



**ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY**  
**Dublin Group**



**NEWSLETTER NO. 47– Winter 2007**

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Front cover illustration is of the Juno iris, *I. tubergeniana*. Photo: Erich Pasche. Back cover picture is of *Narcissus assoanus* growing on Mount Alaric in southwestern France. Photo: G. D. Sevastopulo.

## EDITORIAL

The 'shop window' of the AGS in Dublin is our annual show which is held in Cabinteely Community School usually in April. The show presents an opportunity for AGS members to present in a public forum alpines grown to the highest standard. Members of the general public attending the show are invariably astonished at the beauty and diversity of the plants on display. Some of them are so impressed that they decide to become members of our group. Visitors, who may have had only the vaguest idea of what an alpine plant is, leave with a completely new concept of what the term means. So the show has an educational function as well as affording visitors the pleasure of seeing a vibrantly colourful display of well grown plants. Thanks to the efforts of everyone who helps to put the show together under the direction of our Show Secretary, Val Keegan, all our shows to date have been successful; but the success of every show is, in the final analysis, entirely dependant on the exhibitors. In this regard we are very fortunate that our colleagues in the Ulster Group exhibit at our show in such numbers. Of course, we reciprocate by showing in Greenmount at the Ulster Group's show. We cannot afford however to be complacent about the situation. Both shows are dependant on a relatively small number of exhibitors to fill the benches. Liam Byrne, who is the most successful exhibitor on this island by a significant margin, cannot be expected to continue exhibiting at his present level indefinitely. The same can be said of other major exhibitors from both groups. It has been encouraging in recent years to see the names of new exhibitors in section C and it is to be hoped that among them there may be another Liam Byrne or Harold McBride. But for the long term sustainability of the shows the most desirable scenario is to have a large number of exhibitors each showing a few plants. Even one plant from a member who has not exhibited before would be a bonus.

Elsewhere in these pages Val makes her usual plea for members to exhibit and also to bring plants for the plant sale. The Committee provides an opportunity at the local shows for members who have not exhibited before to learn the basics; also, existing exhibitors are very willing to provide whatever advice and assistance they can to newcomers. So really there is no excuse. The health of the Group is very much tied up with the success of the show which is the main weapon in the achievement of one of our main objectives which is to advance awareness of alpines and encourage their wider cultivation. A useful New Year resolution for each member would be to become an exhibitor in 2007.

## NEWS & VIEWS

The reaction to the summer 2006 newsletter has been generally favourable with the main complaint being that the print was too small. I have increased the font size for this issue and I hope that you will all find it more comfortable to read.

If the newsletter is to be of real use to members I need to hear your views. Items of interest can be included in this column either anonymously or attributed. Contributions relating to people, places or plants, ideas as to initiatives the Group could take, criticisms of or comments on what we are currently doing, suggestions for changes or indeed anything you want to get off your chest would be welcome. So please let me hear from you. My contact details are on the outside back cover.

### In this Issue

I spent a couple of weeks last summer botanizing in Turkey with **Erich Pasche**, the well known German botanist and expert on bulbs and the flora of Turkey. He agreed to write an article for the newsletter and chose the cultivation of Juno irises as his subject. The result is on page 10. These beautiful plants are not easy, and perhaps not for everyone, but any member who wants to try them now knows what to do.

**George Sevastopulo** has done some research on the Dublin connection of that great plantsman **E. B. Anderson** and his very interesting findings are on page 13.

**Liam Byrne** outlines his approach to the cultivation of that beautiful alpine, *Ranunculus parnassifolius*, on page 15. As you know Liam is one of the most successful growers of alpines in this country and writes from experience.

Various members have written accounts of our fixtures in the second half of 2006.

Sincere thanks to all our contributors.

### New Venue

Our new Southside venue, replacing Sandymount, is St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan. It is more spacious, has more facilities and is convenient for Southside members many of whom find the NBG difficult to get to because of traffic. Coming from Goatstown turn right past the Stillorgan Shopping Centre, past the Stillorgan Orchard Public House and the venue is into the right – see page 58 of the Dublin City and District Guide.

