



*The
Irish Garden Plant Society*



Newsletter No. 116

April 2010



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Photograph on Front Cover: *Rosa* 'Souvenir de St. Anne's', flowering from May to December, and easy from cuttings.



Editorial

After a long winter there are finally signs of growth, but many gardeners will have lost plants because of the severity and duration of the cold weather. Stephen Butler would like information from around the country so do please get in touch with him. On a positive note the dry weather of recent weeks provided the opportunity to catch up on gardening jobs not completed earlier in the winter. On most days it was a pleasure to be working outdoors.

Details of events for the coming months organised by the regional groups of the Society are included in this Newsletter. This includes the A.G.M. organised this year by the Munster Regional Group, which will be held at The Clonmel Park Hotel, Clonmel Co. Tipperary on Saturday May 1st, followed by garden visits on both Saturday and Sunday. Other annual events include the Munster Plant Sale, the Summer Lunch in Angela Jupe's garden in Shinrone Co. Offaly organised by Ricky Shannon, and garden visits at home and abroad organised by the Northern Group. I hope there is some event you can attend.

All event details can also be found on the IGPS website - www.irishgardenplantsociety.org. The web address and email contact details are printed on the back cover of the Newsletter.

Mary

Please send material for the Newsletter to: igpseditor@gmail.com or Mary Rowe 29 Bantry Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9

Copy date for the July Newsletter is Friday 4th June 2010



Seed Distribution Scheme 2010

As I write this in early March I reckon I have the bulk of requests in, 95 at present, with another 20 or so to trickle in late! The early birds as usual got the pick of the unusual plants, but the late comers benefit as I tend to give more seed per packet to get it out somewhere – swings and roundabouts.

So far only a few errors have been spotted, my spelling of *Nothofagus antarctica* drew the correction that I'd missed a c, so it was an articulated tree rather than southern hemisphere, and I managed to include *Eccremocarpos scaber* as a climber and an annual – I had several accessions, so it slipped through in both, which of course it is!

My biggest problem came with *Furcraea longavaea*. These were green bulbils which form on the flowering stem, which I could not leave in a packet 'til posting out. So I potted them in a sandy mix in a tray and left them in my unheated greenhouse at home.....and then it froze. I had hoped to save them by moving them in when I realised how cold they had become, but alas they all seem to have succumbed to the low temperatures. My apologies, but I'm afraid there will be no *Furcraea* going out now. I have also heard that the species should be *F. parmentieri*, as *F. longavaea* does not form bulbils on the flowering stem, you live and learn.

With lots of plant losses around the country please do try your hand at seed saving for the scheme next year. Wait until some seed pods are fully ripe and opening, place head in an open paper bag, and let dry thoroughly. Each plant is different so it's impossible to describe for all – there is much info on the web, just search the plant name and seed collecting, and see what comes up!

Many thanks again to all our donors.

Stephen Butler
Seed Distribution Scheme
Curator of Horticulture
Dublin Zoo



SEED TO SEED

BY BARBARA PILCHER

I'm borrowing the title of one of my favourite reads* of recent years to head this comment on the IGPS seed exchange. It's at this time of year that we begin to get the influx of new sets of seeds whether it is by way of exchange such as the IGPS Seed Distribution Scheme or from commercial sources.

Before we get caught up in the hopes, aspirations and the trials of a novel group of seeds, I'd like to mention some of my offspring from previous lists. It was in September that I finally got around to seeing what had, and what hadn't germinated and record some of them here. Unless otherwise stated, the seeds are from the 2009 listing. I have included some others sown in previous years that still appear on the list from time to time. Often it takes more than a year to become acquainted with the progeny.

Cyclamen hederifolium, scented form.

I look forward to the scent once these have grown on beyond the pinhead-sized corms and begun to flower. Cyclamens are most rewarding from seed. Even now that I have large clumps flourishing in my garden I find that it's worth collecting seed, or better still lifting small seedlings, potting them into modules and growing them on until they are of a size to survive and compete with the general rough and tumble of the borders at Lisdoonan.

Asphodelus albus (sown in 2008)

I'm excited to find eight or nine good healthy seedlings, more than ready to be potted on. I adore this plant, my only concern is whether I can find the right spot where it will produce big clumps like those I have coveted in the wild in the hills of southern France.

Gladiolus tristis (sown in 2008)

This has developed into a seed-tray-sized 'lawn'! They should make a brave show if I can find the right spot. Whether it is the red-tinged or yellow/white form, I look forward to the first flowers and smelling the scent for the first time. At around 18 inches high, it should be suitable for pot culture before being surrendered to a bed.

Iris orientalis (sown in 2008)

There are a few seedlings, enough to start a small clump for a sunny corner.

Omphalodes linifolium

A gardening friend gave this to me once but it has since been lost. I'm glad to have it back and hope to keep it going this time. It has one of the prettiest flowers I know, like a little cut out from a piece of freshly laundered *broderie anglaise*.

Campanula burghaltii (sown in 2006)

Another favourite from long ago which has gone. Seedlings have just appeared in summer 2009. I can't think why it has taken so long, but worth the wait to see (eventually) those lovely grapey-blue tubular bells again.

Ferula communis has germinated and is all set to wow us next summer, a real showstopper. I think it's worth the space even if it isn't any use in the kitchen. However I suspect that my own seed saved this year is viable.

Watsonia meriana var *bulbillifera* plantlets are looking promising, as are those of *Lilium lancifolium* var *splendens*, which I was pleased to read is a vigorous form. It was good to have the opportunity of growing from bulbils this year, especially from desirable plants such as these.

Patrinia scabiosifolia (sown in 2008) has made a welcome splash of intense yellow in the mixed border, with a dash of red from its autumnal foliage. I reckon this is a useful herbaceous perennial.

Hieracium maculatum ex 'Chocolate Dip' (sown in 2008) continues to intrigue as it pops up in unexpected places including pots of herbs in the nursery. Its chocolate-splashed leaves make a good foil for its pleasing yellow flowers.

Galtonia candicans and *G. viridiflora* from '08 germinated well and the former has made several sturdy flowering clumps. The latter are not nearly so robust so I hope they will succeed.

Cerintho major 'Purpurascens'

I am temporarily self-sufficient in this handsome 'filler'; it's another guest who comes and goes. I have enough seed to sow next year, but it may be 2011 before I can return some to the seed exchange.

Muscari armeniacum ex 'Valerie Finnis' sown in '08 produced some seedlings last year and the pot is showing a few more this year. I recommend keeping all sown pots for several years if possible.

Romulea bulbocodium

Two seedlings have germinated and I expect there will be more.

Of *Jeffersonia diphylla*, *Dianella nigra*, *Narcissus bulbocodium* var. *citrinus* and *Primula* Harlow Carr hybrids, there is as yet no sign, but I live in hope.

My notes are not intended to reflect on seed quality or germination potential; sometimes I have space only for a few seedlings, so may not use the whole packet. Generally I find germination is good, and as expected, sometimes takes more than one season. And even if I manage to raise only a few seedlings, they can often be bulked up later vegetatively. I sow into a peat-free organic sterile compost (New Horizon multipurpose) mixed 3:1 with medium grade vermiculite. I have found this to give reasonable results over the past few years. So as I receive my seed packets from the 2010 list I look forward to receiving other members' treasures to try. I would encourage others to avail themselves of this rewarding opportunity. Nothing beats the thrill of watching seedlings emerge.

Thank you Stephen for the dedicated work you put in.

*Seed to Seed by Nicholas Harberd is the engaging story of a plant geneticist's day-to-day life both in the laboratory and in the East Anglian countryside around his home. The author manages to interweave his account of an in-depth study of the gene mechanisms of thale-cress (and he does not dumb down) with his minute observation of this native weed as it grows in a country churchyard. Patently a brilliant scientist, his skill as a communicator and poetic style makes this a surprisingly fascinating tale. One for your list, Paddy?

ANNUAL SUMMER LUNCH

Our summer lunch this year will be held on Saturday, 12th June, in Angela Jupe's garden at Bellefield House, Birr Road, Shinrone, County Offaly.

Lunch is 12.30 for 1 pm

Angela has a wonderful collection of Iris and Peony and they should be in full bloom then. Recently she has become obsessive about orchids so we should be able to include them in our visit. She hopes to have some plants for sale on the day.

For a preview go to www.angelajupe.ie/events
A booking form is enclosed with the newsletter.

Nearby: Birr Castle Demesne is only 15km from Shinrone.
It is open 09.00am -6.00pm on Saturday. Admission charge.

See www.birrcastle.com

Ricky Shannon



Hubris by Rae McIntyre

Hubris: insolence; overconfidence; arrogance, such as invites disaster or ruin.

When I wrote the piece ‘In praise of November’ for the January issue of this newsletter I was being unbearably smug about how well the garden looked in mid-November. So I was truly appalled when I saw the Pat Kenny show on RTE one night at the end of the month and saw how much flooding there had been in parts of Ireland destroying not just gardens but great tracts of farmland and causing untold misery in hundreds of houses that had been flooded. Things deteriorated farther when this was followed by the worst winter for nearly thirty years.

The autumn of 2009 was very similar to that of 1981 when I had been gardening for only three years. Summer that year had been a non-event and, in the dismal months of June, July and August, we didn’t have a single 24-hour period when there wasn’t rain. The weather improved greatly in the autumn and in early December I filled three vases with flowers that I had picked from the garden. That was the last time I saw some of them because their siblings, or whatever, still out in the garden perished after one night’s vicious frost, the first of many. A local man said it had been -14°C that night.

Last autumn it did occur to me at times that 1981 and 2009 might be parallel but I dismissed that because I believed all I heard and read about autumns lingering on for longer, about winters becoming milder and springs arriving earlier.