### Fixtures

The 2007 season opens on 25 January with the AGM at our new venue. This meeting provides all members with an opportunity to raise any issues that

concern them. It also offers the chance to thank the committee members for all the hard work they do on our behalf throughout the year. As a bonus **Brendan Marnell** will talk to us about raised beds and tufa. Many of you will know that Brendan has a fabulous tufa wall in his garden and his talk will be a very appropriate introduction to the visit to his garden which takes place on 31 March.

On 1 February **Alan Furness** will talk at the NBG about accommodating the trickier alpiners in the garden. This subject should be of interest to everyone, beginner and expert alike, because getting plants out of pots and into the open ground is good for both the plants and the gardener. This is a unique opportunity to hear the views of a highly accomplished and experienced plantsman and grower on this important topic.

Our annual lunch is on 24 February at the Royal St. George Yacht Club in Dunlaoghaire – see booking form for details. This is always a very enjoyable event where members can socialize over an excellent lunch in very pleasant surroundings. After lunch we will be treated to what promises to be a most interesting talk from **David Lapsley** on ‘Beautiful Patagonia’. David is a very good speaker and laces his talks with plenty of humour.

On 24 March, in the new venue, we have our spring Local Show and Workshop. See the show schedule for details. As well as the show there will be practical demonstrations from experienced exhibitors on preparing plants for showing as well as general cultural tips.

Also in our new venue on 29 March **Ciaran Burke** will talk about ‘Alpiners – not just for the Rockery’. Ciaran who is well known to most members is a committed plantsman and will be telling us how we can grow alpiners in our gardens even if we don’t have a ‘rockery’.

I’m really looking forward to seeing **Brendan Marnell’s** garden on 31 March having missed it last time round. Reports of the previous visit have been very enthusiastic. Brendan grows a very wide range of rare alpiners and I think his tufa wall is unique in this country. Not to be missed.

The Ulster Group Show takes place in Greenmount near Antrim town on 14 April. This show is always worth a visit and it is important that we support our colleagues in the Ulster Group in the same way that they support us by exhibiting at their show and attending as visitors. There will be lots of good plants for sale.

On 19 April in Glasnevin there is an unmissable talk from **Ian Young** which he has titled ‘Bulb Log Live’. I quote Ian: ‘Bulb Log Live is a digital talk covering the full range of bulbs we grow plus a lot of detail on how we grow them. It moves through the bulb year showing the different stages and tasks as we go. Lots of beautiful flowers, lots of practical tips and lots to challenge and inspire the audience as well.’ Those of you who are familiar

with Ian's bulb log on the SRGC site will need no urging to attend this talk and anyone who is interested in growing bulbs in the garden or under cover and has not accessed this wonderful resource should do so at once. There is a link to the SRGC page on our website and from there a direct link to the bulb log.

In Cabinteely Community School on 28 April we have our main Show. Please be there and bring your friends and neighbours.

As someone who has an intimate knowledge of the region **Mary Angela Keane** will talk about 'The Habitats of the Burren' on 10 May. If you have any interest in this National treasure this is an essential lecture. It will be in Glasnevin.

On the weekend of 25 to 27 May we are going to visit that fascinating landscape in Co. Clare at a time when the flowers should be at their best. *Gentiana verna* is of course the star attraction but there are many other super plants to be seen also as well as those wonderful limestone pavements.

Our last fixture in the first half of 2007 is like the wine of Cana. **Anna Nolan's** superb garden is known to most of you and nothing I can say will stop you going to see it again on 17 June. See you there.

I think our programme is an excellent one. One small complaint; why are we not having a talk from **Martin Walsh** on his 2005 trip to Tibet? I hope excessive modesty is not the reason.