Many people did say last year when berries were so prolific that that foretold a very bad winter. However I’ve known many years when berries were just as prolific and we had a mild winter afterwards. I used to believe that when *Schizostylis coccinea* flowered in July a severe winter would follow but it has been blooming in July for the past five or six years. I had absolutely no premonitions that we were in for such a hard winter and recognise as true what someone (I can’t remember who) said that the only thing we can learn from history is that we can’t learn from history.

So I, who was so smug last November, have had my ‘comeuppance’ as they say. The clumps of *Dianella tasmanica* about which I wrote, with their jewel-like blue-purple berries, now have leaves the colour of buff envelopes and seem lifeless. I did pot up one clump and brought it into the greenhouse for an

acquaintance because the poor dear lives in a much colder part of the province than I do. Unfortunately the poor dear isn't going to have it because I am going to keep it. I also potted up the young *Eupatorium ligustrinum*, a plant that I shall always associate with John Joe Costin, and brought it into the greenhouse. Other plants of doubtful hardiness over-wintered there but I'm not going to name them because I am now of a superstitious nature and think it would be tempting fate. As I write it is March 10 and, even though it's a glorious sunny day the temperature is 3° C. This morning at 7.30 it was -9°C. A 5cm layer of ice still hasn't melted in the wooden half-barrel I keep outside the greenhouse. How I hate, loathe, abhor and detest bitterly cold, sunny days after frost because they're lethal for plants. I long for mild, murky, cloudy days, when I feel alive. Since December 17 2009 we've had very few nights when there hasn't been frost.

Salvia guaranitica, about whose October and November flowering I waxed lyrical, is possibly now only a memory. Because it was well sheltered against a west-facing wall I only put a heavy mulch over it and hoped for the best. There are just a few moribund-looking stems left but I have lost this plant before in winters that were much milder. The salvia's close neighbour is a *Myrtus luma* which in November had, as I boastfully pointed out, a few flowers as well as plentiful shiny black fruits. They are no longer shiny. They're still there but seem to have become petrified and about four fifths of the leaves are brown. At the base there are still branches of green leaves but it's probably too much to hope that they'll withstand the present onslaught of frosty nights and sunny days.

Corokia buddleioides was the most floriferous it has ever been in 2009. I doubt if it will be in 2010 because the grey leaves have become an unattractive brown-purple in the cold. A young one that I had grown as a cutting from it has lost a lot of its leaves and I suspect that it's had it.

My late mother's variegated pelargonium did survive and, as I hoped, bore its flowers over Christmas and since then. It has been living in our front porch which can be as cold as a morgue at times. When I'm entertaining a small crowd and the fridge can hold no more I can keep prepared dishes out in this porch. On the very coldest nights I dragged the pelargonium into the hall even though it's only marginally warmer because both radiators are turned off; oil is too expensive to use radiators in rooms that are only passed through. I was talking to someone last weekend who has a much larger house than ours but it must also be much colder because a red-flowered abutilon in one of the main rooms had died of cold.

Out in the garden again the two hebes 'Autumn Glory' and 'Midsummer Beauty', that I proudly noted had been flowering non-stop since August, are probably goners because they have lost most of their leaves. A neighbouring

cistus is completely brown and the fuchsias that were still flowering abundantly in November are beige skeletons now. I'm just hoping they'll sprout again from the base but I won't cut them back until April.

At the moment the countryside is dismal and dreary and dreech – an expressive Ulster dialect word meaning much the same as the other two. Winter has barely loosened its grip and, apart from lambs frisking around fields, there are few signs of spring. The fields themselves are the rather sickly shade of green of dead grass and not even hawthorn hedges are showing any signs of life. Last Sunday we went up to mountainous country beyond Garvagh because from there is one of the most stunning views anywhere in Ireland. There was still crisp hard snow lying beside the roads and it wasn't melting even when the wintry sun was shining on it. Country people say it's lying around waiting for more. I hope not. Many, but not all, whin bushes have taken a severe battering but some stalwarts are bearing their yellow flowers. What does surprise me is that so many *leylandii* hedges have gone brown. I always thought they were as tough as old boots but apparently not. There are also several very brown monkey-puzzle trees in this area and hedges of *Griselinia littoralis*, escallonia and camellia are unquestionably dead.

Some years ago I wrote a book about winter gardening. It was carefully researched and I spent about a year and a half writing, rewriting and honing it. At first I was going to call it 'Winter Bloomers' but I thought that could be considered tacky. Anyway there are / were many foliage plants that look well in winter. No one was willing to publish it so I have a fine collection of rejection letters, nearly enough to paper the walls of the downstairs loo. The consensus of opinion was that the writing was satisfactory but, in order to sell, my media profile needed to be higher. Actually my media profile barely exists. Anyway I've put it all down to experience. My favourite lecturer in English, when I was an undergraduate, always said that we should write a novel even if it was only for the waste paper basket. I chose to write a gardening book instead. Believe it or not I am now thankful that it wasn't published. I made the assumption that mild winters were here to stay so it was liberally peppered with things like: 'So when did you last see an icicle?' or 'Now that we have global warming' or 'I can often sit outside in February and drink tea'. The icicles in January were long, impressive and long-lasting, that list of plants that would flower outside in winter 'now that we have global warming' (correas, *Atherosperma moschatum* and mimosa) would now be stone dead and only a complete idiot would have sat outside this past February drinking tea.

Like most things in life some good has come of the horrible winter. A wise old woman I know, who was an excellent gardener in her time, always advised me to feed birds only when there was heavy snow or prolonged frost. Her theory was that, if they were fed when there was natural food available, they would stop eating garden pests and she claimed that she never had any problems with

vine weevils. It was probably sound advice but, until I started feeding birds this past winter, I didn't realise what I was missing. The feeders are filled daily with peanuts, fatballs and seed and many more birds than I ever realised were in the vicinity spend much time at them. So much pleasure do they give that I haven't stopped feeding them when there is no snow around and only frost at night. The Garden of Eden had its serpent. Here there is a flying cat. It's a huge, well fed, very arrogant ginger and white tom that belongs to someone in the neighbourhood. In spite of his size he can leap through a perfect arc, at least four feet off the ground at the highest point, in an attempt to catch an unsuspecting bird. I just hope he doesn't succeed. He also loves to sit beside the pool, where the frogs have been spawning since March 6, glowering menacingly. The spawn this year is in the centre of the pool, which may (I won't say will) forecast a good summer. One of those old men, who manage to give accurate long-term weather forecasts, did predict a vicious winter followed by a scorcher of a summer. We shall see.



Sally Walker - An Appreciation

We are very sorry to learn of the death of Sally Walker who has passed away in her 95th year. We are indebted to her, and her late husband Ralph, for creating the wonderful garden Fernhill, in the foothills of the mountains in south Dublin.

One of the first members of the Irish Garden Plant Society many of us will have happy memories of visits to Fernhill where she proudly showed us the magnificent large pink flowering rhododendron 'Fernhill Silver' named after the garden. She also grew the blue *R. augustinii*, which was given to her by Lady Leitrim from her garden in Mulroy Bay, Co. Donegal. This among a large collection of rare and interesting plants from around the world.

Many years ago on a weekend trip to Killarney we were also fortunate enough to have a visit to the exotic garden at Rossdrohan which had been owned by the Walker family.

We offer our deepest condolences to her son and daughters.

Ricky Shannon



Annual General Meeting 2010

The 2010 AGM will take place at the The Clonmel Park Hotel, Clonmel Co. Tipperary at 10.00 am on Saturday 1st May. Dinner on Saturday night will be held at the Clonmel Park.

As always there will be a series of garden visits on Saturday and Sunday. Those staying until Monday will have the option of visiting a very well known Garden Centre in Clonmel. Many of the gardens listed are award-winning gardens and all are open only by appointment. A selection of the gardens are listed but are in no particular order:

Trish Hyde at Camas Park, Cashel a four-acre garden with several contrasting gardens on different levels surrounded by parkland. There are formal areas, deep herbaceous borders, and a wild water garden with moisture loving plants such as ferns, primulas and hemerocallis.

The garden at Demmie Byrne at Springhill, Killenaule is a formal garden.

Mildred Stokes at Killurney, Clonmel, a Viking Garden Award winner. This is a one acre garden of mature trees and shrubs, herbaceous plants, with the sound of water from a stream that leads into a pond heavily planted with waterside plants.

Fairyhill is a mature large garden with interesting trees.

Carvilahoe is a large garden with walled garden, twin herbaceous borders and woodland area of mature trees under planted with trilliums.

Another Viking Garden Award winner is Pauline Hegarty for her garden at Kilmacomma, Clonmel. This mature garden of approximately three quarters of an acre is located in a scenic area and planted with trees, shrubs and herbaceous borders, there are also two water features.

A booking form for the weekend is enclosed with the Newsletter. A fully detailed programme will be sent at the time of booking

Annual General Meeting Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of AGM 2009
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 at least two weeks before the A.G.M. to the Honorary Secretary:

Mary Rowe
29 Bantry Road
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9

Little Sparta Visit

A weekend visit to the renowned garden, Little Sparta, and a selection of other gardens around Edinburgh is planned for 24th and 25th July 2010.

Gardens include:

Little Sparta, the creation of poet and artist Ian Hamilton Finlay, is a 'fusion of poetry, sculpture and natural landscape'. Planting is mainly native species-hazels, dogwoods and rowans under-planted with species roses, honeysuckle, foxgloves and ferns – providing a backdrop to the artist's often controversial sculptural pieces.