### **Digital Photography Course**

**Val Keegan** organized a course on digital photography which ran over six nights in October/November. The course was given by the talented **Edwin Davison** who judges the artistic section at the Show each year. The syllabus dealt mainly with the manipulation and storage of digital images on computer. The participants were unanimous in their praise for the course. Edwin has agreed to repeat it if there is sufficient interest. Fifteen participants would be required and the fee would be €50. Anyone who is interested should contact me.

### **The Shows**

**Val Keegan** needs you!

She Writes: - I am just back from the Show Secretaries Meeting in Pershore. Our Dublin Show seems to compare very favourably to the overall standard of UK Shows, considering that we depend on two groups only. 'Cracking plants' was one comment from a previous judge! So, all we have to do now is to continue what we are doing – while always looking for ways to improve of course! It really is up to all our members to contribute to the success of the day. Surely each and every one of you could manage at least one plant for our next Show on Saturday 28 April (Ulster Show Saturday 14 April).





*Ranunculus parnassifolius* 'Nuria', Farrer Medal winner. Photo: G. Wheeler, AGS Slide Library.

Hopefully you have planted some bulbs, and will look around your other plants next spring. Then persuade all your neighbours to come to the Show!

Our experienced exhibitors are only too willing to advise you on plants you have and what to do. We also use our local shows and workshops for this.

For the Show to be successful there are three essential criteria:-

1. An excellent display of plants.
2. The public to come and view them.
3. A good members' plant sale – profits of which help to provide our lecturers. Of course, other specialist nurseries and the Artistic Section attract visitors too.

For advice on showing – contact **Val Keegan** 01 2862616, for plants for selling – **Anna Nolan** 01 2825207 and for artistic advice – **Gwenda Wratt** 01 8360296.

I am pleased to report that Michael Meagher has achieved his Bronze Medal, the Botanic Gardens a Silver Medal and Peggy Parker has obtained a bar to her Gold Medal (100 firsts) in the Artistic Section. Well done!

## **Books**

**Barbara O' Callaghan** reviews Jim Jermyn's book on European Alpines on page 16.

Good news from Vojtech Holubec for those who ordered a copy - the Caucasus book is on its way at last. It will be reviewed in our next issue.

## **Our Website**

**Jamie Chambers** writes:

The website continues to expand as we come up with ideas for new pages of interesting information, and enhance the original pages. Here are some of the changes:

**Weekend:** There is a new page about the Termonfeckin weekend which you get to by clicking on 'Weekend' on the menu. This gives details about the events and speakers, and also provides a map for those in need.

**Archives:** All the previous Seasonal Focus plants (from the Home page) have been collected into the new 'Archive' page, together with the commentaries.

**Gallery:** I am experimenting with using the Flickr website as an easy way to present any photos about the Society and its events. You get to see these by going to the 'Gallery' page and clicking on the link to the Flickr website. You will need to register with Flickr first, but it's free.

**Other changes:** there are some new Links, and I am always interested in more, so if you know of good websites for alpine gardeners please send me the details. A membership form for the Society is now available for downloading on the Contact page as a pdf file (so tell your friends). The Library page has a new section, for recent acquisitions.

Finally, I have been embedding hyperlinks into pages where I think it could be useful. For example, you might be interested in going to the website of one of our speakers. When you see a speaker's name underlined it means I have linked the website to the name, so you if click on it a new window will open up to take you there.

I'm always looking for ideas and material for the website, so please send in anything that you would like to see there, be it bits of news, photos, or thoughts about useful information. Remember, if it's of interest to you, chances are that it will be for others too. Plant photos for the Seasonal Focus section will be particularly welcome!

As always, you can reach me by emailing to [agsinfo@eircom.net](mailto:agsinfo@eircom.net). And if you haven't yet taken a look at the website, go right now to:

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



## **Pots and Labels**

In the early years of the Group the Committee made bulk purchases of rigid square black plastic pots and made them available to members at a reasonable price. It has been decided to reintroduce this service and we now have 7 cm pots for sale to members at 5c each. If you want some you should phone Michael Meagher (01 8382368) well in advance of any meeting and he will bring your order along.