Shepherd House is home to Sir Charles and Lady Ann Fraser. Its many individual gardens nestle inside each other like Chinese boxes with the design, colours and plant combinations reflecting the strengths of its owners. A gem of a garden.

Hopetoun House – one of Scotland's finest stately homes. The parkland with much of its Adam design still visible lies around an impressive axis which runs in front of and behind the house. The once derelict walled garden is gradually being restored.

Binny Plants – a wonderful nursery in the walled garden of Binny Estate. The catalogue lists over 2500 plant varieties with particularly fine collections of Iris, Astilbe, ferns and grasses and some 200 varieties of peony.

Southern Hemisphere Botanics – an artfully designed garden by an expert plantswoman, sited on the south facing shore of the River Forth where plants from the Southern hemisphere thrive in the benign microclimate. Plants include Eucalyptus, tree ferns, Chatham Island forget-me not, Dierama and many bulbs from South Africa's fynbos.

There will also be a guided tour of the world renowned **Edinburgh Botanic Gardens** on Monday 26th July.

We will be based at the Edinburgh Murrayfield Hotel, 18 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh, which is very near to the airport. The hotel is currently holding 5 double rooms and 5 twin rooms for our group until 5th June. A special rate of £100 per room is available for Saturday night and £80 per room for Sunday night (includes B&B). To avail of this rate you will need to quote group ref: 10040903371. There are also several other hotels and B&B's in the area.

Dates: 24th and 25th July 2010. Cost: £60 includes entrance fees to all of the gardens and coach transport. Meals, accommodation and transport to Edinburgh are not included. Coach pickup will be from the Edinburgh Murrayfield Hotel on Saturday morning. Dinner is available on Saturday evening at an additional cost of £20.00. Numbers are strictly limited.

To book, and for further information, please contact Patrick Quigley: 0044 7801 299263 (mobile) or 0044 28 90225484 (home) or email patrick.quigley@live.co.uk

Bookings by 14th June please.



The Big Freeze - January 2010

Plant Mortality and Survival Survey

January 2010 brought a prolonged cold period, and a depth of cold, that we have not experienced in Ireland for many years, and the combination has been a severe challenge to many of our garden plants. For instance at Dublin Zoo I had a wipe out of almost all *Acacia*, a few survived. Some batches of *Beschorneria* went to mush after they thawed – but with one unscathed survivor only a foot away. All *Echium pininana*, a stalwart of our summer colour for years now, were wiped out, and some fine leaved bamboos suffered from the drought effect of frozen soil. I have a long and expensive list of replacements needed – I think – and I'm sure many of us are in the same boat.

It is important that we attempt to try to record our losses, and more importantly, our survivors, but we must do this with due consideration. At time of writing we will not know for sure which plants have definitely died or survived, although we may have a darn good idea, in many cases only time will tell. Woody plants may yet grow back, and even more so with any plants with a woody root system – such as *Melianthus*.

Maximum minimum temperature records would obviously be very useful for accurate plotting of cold tolerance by degrees, the problem of course is that every garden, no matter how small, often has significant variations in temperature, even within a few metres.

Another crucial influence is drainage, the combination of wet soil and cold is often more damaging. The opposite effect is that frozen soil allows no water uptake, shallow rooted plants may suffer drought which may not show for a few weeks yet, conifers in particular will be a problem.

So, could anyone with interesting plant losses, or with more interesting plant survivors, please consider sending me details – **but not yet!** Wait until you are sure the plant is dead or alive, and record the following.

Address (general area, urban or rural)

Site – elevation, shelter (windbreaks or tree cover over), position (e.g. can cold air drain away)

Minimum temperature recorded (with site of thermometer, near house, on a wall, in the open etc)

Plant details – age (how many years established), drainage (is the soil very wet), previous damage (at what temperature)

Was any protection given? Fleece, bubble wrap, etc.

Degree of damage – dead, killed to older wood, killed to ground and regrew.

This survey should not be completed until you are sure the plants are dead or alive, probably late summer.

Please send details, preferably emailed as easier to compile, to me at stephencbutler@gmail.com or Dublin Zoo, Phoenix Park, Dublin 8.

I will compile much later in the year and spread the results.

Many thanks
Stephen Butler
Curator of Horticulture
Dublin Zoo



Despite its exotic appearance *Dianthus* 'Chomley Farran' survived the severe winter weather unscathed and was one of the first plants in the garden to put on new growth.

Available from Terra Nova Plants
Kilmallock
Co. Limerick



PLANT SEARCH

Earlier this year I emailed our Chairman with a suggestion that I had been mulling over for some time: that the IGPS could initiate a 'Plant Search' for plants that members are interested in acquiring.

We have all at one time or another requested a cutting of a must-have plant, or been offered a plant we really admired. With fewer good nurseries at our disposal and garden centres increasingly becoming lifestyle-oriented, finding particular plants can be difficult. The really determined plant hunters and great gardeners in our midst are willing to travel further a field to acquire rare and unusual plants, but for the majority this is not practical – hence the 'Plant Search'. Obviously, members would neither request nor expect fellow members to donate very rare or expensive plants, but that so-called 'ordinary' plant in your garden may be the very one that I most desire. My only concern when making the suggestion was that the scheme would not detract from our very necessary autumn plant sale or from the spring seed exchange, but knowing the generosity of our members I feel that this would not affect either donations or sales.

So to start the ball rolling, two plants on my personal wish list are: *Lilium henryi* and *Buddleja lindleyana*. My thanks to the Chairman and Committee for their positive response to the concept of 'Plant Search'.

Brid's contact details are with the Editor

*Buddleja
lindleyana*





The Woodland of Ireland

by

Diana Beresford-Kroeger

The fascination with forests still exists in Ireland. Stories about the properties of wood are tied fast into riddles, ancient language, legends and even brace the Brehon Laws with meaning.

Once upon a time the Island was greened with forests, these temperate rainforests. The Irish rainforests are connected with the cloud rainforests of South America by one extraordinary green link that I found as a young student of botany. I remember the day. It was late spring in Killarney. A massive boulder leaning against a tree caught my eye. This ice age monster wore a green skirt of the finest fabric, the fragile one-cell thick fronds of the fern, *Hymenophyllum*. This rare treasure I brought back to Cork University and put it under a microscope and classified it. It is now known as the Killarney fern.

The ancient forests of Ireland were composed of a unique mixture of tree species. A few evergreens coexisted with many spectacular deciduous trees. These covered the valleys but covered the tops of the mountains, too. They were able to exist there by means of the constant warm rain and weathering of rock systems that provided an almost endless sandy terrain filled with mobile nutrients. Some ancient forests were of yew, more of oak. The remains of these I witnessed for myself being dragged out of turf bogs and cut with saws after they had dried in the sun. These black skeletons of trees were never super large, such as are witnessed elsewhere on the planet, but seemed to grow in a squat fashion, close to the ground as if the many gales and tempests off the Atlantic Ocean drove them back.

Native Irish evergreens were, and still are, the lordly Scots Pine, *Pinus sylvestris*; the sulky Irish Yew, *Taxus baccata*, and the shining holly, *Ilex aquifolium*.

The principal deciduous tree of the past was the oak, of course. Irish woods flaunted this oak, *Quercus robur*, right down to a few paces from the sea and begot from this courageous stance against the stress of the elements another sister tree, the sessile oak, *Quercus petraea*. This oak bears sessile fruit which means that the acorn stem is extremely short and is sometimes non-existent.

The oak leaves of this tree are different, too. The petiole is long and extends into a midrib which carries a curious batch of glandular hairs that science has not yet bothered to examine.

Other deciduous trees are the aspen, *Populus tremula*, the alder, *Alnus glutinosa*, the ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*, the birch, *Betula pubescens*, the rowan, *Sorbus aucuparia*, and the willow, *Salix alba*. The smaller deciduous trees are the feeding trees for wildlife, migratory birds and butterflies. These are the apple, *Malus sylvestris*, the cobnut or hazel, *Corylus avellana*, the hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna* and the sloe, *Prunus spinosa*. The elder, *Sambucus nigra*, is still part of the wildwood scene as it once was all over the world.

The aspect of the ancient woodland of Ireland must have been extraordinary. A glimpse of this can be garnered from the tiny fragments left standing and this is just a little more than 1% of the landscape. A piece so small that less than a few citizens have had the experience of it to treasure. Ancient Irish oaks produced elbows in the woodland. The branches grew stout and long with age. These did not reach so much for light as for support. This support came from the ground itself as the branches crawled along the open soil to lift up their individual canopies to the sky again. This clever technique of extreme old age is a form of propagation of the ancient genome itself when the trunk of the tree decreases in height. This shrinkage produces a 'sweat' of black, medicinal tannins which help the age old process of nitrogen composting. In time and this time is measured in the flick of centuries, one tree produces many. And so an ancient tree clones itself into the future.

The tapestry of the Irish woodlands did not end there. It was picked up by the lichen populations. This natural wonder of algae and fungi living a life together injected the trees with a host of healthy natural antibiotics. We will never know what Ireland held in this treasure trove, but some foliose lichens can still be found on ancient trees and more than a share of crustose forms, too. The ferns share the same strange habitat as in the tropics, out to the ends of the branches and hanging from the limbs. They make a compost soil which they share with the aerial mosses. The ivy stems on these trees are like tendons on a sinewy arm, spitting up a mainstem from the soil at the base of the trunk that can live for 500 years if left to its own devices.

But Ireland has turned her back on the past. The native woodland is replaced by sterile deserts: plantation forests borrowed from the west coast of Canada. These trees are called Tideland spruce or Sitka spruce, *Picea sitchensis*. In their own habitat they are 160 foot wonders and brush the mountains with the sea. Their host of pimaric acids are diluted by the Pacific. This does not happen in the small closed lakes and streams of fresh water systems of the Irish landscape, where wild salmon use to run.

The Woodland League is replanting the native Irish Forests. They are doing it one acorn at a time, one sloe at a time and one ash samara. The method of over-wintering, dormancy and imbibition of the seeds is known as the Dunemann method. Herr Dunemann was a German forester who brought about the successful natural planting of some of Germany's valuable native forests. The acorns and various seeds are packed in their own litter of leaves during the winter months. This natural means of seed coat protection ensures that the seeds will expand and germinate at the correct time the following spring or maybe even, the spring after that. The seedlings are healthy and remain so after they are planted.

The Dunemann method is elegance itself in its scientific simplicity. All trees produce hormones. The chemical range of these hormones is large. Some are produced during the full life span of the tree these are called auxins. Others are produced only in the autumn at leaf fall. These are mostly gibberellins and are composed of sixty or so very important hormones. One hormone comes down with the nut and the seed. This is abscisic acid. This hormone regulates seed maturation and germination as well as directing the tiny seeds' response to stress. Herr Dunemann and others, unfortunately, did not understand the science at the time, but had the right instinct for nature's ways in any case.

Now with the help of the Woodland League, Ireland can find a new fashion on greenery. The science and forward thinking can lead the way for other countries to follow. Trees have been trading in carbon for millennia and native trees in natural habitats do it better than any brainwave of man; a greater plan has been sitting in the leaf waiting for the human family to wake up!

Congratulations to Diana on her nomination for a Wings Women of Discovery Award, she will be the first Irishwoman Fellow of World Wings Quest when she receives her award on the 15th April in New York.
Ed.

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The 21st Anniversary of Ireland's National Tree by John Joe Costin

Symbols and emblems play a part in forging a national identity or in the visualisation of a nation. They carry a complex web of associations and emotions that may be difficult to articulate, but that make them inclusive, each person attaching their own meaning and value. There is an array of symbols associated with Ireland, most of which were invented or revived for political purposes. Passively, they are imprinted on our minds from early childhood. The chorus of a song my father sang listed four of our best known ones. The lyrics are probably an emigrant's romantic evocation of Ireland.

“The Glorious Old Round Towers of Ireland
And the pretty little shamrock so green,
The wolf–dog lying down, beneath the Harp with a crown
and the sun burst of Ireland between.”

The Round Tower I knew from earliest memory is our contribution to architecture. The tallest and best preserved one in Ardmore, overlooks my grandmother's farm.

The Irish Wolfhound, the size of a donkey is the largest dog in the world. Its size, strength and noble bearing, once made it a status symbol among European leaders. Their outsize would captivate a child's imagination.

The story of the shamrock is succinct, imaginative, and memorable and is polished with a patina of a 1600 year pedigree. The Shamrock, is the most familiar emblem despite its supposedly fictitious connection with St Patrick and the Trinity. I learned at an early age how to identify and pick supplies.

The Harp though not as well known as the shamrock is the oldest official symbol of Ireland. It is based on the portable Bard's harp and was depicted in gold on a field of St. Patrick's blue, the original or heraldic colour associated with Ireland. These colours are now seen on Ryanair's livery and on the carpet of the Dáil Chamber. When I understood that the harp too was a national emblem, it's status was diminished, as I knew it only as a trademark on the label of Guinness bottles. Their logo presents the harp in reverse to that on government documents.

Politically symbols were used to evoke unity of purpose. The Emerald Isle epithet was first used by Belfast's United Irishmen of 1798, one of the

concepts of the Young Irelanders of the 1840's was the tricolour. The green created as a symbol of unity by mixing St Patrick's Blue with the Orange that symbolised Protestantism. More recently, the Celtic Revival drew on the Irish language, music, literature, sculpture and the rich art of our antiquities to forge new images of Ireland. These include the Celtic High Cross, St Brigid's Cross, the Tara Brooch, and the Claddagh Ring. From literature, we were given Roisín Dubh, (Dark Rosaleen) symbolised as a beautiful suffering woman. Later at the New York Fair in 1939 Evie Hones large stain glass windows in abstraction entitled "My Four Green Fields" offered a more dynamic image of Ireland than that of a static colleen in a shawl.

The Royal Irish Academy systematic study of our great books, and precious metal art treasury provided such recognisable motifs as spirals, whorls the interlacing and unique lettering and animal heads inspired by the Book of Kells and other manuscripts. Despite all these symbols enveloped in shades of green, a rich folklore of plant lore, and an environment that accommodates a great diversity of plants, the miniscule shamrock is the only plant that has emblematic status.

On a Greyhound bus travelling across North America from Montreal to Vancouver and from San Francisco to Washington. I observed that each state promoted its identity, not through its built heritage, but through its flora and fauna. Each had it own, bird, flower, state tree and a matching slogan, some pithy, others aspirational or simply promotional.

Alaska	PICEA sitchensis 'North to the future'	Sitka Spruce
Indiana	LIRIODENDRON tulipitera 'The Cross Roads of America'	Tulip Tree
New Hampshire	BETULA papyrifera 'Live Free or Die'	Paper Birch
Rhode Island	ACER rubrum 'Hope'	Red Maple

It was a Japanese Government presumption that every country had a native tree that led to their request for the name of Ireland's National Tree to the Taoiseach's Department 1988 that initiated the process. The Paris based Bureau that govern International Exhibitions granted Japan the hosting of the First International Garden Festival in Asia, in Osaka in 1990. Of Grade 1 status, the highest category where individual countries rather than companies participate, Japan perceived it as a singular honour, provided funding of €1.6 billion and endowed it with green credentials before words such as sustainability entered our vocabulary. A tree covered 370 acre former municipal dump would be transformed into a major city park after it hosted

the Festival. For the 23 million visitors, access was solely by a new underground, the first electromagnetic levitating train to operate commercially. Four years before the opening, the Japanese government appointed a full time roving Ambassador to promote and encourage worldwide participation. Seventy seven countries built gardens, and the exhibition ran for a 6 month period. The winning gardens were retained to create a permanent attraction within the new municipal park.

On a state visit to Japan in April 1989, Mr Haughey astonished his retinue of advisers, participating he said would be a small gesture of gratitude to Japan for all the investments they had favoured Ireland with. The diplomats should not have been surprised. Mr. Haughey as Taoiseach was to be the best unofficial Heritage and Landscape Minister we ever had. He appreciated fine design, good art and had an observant eye that could x-ray a landscape. He was not a gardener, nor was he interested in small plants. The landscape, its heritage and the overwhelming nobility of the largest trees is what moved him. On more than one occasion he raged against the gratuitous destruction of the trees in the Vale of Avoca. In opposition, he bridled in anger at the clear felling of the Oak forest in Tonnafinoge Woods in Shillelagh. He was adamant that there was adequate legislation in place that could be used by the Local Authority to prevent their removal. In March 1987, on Saturday, his second day in office as Taoiseach, accompanied by the Ministers for the Environment and Defence he travelled to see the giant Kowloon Bridge ship beached on the rocks in West Cork and then to Shillelagh to see the clearance first hand and to navigate a means to end that felling, which he subsequently did.

In creating Coillte, he accurately foresaw the potential it would realise as a semi-state company released from departmental constraints. It's remit would be holistic. It would have a duty of care to the landscape as well as to its commercial forests. Planting trees in geometric blocks insensitive to the contours of the landscape was not a way to win friends for afforestation policies. He was aware from his base in a north Dublin constituency of the potential of horticulture. It was to be realised through the establishment of An Bord Glas, now Bord Bia. He brought order and sense to the management of our Public Parks. Those formerly managed by three Departments were all transferred to the care of the OPW. The National Botanic Garden's embarrassingly neglected infrastructure received the finances to modernise its facilities and services. The establishment of the Heritage Council on its own is a fine legacy to any minister's tenure in office. His sense of landscape saw CIE relinquish Temple Bar for a more imaginative use to its planned city centre Bus Station. The derelict landscape of the North Quay's metamorphosed into the International Financial Services Centre.

In essence other than Seán Mac Bride's fostering of State Forestry, no politician matched Mr. Haughey's interest or achievements. Consequently, when the Japanese Garden Festival Ambassador requested the name of our national tree, it was received sympathetically and prompted the Taoiseach's Department to form a committee to advise on the selection. The members were:

Aidan Brady, Director, National Botanic Gardens
Dr. Charles Nelson, Taxonomist, National Botanic Gardens
John McCullen, Superintendent, Phoenix Park
Jim Kelly, An Foras Taluntais, Kinsealy
John Joe Costin, Chairman.

Selection criteria included:

- A National Tree was likely to be planted frequently for Ceremonial purposes. It should be hardy and suitable to plant in every county.
- For practical purposes, it had to look like a tree rather than something that might grow into a tree eventually.
- It should be a native species.

From a short list submitted, Mr. Haughey nominated *Quercus petraea*, Dair or Sessile Oak as our National Tree 21 years ago in 1989. There was little doubt but that Mr Haughey's choice would be Oak. His interests were landscape and trees. He prized good wood. He felled and saved Oak planks, admiring its beautiful grain and appearance. He quoted the stories of the Fianna and their deeds in the woods He commissioned a 7m sculpture of Cuculainn carved from a diseased Elm at Abbeyville. He merely reaffirmed its status in an Ancient Law, which placed native trees in four categories of seven in order of status and usefulness. Oak was placed number 1 in the highest category, *Airig Feda* (Nobles of the Wood). The others listed by rank are Hazel, Holly, Yew, Ash, Scots Pine and the Apple.