## **Valerie Finnis**

**Martin Walsh** has written this tribute to his late benefactor.

Valerie Finnis who died on 17 October 2006 was a leading figure in British horticulture over the last forty or so years. She was a gifted photographer and a superb plantswoman with a special interest in alpinists. She was awarded the premier award of the Royal Horticultural Society, the prestigious Victoria Medal of Honour, in 1975. She spent her working life in Waterperry Horticultural College for Women which she entered as a student in 1942, and eventually joined the staff as a teacher. She set up a nursery at Waterperry specializing in alpinists and became a skilled propagator of plants such as saxifragas and drabas. She later became a lecturer as well as a garden writer and contributed numerous articles to the 'Journal of the RHS', now known as 'The Garden'.

Valerie Finnis had a lot of associations with this country and the world of alpinists. She was a great friend of the renowned plantsman David Shackleton and his family and was godmother to his son Charles. On one of her many visits to Ireland she traveled to the Burren in the company of David and Wilhelm Schacht, curator of Munich Botanic garden. Wilhelm Schacht was the person she credited for her interest in photography as he gave her a gift of an old Rolleiflex camera. Her love of photography is evidenced by the fact that she had amassed a collection of over 50,000 images by the time she died. These were mainly plant portraits but also some of such famous people as Cedric Morris, Margery Fish and Vita Sackville-West.

Her other connection with this country was her discovery of the Californian fuchsia, *Zauschneria californica ssp. cana* 'Dublin' in a Dublin garden, however the exact garden from which she took her cuttings is still a source of contention. She always maintained a strong interest in Irish gardening and in recent years this was strengthened even further when she provided generous travel grants to several young Irish gardeners, including this writer and such well known horticulturists as Ciaran Burke, Michael Higgins, Seamus O'Brien, Brendan Sayers and Noeleen Smyth. One of the primary aims of her trust was to help young horticulturists to travel to various parts of the world in order to see plants growing in the wild. Research projects that involved alpinists were especially encouraged. She set up the trust in memory

of Merlin Scott, who was killed at the age of 22 in North Africa during the Second World War; he was the only son of her late husband Sir David Scott.

What made the Merlin Trust unique, was the personal interest that Valerie took in her 'Merlins' with regular contact maintained for years until failing health forced her to hand over the running of the trust to Fiona Crumley. I was very fortunate to have met her at the RHS London Flower Show in February 2001. Over the years of corresponding with her, the one story that she took great delight in telling was of a group of very keen Cork women who were filling their suitcases full of plants when she met them in the ladies' loo in Vincent Square; she was very impressed with their resourcefulness!

Unfortunately, she was unable to realize her dream of a reunion of all her 'Merlins' due to ill health. Personally, I owe her a huge debt of gratitude as she provided funding for several of my earlier plant hunting trips to China and Central Asia and without her help and encouragement I would never have embarked on those hugely enriching trips in the first place. It is an astonishing fact that she has helped almost 500 'Merlins', and I think it is fair to say that she has done more than any other person to help the younger generation of horticulturists in Ireland and the UK. She is commemorated by several plants, which have been named after her or her garden such as *Viola* 'Boughton Blue', *Artemisia ludoviciana* 'Valerie Finnis' and, perhaps the best known, the lovely grape hyacinth, *Muscari* 'Valerie Finnis'.

### **Deceased Member**

I am sorry to record that **Bill Kavanagh**, a dedicated gardener and long term member of the Group has died. **Mary Glennon** offers this tribute:

Bill Kavanagh who died at the end of October was a member of the Society from its very early days and served on Committee for a period also. Bill was a gentle giant, a big man, very quietly spoken, a man who loved his garden and loved to share it with others. Where helping hands were needed Bill was always ready to serve and did so in many ways. In recent years as a very energetic member of the Active Retirement Group in his area he helped to run a gardening group on Tuesday mornings. He never came to meetings without some plant material to pass on and with his practical tips and advice he encouraged many of the members to take a more serious interest in gardening. Despite his illness he continued his Tuesday commitment up to two weeks before his death. He will be missed by many but most of all by his wife Mary and by his children and grandchildren to whom we offer our sincere condolences.

## The Cultivation of Juno Irises

In the AGS Bulletin, 3 of 66, there is a splendid article by Tony Hall on growing Junos. In the same issue I touched on Juno culture in connection with the cultivation of rare bulbs. Here for the Dublin Group of the AGS I try to describe my method in some more detail.

Since my early childhood I have been interested in plants, and started gardening at around the age of six. I progressed through cacti, primulas and sempervivums until in my late teens I became focussed on bulbous plants. I was fascinated by their life cycle and by the fact that when they are dormant in summer one can leave them and use this time for travelling.

On April 18 1970 I set out for a seven week trip to Turkey with three companions in a VW bus. I had received invaluable advice from experts such as Dr D. M. Henderson, Admiral Paul Furse and Patrick M. Synge whom I met at the Fourth International Lily Conference in the UK in 1969. The enormous range of bulbs we encountered in Anatolia fuelled my lifelong passion for these plants. Among these were several Junos, including *Iris galatica*, *persica*, *caucasica* and *stenophylla*, whose beauty fascinated me. Soon after this crucial experience I started to build a collection of these wonderful plants which today includes 39 of the known 55 species and subspecies in the subgenus Scorpiris, also called Junos.

### Peculiarities and Distribution

Most Junos are native to western and central Asia, *Iris aitchisonii* being the most easterly one. They colonize well-drained, steep mountain slopes and very dry steppes. There is only one species growing in Mediterranean Europe and North Africa, namely, *I. planifolia*, a large-flowered species but very susceptible to virus infection. It starts flowering in late autumn. All Junos have a bulb and normally possess fleshy roots of different length and width which usually persist for several years. An exception is *I. leptorhiza* with normal roots which die away during dormancy.

### Cultivation

I cultivate my Junos in pots in a cold greenhouse. The soil mixture I use is made up of:

3 parts sharp sand

3 parts grit (dolomite, 2 – 5 mm)

3 parts TKS 1 (you could substitute John Innes no. 1)

2 parts heavy loam, roughly sieved.

To this I add 2 kg bonemeal, 10 kg bentonite and 100 g Radigen (trace elements) per cubic meter of soil.

I grow the plants in 8 cm and 11 cm square plastic pots putting a drainage layer of about 1 cm of grit on the bottom. I place the bulb in the pot and fill with soil up to the base of the bulb, so that the bulb itself sits on the surface with its fleshy roots in the soil. Then a piece of plastic pipe, 2 – 6 cm in diameter depending on the width of the bulb, is placed over the bulb and filled up to the rim with grit. After filling up the pot with additional compost to about 2 cm from the top the pipe is pulled out. Thus the bulb is completely clothed with grit which guarantees optimal drainage. Depending on bulb size, I plant between two and five plants per 11 cm pot or one to three smaller ones in the 8 cm pots. The pots are covered with about 2 cm of dolomite chippings and are placed side by side on a layer of c. 4 cm of Perlite to prevent rapid desiccation. My *Oncocyclus*- and *Regelia*-irises I treat in the same way. Additional artificial light supports healthy, compact growth. To keep the plants nearly frost free during winter I use a fan heater, which both circulates and warms up the air. This would probably be unnecessary in Dublin. During the entire growing period the plants are ventilated by a fan as a substitute for the missing steppe wind, keeping the leaves dry and avoiding botrytis.