Around the same time research workers at Queens University confirmed the importance of Oak logs used in construction 7200 years ago by analysis of tree rings. Place names are a land memory of what the countryside once held or had. Derry or Oakgrove is recorded in a multitude of places. It records not only a copse of trees, but many were sacred spaces. Early Celtic Society was rural and their sacred places were not buildings but places in the wilderness. Feehan wrote that the Celtic sacred space was the Nemeton – a grove of trees. Subsequently, it was in these sacred groves that the first early Christian Churches were built. Dair (Derry) Oakgrove was recorded in a range of variations. Names such as Aghadarragh, Adare, Edenderry, Ballaghaderreen, Derryvaragh Lake, Derry, Durrow, and Fahanasoodry (Tannery Green) in Limerick, acknowledge the presence of Oak. Dairbre (abounding in oak) the old name for Valentia Island, suggest it was once abundant even on this most exposed western island.

The topography of Ireland was the first country in the world surveyed. The purpose was solely military, to find the best locations for the placement of ordnance (guns). It was only later the civic benefits were seen. It was undertaken by British Army personnel with the assistance of local guides. The surveyors spelled phonetically place names identified by the illiterate locals. Irish is guttural and pronunciation is helped if you have some gravel in your throat. The unattuned ear easily mistook Coill (Woods) for Cill (Church). Baile (settlement) became Bally. Eocoill, the Yew Wood, became rootless Youghal or entirely foreign sounding as Beal Uisce (water mouth) became the Spanish sounding Valentia.

Irish place names are predominantly descriptive of landscape features, glens, valleys, plains, hills, headlands, high places, mountains, bogs, marshes, inlet lakes, groves, woods, forests and rivers. A smaller proportion of place names specifically mention plants. These include Heather, Frachan, Rushes and Ferns. However, trees are the most frequently listed including Ivy, (if undisturbed, can develop a telephone pole size girth). Furze, (I measured 5m tall 'trees' in Donegal in 2008). Native trees recorded in order of increasing frequency are Hazel, Elder, Alder, Hawthorn, Rowan, Birch, Holly, Willow, Elm, Yew and Oak. Pollen records recall that Ireland at one time was covered in thickets of hazel. This might suggest that Hazel should be commonly recorded in place names but it is not. Oak is listed more frequently than all other trees combined. Two counties Kildare and Derry are named after the Oak but the frequency and the distribution of Oak in place names suggest ubiquity. Such names are recorded in all counties and with great frequency in Kerry, Cork and counties along the western seaboard, especially Clare, Galway, Mayo and Donegal, Fermanagh, Cavan, Armagh and Antrim.

Petraea means of the rocks or rock like. This refers to the sturdiness of its timber not where it grows. Webb confirms its ubiquity in saying it is 'very frequent'. It grows in the mountains, sand, wood and glen. Depending on where it is growing, it can be a bush, a scrub, or a tree. This offers an accommodating perception that Oaks will grow well in more than just our best soils. Webb says, it often occurs with *Q.robur* the other Oak found in Ireland, but is the more frequent. Its wood is also regarded as superior to *Q.robur*. The Sessile Oak when planted at close spacing forms a narrower tree with a valuable larger trunk.

It is the dominant Oak in the wood on the Bourne Vincent Estate in Killarney, or the Cratloe Wood in Limerick and is the Oak of the famous forest in Shillelagh. The current National Tree champion on the Coolattin Golf Course, Shillelagh measures 6.5m in girth x 37m in height. This is a continuum back to the 1200's when suitable length beams were sourced from Shillelagh to reputedly construct the innovative roof of King Richard 11 Westminster Hall in 1402. Its 21m span is an excellent example of a then

recent use for heavy timber beams for roofs that was influenced by shipbuilding technology. A hammer beam roof was a kind of a corbelled truss that could span quite large distances. Michael Carey in his recently published book, ***“If trees could talk”*** did not find documentary evidence to support this claim. However, we do know that Irish Oak was supplied for many other significant buildings in Britain from 1200 onwards. The Normans knew their forests. They introduced to Ireland the concept and laws of private ownership and that trees were valued separate to the lands they grew on. These concepts were alien to the Irish who were tribal and whose property was communal. The Normans would have known the forest resources of Britain as well as of France. If they imported timber from Ireland from 1200 onwards, it would suggest it had to be of superior sizes and lengths that were not available from their own forests.

Unanimity, can give rise to unease and raise suspicions, thankfully, the selection of *Q. petraea* was criticised. The main gripe being that the Oak was associated with or synonymous with Britain and that they had a greater claim to it. This claim is accurate in terms of their exploitation, but is insular in terms of the tree's distribution. We have over 20 native species, Britain has 35 and there are 100 tree species native to Europe. *Quercus petraea* is a major tree in the Atlantic deciduous forest and grows in western, central and south east Europe, as well as in Asia Minor. Its distribution is more northerly and western than other oaks. If the selection of a National tree was based on the areas where it grows, then 75% of European countries could nominate *Q. petraea* as their national tree. Indeed some states in the USA share the same tree. Equally, the non-native Horse-chestnut is to Vienna what the Plane is to London. If either country were to adopt these, it would be pernickety to criticise their choice. If the criterion was where it grows best then undoubtedly it has to be the French national tree.

The great forests of Sessile Oak in central France above all Foret de Tronçais where the tallest Oaks in Europe grow, were originally planted in the 18th century to provide timber for the French navy. Instead their cooperage industry provide the French Oak barrels of choice to the worlds wine industry. McCracken in her 'Irish Woods Since Tudor Times' stated that in 1625 it was said that France and Spain casked all their wine in barrels made of Irish Oak. To serve its strategic interests, the British Government gave oak the same dominant importance that the USA now accord to securing oil supplies.

Oak is remarkably durable and is impermeable. It has always been prized for its great strength and for its availability in the largest sizes. It was the foundation of the Royal Navy for centuries because it worked and bent well to form the superstructure of ships. However, the limitations of timber controlled development in the size of ships and dictated a design that

changed little from 1600 onwards. Building a 74 gunship took about 5 years and consumed a prodigious 2000 mature Oak trees or the produce of 50 acres. Trees were grown at maximum density of 40/acre at a spacing of 33ft centres, so that the vital powerful horizontal branching system that provided the 'knees' could develop fully. These were the critical lynchpin pieces for the ship builder. The largest ships consumed not only double that amount but also required proportionally larger sized timber. However, because there was no known treatment for dry rot, timber ships had a life span of only 15-20 years. For this reason, it was estimated that one third of all shipyard timbers supplied were earmarked for repairs.

Lord Palmerton said Britain had neither enemies nor friends, it only had interests. Oak supplies were a vital national interest. Successive governments over 400 years were consumed with securing supplies of oak. They used legislation, regulation and naval power to ensure that it could fully exploit its exploding worldwide trade, colonial demands and to maintain its domination of the seas. Suddenly, over a very short period, Britain's prized heart of oak forests and its 3 year strategic timber supplies stockpiled in its naval yards were devalued from priceless to useless and its oak forest made valueless.

They were undone by two events. Coniferous timber substitutes for Oak arrived from North America. They were extraordinary versatile, much quicker growing and cheaper. However, the nail in the coffin was the decisive 2 day Naval Battle at the mouth of the James River in Virginia in the American Civil War in March 1862. The ironclad Confederate's Merrimack sunk the US Union's wooden boats. It had a profound impact. Britain realised its sea power based on wooden ships was over. It knew it had to rebuild its entire navy in steel. Its 400 year long overarching concerns in the planning, procurement and the protection of Oak supplies came to an abrupt end. As Neeson wrote, oak as a subject was wiped from the affairs of parliament, and summarised by a contributor to the ensuing debate. "We have learned what if 2 months ago a man had asserted he would have been scouted by a lunatic, we have learned the boastful navy of Great Britain when opposed to iron vessels is useless as a fighting navy. There is no blinking that question."

Oak was no longer synonymous with Britain's interests. It was a relationship based on expediency rather than principle. It disappeared off the national agenda. It had happened before. The Battle of Agincourt 1415 marked the demise of the bow and the archer and rendered Yew woods valueless. Perhaps, Mr Haughey's choice was both inspirational and aspirational.

Coillte was also formed in 1989 at a time when Ireland had the lowest tree cover in Europe. Coillte set a planting target of 20,000 hectares per year and achieved it. Today almost 10% of our land is under tree cover. Moreover, a recent survey published in the Farmers Journal showed that over 50% of

young plants supplied ex nurseries in the 2008/09 planting season for afforestation were hardwoods. Perhaps, we will again reclaim our leading position as suppliers of staves, casks and barrels to the wine industries of Europe in 2210. It takes 200 years for oak to reach an economic size to harvest but can live to 400 years. We have only remnants left of our oak woods.

None in this generation or indeed in the next two generations will have an opportunity to experience the Sistine Chapel of nature, the unique magnificence of a walk in a mature Irish oak forest. The RTE mast at Montrose at 36.5m towers above everything in South Dublin from a distance and up close it overwhelms. The tallest Oak tree in Ireland is 0.5m taller. Imagine walking in 100 acres of such giant trees. To do so is a profound spiritual experience; one meditates on it in the silence it imposes. One is standing overwhelmed amidst such enormous powerful noble and dignified trees with boles disappearing out of view into a distant canopy. One realises ones utter insignificance. One might recognise the source of inspiration for Gothic Cathedral. One is bereft of a vocabulary to describe what one feels and sees or how to relate to its scale. The extraneous noises are absorbed and nullified. It is a therapeutic experience, beyond the best offering of the best health spas. All these thoughts are incubated on the forest floor, as you begin to understand why our ancestors attached such spiritual aesthetic and cultural values to their Oak woods. No wonder our ancient places were called sacred groves. They could sense the awe and special magic of such a place.