### **Watering and Feeding**

In general I start watering around the middle of November. Early growers like *Iris planifolia* and *I. aucheri* get water as soon as the leaves appear. As I write the former is already in full leaf at the end of October. Watering must be done carefully so as not to wet the channelled leaves to avoid botrytis and bulb rot. *I. nicolai*, *rosenbachiana*, *galatica*, *persica* and *stenophylla* are especially sensitive. In early January I sprinkle granulated potassium on the surface of the pots. With each watering thereafter some fertilizer is washed down and feeds the plants. As soon as the granulated material is dissolved completely feeding is continued with a weak liquid fertilizer high in potassium but low in nitrogen. During the whole growing period the plants are kept moist, but not wet. As soon as the leaves turn yellow in early summer watering is stopped completely. A long dry dormant period is necessary to ripen the bulbs and to enable them to build up a new flower bud for the next season.

### **Pests and Diseases**

When watering the plants for the first time I apply a fungicide called 'Fongalil Neu' (Metalaxyl) to prevent fungal diseases. As soon as the leaves appear careful daily control of aphids is necessary as they are carriers of

virus disease. I spray once with ‘Confidor’ (Imidacloprid), a very effective systemic insecticide. One treatment during the growing season is enough.

### **Propagation**

Junos can be propagated in three ways: by daughter bulbs, by root cuttings or by seed. The easiest way is to separate the daughter bulbs and plant them in the way already described. It is also possible to cut away healthy roots in such a way that a piece of the basal plate remains on the top of the root. In most cases a tiny bulblet is already visible at the top of the storage root and this will grow to flowering size in two or three years. Before planting the roots again in the soil mixture mentioned above I let the cut dry off for some hours. Self collected seed is also sown in this mixture in autumn and seed from the societies is sown as soon as received. The pots are placed in the open on a wall. Germination is sporadic lasting from a few months to several years. After germination the seedlings are transferred into the cold house and kept slightly moist all year round. It can take up to six years for the seedlings to reach flowering size.

I am sure there are many ways to cultivate Junos successfully. Here I have shown the way I do it.

**Erich Pasche.**

*(Erich has described how he cultivates these plants. His prescription can be adapted to suit your circumstances. The essentials are to provide perfect drainage, careful watering, good ventilation in winter, regular and appropriate feeding, a careful watch for aphids and a good summer baking. Bentonite, trace elements and so on may help but are not essential –don't be put off, have a go. Ed.)*

### **E. B. Anderson – the Dublin connection**

E. B. Anderson was one of the giants of alpine gardening in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a founder member of the Alpine Garden Society and its president from 1948 until 1953. During that time he launched the seed distribution scheme, which is now such an important feature of the Society's activities. He was a member of the first Joint Rock Garden Plant Committee and served on the committee for the remainder of his life. His friend Patrick Synge wrote: “He was indeed one of the most skilful growers of dwarf bulbs and alpines that I have been privileged to know; his knowledge was infinite and in some fields probably unrivalled anywhere in the world and he shared this most generously, not only with his friends, but with his innumerable correspondents”. He wrote several books, including *Rock Gardens* and *Hardy Bulbs* in the RHS Penguin series and *Dwarf Bulbs for the Rock Garden*, a still valuable volume that I managed to acquire from an

Australian antiquarian bookseller through the Internet. In 1970, his friends Patrick Syngé and Eliot Hodgkin persuaded him to write an account of the gardens that he had made and of the plants that he had grown in them. He died in 1971, aged 85, and the book, *Seven Gardens or Sixty Years of Gardening*, was published posthumously. It is readily available from antiquarian booksellers and is well worth reading.