Trees still hold this allure for people. Every county in Ireland at a minimum should have its own sacred, ancient, oak forest. There are few experiences equal to that of being among ancient trees. Words cannot convey the awe they invoke. That experience should be a birthright of every citizen. It was this birthright that motivated Theodore Roosevelt on July 1st 1908 to spend that day creating 45 National Forests. It was the culmination of a campaign to save hundreds of millions of acres of wilderness. It was not a decision based on preserving an economic resource. He wanted future generations of Americans to be able to share, appreciate and foster the same intense love of nature he enjoyed.

Our National Tree should be as well known as the Shamrock. Every child should be able to recognise it. It should be the automatic tree of choice to plant to mark every celebration and every opening sod turning official event. One should be planted in every school at every level. Every hospital should have one. It should record every prize won by every town in the Tidy Town Competition. There is no reason why we do not have 100 acre Oak Forest near every major city and town.

It would be good for us.

BROTHER UK LTD 2010 BURSARY RESULTS

Plant Heritage Collection Holders supported by Brother

The standard of entries for the second annual Brother Bursary for National Plant Collection Holders was predictably high. Collection Holders vied for funding for a fascinating range of projects – from education and interpretation displays to micropropagation.

“Thanks to Brother’s generous support we were able to award four cash bursaries of £400 each and a top of the range Brother PT2700 professional labelling machine,” says Mercy Morris, Plant Heritage’s Plant Conservation Officer. “Collection Holders are a very special breed – most of them have no external financial support for their conservation activities and an award like this is of real benefit.”

Mike Kelly, Head of Labelling for Brother UK Ltd, adds “We are pleased to be able to support the world’s leading cultivated plant conservation charity in its work. Our Bursaries recognise the professionalism and dedication of the Collection Holders in pursuit of excellence in their field.”

This year’s winners are:

Aesculus, Robert Grimsey, Suffolk

Agapanthus and ***Tulbaghia***, Steve Hickman, Yorkshire

Hosta, Ian Scroggy, County Antrim

John Bartram Heritage Collection, Kath Clark, Surrey

Rhodendron spp, ***Magnolia spp***, and ***Camellia x williamsii cultivars***, Michael Klemperer, Yorkshire



The National Collection of Hostas in Ireland

How did it all start?

Well the man in question is Ian Scroggy from Carnlough, Co. Antrim, a professional grower and retailer of plants by Mail Order (Bali-Hai Mail Order Nursery).

Ian from an early age showed a keen interest in horticulture. Flowers were a great attraction at a very young age. As he grew older he would help his grandfather in his vegetable garden growing potatoes, leeks, onions, the usual easy to grow vegetables, a continuation from war times when every person with a small garden had to grow their own vegetables as food was rationed and hard to come by.

Ian's grandfather worked as a gardener in nearby Lord Antrim Estates in Glenarm thus passing the interest on to Ian. Of course his grandfather Scroggy grew up in the Orchard county, Co. Armagh, where they grew plums and apples on their farm. Ian's great, great, great, grandfather Scroggy moved to Ireland from Scotland in the early 1700's where he planted up an estate in Cortynan called Scroggy Plantation which is now owned by Lord Caledon, so growing was in the blood as they say.

Ian started growing plants at the age of 9, first growing tomato plants in a small tunnel and selling these to local shops. Around the mid 1980's Mail order catalogues for Hostas started to appear on the scene, new businesses mostly in England started up and it was from seeing one of these early catalogues of Hostas that the bug bit Ian. With the sale of the plants at Bowden's Hostas in Devon he right away selected some old classics like *H.* 'Frances Williams', *Hosta sieboldiana* 'Elegans' and *H.* 'Sum and Substance' all in all he purchased 11 Hostas, the starting point of his collection. Well as you might expect once you get the bug for collecting at such a young age it is hard to stop and now some 27 years on, the current collection stands at 1500+ Hosta cultivars and species.

Ian throughout his early school years always showed a keen interest in nature and environmental studies both of which he took as subjects at primary and secondary school along with biology. On leaving secondary school he took a

one-year course at Greenmount Horticulture College in Antrim obtaining a certificate in Horticulture. He then went to the Scottish Agricultural College in Ayr to do his Higher National Diploma in Horticulture where he qualified as a professional Horticulturist. Following directly on from this Ian and another college friend travelled to New Zealand (NZ) for a working holiday in horticulture. Kiwi Fruit orchards in the Bay of Plenty NZ was the post where they worked for the next 6 months. During Ian's time there he went plant hunting around nurseries and gardens and found *Geranium* 'Pink Spice' which is now available in Ireland.

There were not many hostas available at this stage as there was only one main grower in NZ from whom Ian purchased some plants and had them shipped back to Ireland for his return home. On leaving NZ Ian headed to the USA, and to Florida for a month going around gardens and nurseries. It was there he saw more Hosta varieties in one place than anywhere before, he soon made contact with growers and fellow enthusiasts and on his return to Ireland joined the American Hosta Society and the American Growers Association.

He also found out about the UK group The British Hosta and Hemerocallis Society and joined it along with other notable plant societies. To gain some more practical experience Ian helped a couple of Garden Centres relocate and assisted the owners in the design and layout.

After two years Ian decided to set up a Mail Order Nursery at home. As his parents had taken early retirement it was a good opportunity to start a family business. Initially they traded as Bali-Hai Nursery a wholesale nursery to landscapers and public bodies but in 2001 it opened as Bali-Hai Mail Order Nursery.

In no time at all, in the ¼ acre back garden of their bungalow there was just a small path in from the front driveway to the back door, yes you guessed it, plants had taken over. On one of Ian's trips to Holland's major flower shows he saw roller benches for growing plants on, which sparked off an idea that he could make his own and this would double his space back at the nursery.

So now the back garden is double decked with Hostas and as Hostas love the shade it is an ideal position below and above the bench. As space was at a premium it was necessary to purchase a plot of land when it came up for sale in 2007. This land consists of 4.5 acres nestling in the valley of Glencloy just 1.5 miles from the current house on a slight slope and south facing which is an ideal location.

The ground itself is very heavy wet clay and is about ½ mile in from the coast and thus gets a lot of wind in the winter time mainly strong Easterly winds

but this also acts as frost protection with little or no frost. It is divided into 3 fields, one 3 acres, a one-acre and a half-acre. In the two smaller fields Ian has planted trees and has named it “Scroggy Wood”. The name Scroggy means “Stunted Oak” so a collection of Oak and native Alder was planted. *Alnus glutinosa* is native to the Glens of Antrim and the Carnlough area.

The new National Hosta Collection is planted below these trees. The hostas will perform better growing in a more natural setting and it will let people see the great diversity of shape, colour, texture and form of these magnificent plants. It is a big undertaking to manage such a large collection of one genus the largest Hosta collection planted out in Ireland and GB. Ian is hoping to relocate the nursery up to this new site so visitors will be able to come and view the Hosta collection and at the same time be able to purchase some of the rare and new Hosta varieties.

Hostas are still the number one selling plant in the USA, they are so easy to grow and look after and they provide good groundcover in areas where not a lot of other plants will survive the cool damp shady areas.

Having a collection this size costs a lot to maintain and keep on growing so shortly Scroggy Wood will be open to the public, initially for set Open Days or by appointment only. Friends of Scroggy Wood will be set up to help keep the National collection of Hostas growing for years to come.

It is now more important than ever to have a Hosta collection in Ireland because of climate change due to global warming. Countries like the USA are getting warmer and this is leading to more pests and diseases. One notable problem is Hosta Virus X this relatively new virus is proving a big problem in USA and Europe. It spreads by sap so when gardeners divide their plants the sap from infected plants is easily transferred onto another variety. Having healthy disease free stock plants collected over the past 27 years is vital in maintaining good plants for future division and breeding. This is why in Scroggy Wood mainly native trees are planted, as they are hardier and less prone to disease and pest problems through years of evolution.

In Japan Hostas are a delicacy and are eaten, the petioles (the stalks of the plant) are grown like forced Rhubarb in dark cool sheds so as to blanch the stalks white. These are steamed and eaten with sushi. Hostas are mostly grown for their ornamental value with great variation in leaf colour from all green, blue leaves to green and gold, green and white centres, white, blue or yellow margins to streaked colours in the leaf. The petioles also come in green, yellow, red and purple with some showing red spotting. The undersides of the leaves can be white or the same colour as the top leaf surface. The flowers vary in colour mostly lavender and varying shades

from white, mauve, purple to a near blue and even a near pink flower. Leaf size can be as small as one inch or up to 4 feet wide.

There is such a vast range that you can grow a Hosta in any size garden or windowsill. The main pests of Hostas are slugs and snails but over the years Hosta hybridisers are breeding slug resistant varieties. Basically this means thicker textured leaves, slugs prefer soft lush thin leaves like lettuce that are easy to munch. New varieties like *Hosta* 'One Man's Treasure' have leaves like leather, very stiff and glossy green with red petioles. Slugs will not go near this plant unless this is the only one in the garden in which case they will try to eat it but it is not easy for them.

Old varieties like *Hosta undulata* or *H. fortunei* var. *albopicta* have very thin leaves and can be seen in gardens with a lace-curtain effect where the slugs have munched their way through most of the leaves only leaving the tougher veins.

How does one stop slugs attacking hostas? Ian's advice is simply to spray a garlic solution onto the leaves every two weeks during active growth; this deters slugs and snails as they do not like the taste. It is now possible to buy garlic concentrate that can be mixed with water to apply to plants or you can make your own solution.

There is exciting news for Bali-Hai this year. They will be introducing a new Hosta sport found on the nursery 11 years ago called *Hosta* 'Bali-Hai' a good groundcover Hosta with tight compact golden yellow leaves that stays low to the ground and is set off by purple flowers mid summer. Numbers are limited as they are all original stock plants so they have been manually divided up over the years not grown in a tissue culture lab. Bali-Hai is a very hardy little Hosta and will hopefully stand the test of time. Ian says he did not want to release the plant too early as he would prefer to trial new plants for a minimum of 10 years before introduction, to ensure a good garden worthy plant for the customer.

To read more about Bali-Hai's Hostas see their website
www.mailorderplants4me.com

or give them a call to make an appointment to see Scroggy Wood.

There is a small admission charge to help maintain the collection, details can be seen online or can be obtained by phoning 028 28885289 in Northern Ireland or 048 28885289 from the Republic.



KEEPING IN TOUCH

Some of you will be aware that we have been experimenting with using email to keep in touch with members – sending out a reminder of forthcoming events each month. So far this has gone smoothly with no apparent glitches and the response from those who have been receiving the emails has been very positive.

At one stage in December it looked like Noeleen Smyth's lecture at the NBG, Glasnevin would have to be postponed due to industrial action. Fortunately the lecture went ahead as planned, and equally fortunately such an occurrence is rare. However, our email list would have given us the option of contacting as many members as possible to let them know of any last minute changes.

The list of members who were included in our trial was compiled from those whose email addresses I happened to have. If you have not yet received any of these bulletins and you would like to be added to the list, please send an email to patrick.quigley@live.co.uk giving the email address you would like us to use.

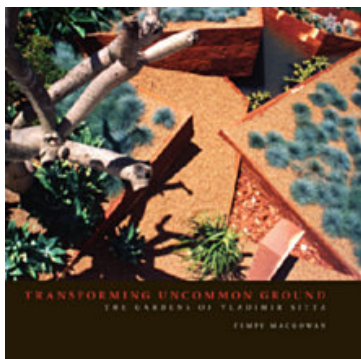
Your email address will not be passed on to others without your express permission and will not be displayed in the emails sent out to the group. The list will not be made available to any commercial organisation. The messages which we hope to send out on a regular basis will be: monthly reminders of forthcoming events in each of the regions; urgent notices of changes to event details; notices for special events e.g. publicity fliers for the plant sales. Your personal details and email address will not be used for any other purposes.

We hope you will find this a useful tool for keeping in touch.

Patrick Quigley



Worth a Read by Paddy Tobin



“Transforming Uncommon Ground – The Gardens of Vladimir Sitta” struck me immediately as a most peculiar book. The introductory chapter is printed on black paper, the text accompanied by a selection of Vladimir Sitta’s drawings, his fanciful thoughts on paper for possible garden designs. To be kind to him, I think few, very few people would entertain the thought of having one of these “designs” installed on their property. Cross shapes feature frequently in these sketches as do ground sculpture based on intimate parts of

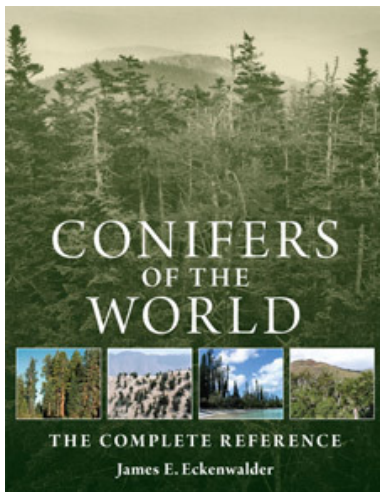
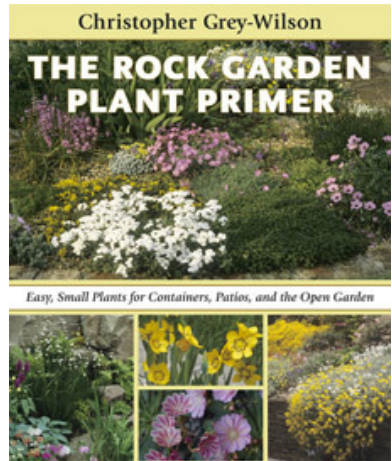
the human form and all left me thinking that this man was just too extreme in his designs to find commissions even from devotees of the outrageous.

Fortunately, the remainder of the book is in clear contrast and presents a range of amazing garden designs by Vladimir Sitta. It is striking that, on so many occasions, he seems to have been called upon to deal with the most awkward of sites and that his solutions to these problem areas are both conceptually brilliant and artistically beautiful. The ingenuity of his designs is quite amazing and they both need and deserve to be examined at length and in detail to be fully appreciated. Each design is presented within a very few pages and each is well illustrated with photographs, design plans and minimal text. As the designer is based in Australia, so are the gardens and while this might lead one to think the designs could not be applied to any other location this would be an inaccurate assumption. The thought and imagination, which went into the designs presented in this book, could be applied anywhere, even by ourselves in our own gardens – if we had the necessary bravery and sense of adventure. In the meantime, they are here for our enjoyment and great pleasure. [*Transforming Uncommon Ground – The Gardens of Vladimir Sitta*, Tempe MacGowan, Frances Lincoln, London, 2010, HB, 164pp, £30, ISBN: 978-0-7112-3128-3]

Christopher Grey-Wilson has a list of excellent titles to his credit and this latest title, *“The Rock Garden Plant Primer”* is a worthy addition to that list. Its title might lead one to assume it is purely for the beginner, the novice in growing rock garden plants, but this is not the case, as it will also appeal to those who have started on this hobby and be an excellent addition to any enthusiast’s library. It has a layout which is typical of such books, an

introductory section with general information on rock gardens and rock garden plants, their cultivation, propagation, aftercare and association with other garden plants.

The main section of the book is an A – Z guide to a selection of good reliable rock garden plants though it does not include the smaller bulbs which many would see as an indispensable part of the rock garden. It does, however, include some tubers, cyclamen and corydalis for example. The illustrations, colour photographs, are of the highest standard and the advice and comment on each plant is concise and perfectly relevant to the needs of the gardener. As a general book on selecting and growing rock garden plants it will not have all that everybody would want but it is still an excellent book for both beginner and more advanced grower alike. [*The Rock Garden Plant Primer*, Christopher Grey-Wilson, Timber Press, London, 2009, HB, 232pp, £20, ISBN: 978-0-88192-928-7]



Finally, an extraordinarily comprehensive treatment of the conifers species of the world, 545 taxa in total, in “Conifers of the World”. Before the expected A – Z treatment there are introductory chapters on classification, taxonomy, cultivation, morphology, classification and identification. There are guidelines and keys to aid in the identification of conifer along with illustrations, photographs and line drawings, though the photographs are a disappointment as most are in black and white and not always of the best quality. Likewise more detailed and more extensive line drawings would have made the “keying out” of species easier. There is a collection of colour photographs grouped at the front of

the book, a practice which I dislike, preferring the illustration to be near the relevant text. Nonetheless, this is an extraordinary work and one the conifer enthusiast will use with great benefit. [*Conifers of the World*, James, E. Eckenwalder, Timber Press, London, 2009, HB, 720pp, £45, ISBN-13:978-0-88192-974-4]



Regional Reports

LEINSTER

Thursday January 21st.

A lecture by Dr. Daniel Kelly “The Pursuit of Plants: from Templeogue to Tegucigalpa from gardener to Botanist”

Dr. Daniel Kelly, senior lecturer in the Botany Department of TCD spoke to a combined IGPS and Dublin Naturalists’ Field Club audience on a cool but not cold January night. He took us through his early education and the “Siren lure of the Tropics” that he experienced from the days he first noticed that there are different kinds of daisies. His first mentor was Mildred Townsend who gave lessons on horticulture.

Daniel recalled the drama of the day that Lady Phylis Moore arrived with a basket of *Crocus tommasinianus*. He still associates her with *Fritillaria imperialis*, *F. pyrenaica* and her habit of throwing snails into the next door garden! Daniel’s own early botanising began with a “Collins Pocket Guide to Flowers”. On holidays in Galway in 1964 he encountered David Webb who was leading a group from the Botanical Society of the British Isles.

After graduation Daniel’s first job was at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. Here he worked and botanised around the Hope Gardens in Kingston and up to 7,000 feet at the Cinchone Gardens in the Blue Mountains. Gardening in the tropics is challenging! Daniel introduced us to a Poinsettia hedge which was 12 feet tall, to an *Ortanique* which is a cross between an orange and a tangerine, to armies of caterpillars and omnivorous goats which put paid to an entire class experiment!

Daniel researched the montane rainforest in N.E. Jamaica. Here there is great diversity of epiphytes and Bromeliads. He showed us some members of the *Araceae* and a nomadic vine- *Polyganum*- which dies from below as it climbs. He also showed us some Aroid stems which send aerial roots down as far as the soil. If the host tree dies the Aroid stems will grow horizontally on the ground and climb up another tree - clever or what?

Daniel mentioned the 19th century Orchidmania which led to over collecting in Jamaica, the Bahamas and Columbia. Nowadays in Honduras no

specimens may be taken, only photographs. Floristically, Central America is one of the least known parts of the world. Honduras still has very extensive natural forest cover. Its biodiversity has been studied much less than that of neighbouring countries. It has 6,000 vascular species of which 2.5%, 148 are endemic.

Daniel surveyed Cusaco National Forest in Honduras from 2004-2008. Working on plots of 20m x 20m, all trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants are identified. Rugged terrain, torrential rain and green vipers notwithstanding, Pines, Oaks, *Liquidambar styraciflua*, Magnolias, Podocarpus sp., *Cinnamomum triplinerva*, Persea sp. (Avocado) *Guatteria anomala* (Custard Apple family) were just some of the species found and noted.