Bertram Anderson graduated from Birmingham University as a chemist and his first job was in Dublin, where he arrived in 1909. He lived in ‘digs’ for two years but after his marriage moved to 18 Gilford Avenue, Sandymount (information from Thom’s Directory), a small Edwardian house close to the sea, with a very small garden. He constructed two rock beds, one banked up at one end with top-spit peat blocks, a dry stonewall, a scree, a ‘Farrer’ moraine (Bertram Anderson’s term), and a bog garden. The moraine consisted of a concrete trough filled with chippings and a little leaf mould, with an outlet that could be blocked in the summer, allowing an inch or two of water to accumulate in the bottom. The bog garden was made from a concrete trough without an outlet. It must have been, as he remarked, a rock garden very much ‘*multum in parvo*’. He mentions some of the plants that he grew: *Omphalodes luciliae*, self sowing in the ‘Farrer’ moraine; *Campanula alpestris* [*allionii*] running freely in the scree; *Pelargonium endlicherianum* in the dry stone wall; *Myosotis alpestris* [*rupicola*], the true plant; and ramondas, outstanding in the peat wall. He grew only a few bulbs at this stage of his gardening career. They included *Narcissus assoanus* [*juncifolius*], illustrated on the back cover of this newsletter, and *Tulipa celsiana* and *T. clusiana*, which did well for him in the light sandy soil.

During his time in Dublin, Bertram Anderson was a frequent visitor to the Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, where he got to know Sir Frederic and Lady Moore. Their friendship continued after he returned to Britain in 1915. There is a letter in the library of the Botanic Gardens, written in 1920, in which he informed Sir Frederic Moore that he had seeds for him from Guatemala collected by an acquaintance, was trying to acquire seeds from the San Bernardino Mountains in California, and suggested that “it would pay us well to send collectors to the Rockies and Asia Minor and to China, as the really good things from China can easily be counted up.” When he made his next garden in Cheshire in 1919, he soon had a fair collection of plants “through the kindness of my Dublin friends, such as Sir Frederick Moore and R. Lloyd Praeger”. Lloyd Praeger, he recalls, introduced him to the German nursery of F Sünderman of Lindau, from which he bought plants throughout his gardening life. Another acquaintance made during his time in Sandymount, which led to a lifelong friendship, was with E. A Bowles, who had turned up unannounced on the doorstep of 18 Gilford Avenue, directed there by Sir Frederic Moore. Bertram Anderson wrote:



“You can imagine my trepidation at showing such a great gardener such a little plot, but as always, he was charming and encouraging...”

Although he was moderately well paid, Bertram Anderson never had enough spare cash to buy the plants that he wanted (“few gardeners have”, he wrote), so he propagated “a few choice things” and sold them through the monthly journal *Irish Gardening*. This brought him into contact with a civil servant, who lived at Dalkey and whose garden “consisted in the main of natural huge granite boulders in which the encrusted saxifrages grew in amazing profusion”. I wonder whether that garden can still be identified. On one of his visits to Dalkey, he and his wife saw a bungalow for sale, with a long rocky garden leading down to the road and a magnificent view over the coast. He wrote: “I have often wished we had been able to buy it; if we had I believe I should still be in Ireland, for I loved the country and the people who in those days worked reasonably hard but did not allow work to dominate their lives”.

In his last year in Sandymount he acquired seed of the red *Meconopsis punicea*. Because he was leaving, he passed on the seedlings to A.K. Bulley of Liverpool, who financed several of the early plant hunting expeditions to the mountains of China and founded the seed firm of Bees Ltd. He never saw the plants in flower and never revisited his little garden in Gilford Avenue. No trace of the rockery, the peat wall, the scree, the Farrer moraine, or the bog garden remains. But the next time that you see a plant of *Thymus pulegioides* ‘Bertram Anderson’, named for him by his friend the nursery man Joe Elliot, or marvel at *Iris* ‘Katharine Hodgkin’, which he named for the wife of his great friend Eliot Hodgkin, remember Bertram Anderson, a large, burly, cheerful, kindly man and great plantsman, who gardened for five years in a little plot in Sandymount, nearly one hundred years ago.

I thank Colette Edwards of the Library, the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin for her help in trying to trace correspondence between Bertram Anderson and Sir Frederic Moore.

**George Sevastopulo**

### ***Ranunculus parnassifolius***

Buttercups are found all over the world. Some are weedy and to be avoided but many are excellent garden plants and some of the more difficult species require pan culture. At the edge of permanent snow in alpine regions grows one of the gems of the genus, *Ranunculus glacialis*, but as it is virtually ungrowable we can forget about it. Of the buttercups that are in cultivation, from the Pyrenees and the Alps comes another glory of the high altitude buttercups, *R. parnassifolius*. In the Nuria region of the east Pyrenees the

form 'Nuria' is found. This magnificent plant carries large white flowers with rose-coloured veins just above the neat dark green leaves.