Then there is the “Mystery Tree” discovered in 2004. Specimens of its fruits were found in 2006. These fruits were eaten by pacas, squirrels and coatis. Specialists at Kew, the British Natural History Museum and Edinburgh Botanic Gardens have been working on it, as has Missouri Botanical Gardens since 2007. A new genus and species may be created for this tree when it is finally identified. It is not under immediate threat but its known world range is Cusaco National Park, Honduras. It must be very exciting to be in “on the ground” or perhaps “in the tree canopy for such a discovery.

Daniel concluded with a few interesting thoughts - “A gardener is trying to create a patch of Paradise, a conservationist is trying to keep it.”

Mary Bradshaw.

February Thursday 25th “The Spring Garden” A lecture by Mary Forrest

IGPS founding member Dr Mary Forrest gave members a foretaste of spring on a day with more touches of snowflakes than any signs of new growth in the garden. With slides a plenty she gave us a taste of things to come and made many suggestions as to what we might plant, so we could have something nice to look at in the spring garden.

There really are more plants to give springtime interest than we may realise, *Hamamelis mollis*, *Hamamelis vernalis* ‘Sandra’. The *Viburnum* is a very useful genus, try *Viburnum x bodnantense* or *V. carlesi* ‘Aurora’ or ‘Diana’. The yellow *Ribes laurifolium* or the sweet smelling *Osmanthus* can be nice too. A slide of the white *Clematis armandii* showed it covering a tank but it does not like a cold site and a nice *Clematis macropetala*, a double pink, lives happily, near a compost heap, at Burton Hall.

Mary gave good attention to suggesting interesting trees for spring colour. Many of the *Prunus* family can fill in here and the one that interested me was

Prunus triloba 'Multiplex', not just because the name was reminiscent of a cinema but because it was absolutely covered with flowers, almost impossible to see the branch. Cut this back after flowering. A very suitable small tree for a patio or a sheltered balcony, *Magnolia x soulangeana* is more city-sized than some other Magnolias. *Acer platanoides*, with yellow flowers, looks good in autumn too, giving later interest.

Drawing in particular on slides taken at the famous Keukenhof in the Netherlands, Mary pointed out the clever planting there to ensure something continually in flower during the relatively long spring season when the grounds are open, with red tulips combined with white crocus for example, *Tulipa kaufmanniana* 'Showwinner' and *Crocus* 'Jeanne d'Arc'. Appropriate hedging around the spring bedding also maintained interest as plants came into and went out of flower.

If your soil is suitable, the *Rhododendron* is very good in the spring and if you can manage to grow them the *Meconopsis x sheldonii* 'Slive Donard', the wonderful Blue Poppy, looks excellent if planted with *Primulas*.

As many of us look around our gardens after this really awful winter and take note of the casualties from the widespread lasting frost and snow, you may find some good suggestions from the plants Mary spoke about to fill in any gaps.

Robert Bradshaw

MUNSTER

Tuesday 16th March

"Landscape and Nature Photography" a lecture by Mike Brown

This was a talk with a difference as there was no particular emphasis on photographing plants. Mike Brown loves photographing everything to do with nature, plants, birds, landscapes and seascapes.

His interest in photography started in school when a friend lent him a camera just to take a few pictures. From that moment, he found himself hooked on every aspect of photography and was determined to make a career out of it. He now runs a very successful shop in Clonakilty, Co Cork, where one can purchase pictures from his vast selection of photographs. He runs photographic

workshops and has brought out a number of books featuring absolutely stunning photography.

His talk was divided into three sections. In the first section there was a slide show of a selection of wildlife and plants. There were pictures of whales, deer, flowers and cheeky red squirrels. The squirrels had taken up residence in a bird's nesting box situated in a neighbour's garden. The owner of the garden had built a nesting box to attract birds, but had inadvertently made the entrance hole too large.

Mike often takes days to get the right photograph especially of wildlife. He told us that in order to get the close up shot of a magnificent stag, he spent three days stalking the creature. He often gets up at daybreak to get that all inspiring picture of a particular landscape or seascape at sunrise. There were many pictures of Irish plants, including orchids. He showed us some beautiful pictures of the wild orchid, known as Ladies' Tresses (*Spiranthes*). This orchid has become difficult enough to find in Ireland.

The next section concentrated on wild bird photography in which he has a keen interest. One of his photographs showed a magnificent picture of a barn owl just exiting a shed. To get this shot he had to set up an infrared beam, in which once broken, triggers the camera to take a photograph of the owl in flight. There were also breathtaking pictures of eagles in flight and catching prey.

The last section featured photographs mainly of landscapes and seascapes, including a beautiful picture of a vast field of red poppies.

In his talk and slide show, Mike Brown demonstrated that he is a true master in the art of photography.

Martin Edwardes

BLOOM 2010 IN THE PHOENIX PARK DUBLIN

Bloom 2010 runs from Thursday the 3rd of June to Monday the 7th of June 2010 in the Phoenix Park in Dublin.

Opening hours:

Thursday 3rd 11:00 - 18:00

Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday 10:00 - 18:00



Mrs. Delany and her Circle by Honor Connolly

My favourite book of 2009 was without doubt “*Mrs Delany and her Circle*” published by Yale University Press. This is a beautifully produced large format book of 12 essays on the life and work of this multitalented woman of the 18th century. Her interests included painting in oil and watercolours, pen and ink drawings (a collection is now held at the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin), fabric design and embroidery, shell collecting and the creation of shell grottos and of course a diarist.

The essays though formal and scholarly are written for a general audience and the excellent quality of the paper adds to the enjoyment of the visual feast that is her collages or “paper mosaicks”. These were made by a method of her own invention “I have invented a new way of imitating flowers” she wrote, mounted on a black background they were made from coloured paper which was dyed to get the exact colour required. The accuracy of her work was, at a time that predates cameras, much appreciated by botanists that included Sir Joseph Banks. This was achieved because of her eye for detail, sense of colour, her dexterity to carry out tiny movements with precision and her knowledge of the structure of plants.

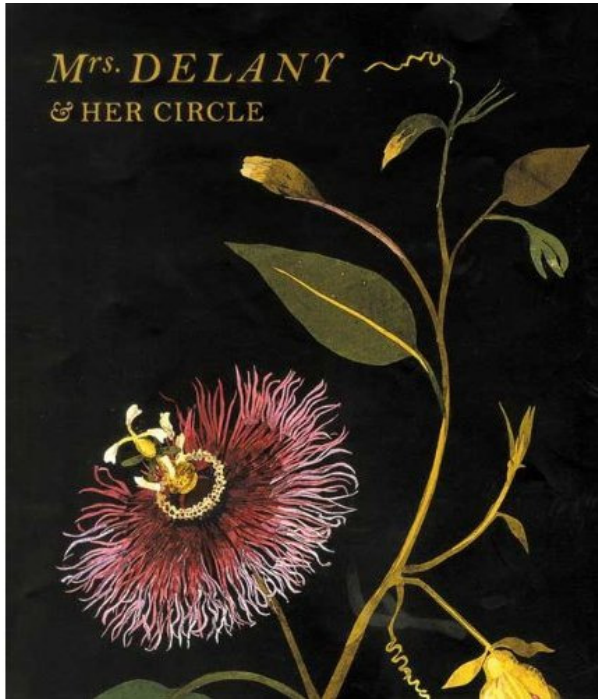
Mrs Delany was born Mary Granville in 1700. She married twice. Her first marriage at the age of seventeen to Alexander Pendarves, a Cornish MP forty years her senior, was an unhappy marriage arranged by her uncle, later she wrote “ I was sacrificed, lost not life indeed, but I lost all that makes life desirable – joy and peace of mind”. When she was 21 Alexander Pendarves died and she remained a widow until 1743 when she married Dr. Patrick Delany a widower from Dublin. She met Dr. Delany on a visit to Dublin in 1731 and corresponded with him and his wife after her return to England. She wrote at that time “he has all the qualities requisite for friendship, zeal, tenderness and application”.

Dr. Delany was a keen gardener and both he and his friend Dean Jonathan Swift were interested in the latest trends in landscaping in England. This informality he introduced to his small estate of 11 acres at Glasnevin, spending more than he could actually afford. While living at Delville Mrs Delany concentrated on her artistic work encouraged by her husband and inspired by her garden. In 1753 she wrote “ I am in the garden every morning by 7 o’clock

and great part of the day besides". However it was after Dr. Delany's death in 1768 when she returned to England that she began her flower collages, or Flora Delanica as she called them. When, aged 82 she was forced to stop because of failing sight her collection numbered almost one thousand.

This sumptuous volume should deservedly make this woman and her art more widely known.

[Mrs Delany and her circle, edited by Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts, Yale, 2009, HB, 283pp, £40, ISBN: 978-0-300-14279-2]



There is also an exhibition **Mrs Delany and her Circle** at the Sir John Soane's Museum 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, WC2A 3Bp running to the 1st May 2010.

Opening Times: Tuesday to Saturday inclusive, 10am-5pm.

Also on the first Tuesday evening of each month, 6-9pm.

Closed Sunday, Monday, Bank Holidays



The Irish Garden Plant Society



Galanthus 'Hill Poë'.

See "A Heritage of Beauty" page 94 for details of the origins of this Irish snowdrop.

Membership Correspondence:
The Irish Garden Plant Society,
c/o The National Botanic Gardens,
Glasnevin,
Dublin 9.

Or E- mail igpsireland@aol.com

Please note that staff at the Botanic Gardens cannot take telephone enquiries about the IGPS.

Website: www.irishgardenplantsociety.org