Unfortunately this particularly desirable form is seldom found in nursery lists. If you ever get an opportunity to acquire a plant don't hesitate.

*R. parnassifolius* is clump forming. Its leaves are heart shaped, dark green and of a thick leathery texture. The white flowers are carried on 10 to 15 cm stems. There are forms with small flowers that are not worth growing but in its best forms it is a splendid plant and well worth the small effort required to grow it well.

### **Cultivation**

In the open garden it requires a very free draining soil and likes lime. Place a pane of glass over it from the end of September to the end of March as it does not tolerate winter wet. It is at its best when grown in a pot in the Alpine House. When it reaches maturity grow it in as deep a pot as possible, for its roots delve deeply into the soil and are quite extensive. For pot culture the compost I use is equal parts of John Innes No. 2, leaf-mould, peat, coarse sand and grit. If leaf-mould is unavailable replace it with peat. Oxygen is as necessary to plants as it is to humans and the open texture of this compost provides oxygen to the fibrous roots. Top dress your pot with about 2 cm of grit. This keeps the crown of the plant off the soil and, if watering overhead, stops the soil from compacting. It is an herbaceous perennial and should be kept just moist, not arid, in winter.

### **Propagation**

Propagation is by seed sown in spring or by division in autumn. Top dress the seed pots with grit and leave them in the open. Seed is readily available from the seed exchanges.

Finally, *R. parnassifolius* makes an excellent show plant. It is ideal for the later AGS shows and the Dublin Show in 2007 is at the end of April. If growing for showing do not be tempted to encourage your plant to flower by moving it into a heated area. If you do the flowers will lack substance and the plant itself will be out of character. A well-grown plant will often be a contender for the 'Farrer'.

**Liam Byrne**

## **Book Review**

### **Alpine Plants of Europe**

**By Jim Jermyn**

I was first attracted to this book by the lovely pictures but discovered that it is not a coffee table book. I was soon immersed in the text.

I was entertained in the first chapter, which is the history of European alpine, to discover that the roots of *Gentiana lutea* are made into schnapps, which was not to the author's taste, and that the plants got their name from King Gentian in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC. Jim tells us about scientists, plant hunters and growers. He encourages the alpine gardener to go into the wild and study plants in their natural environment so that we can see how these plants grow so that we can recreate them in miniature in our gardens as near as possible to nature.

I was a bit daunted by a mention of geology but reading further he explained that the right rock could make the difference between few or many flowers. This explained a lot of the disappointment in my garden. Not only does Jim explain how to grow plants; he also suggests things to grow together.

The cultivars he writes about are reliable in the garden not as in some books where the author describes a mouth-watering beauty only to tell you that it is difficult to grow. He does not spend much time on large groups such as Narcissus but recommends books that specialise in them.

Jim begins his journey in the Pyrenees, first explaining the geography before moving on to the plants and the best time to see them. As he goes along he gives growing and propagation tips. We continue through the Western and central Alps, the Eastern Alps, the Balkans and a small section on the Carpathians and high Tatra Mountains.

The last chapter is a practical guide to alpine gardening. He explains how to build a raised bed and advises on the soil-mixture, he suggests top dressing to a depth of 50 mm!

Jim is a little scathing of pan grown plants for showing, he prefers them grown in as natural a setting as possible in the garden. His comments about growing plants in tufa make it the ideal to aim for.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book with its easy to understand text and lovely photographs by Wilhelm and Dieter Schacht. It is definitely going on my Christmas list!

Jermyn, Jim. *Alpine Plants of Europe, A Gardener's Guide*. Portland, Oregon, Timber Press, 320 pp. ISBN – 13: 978-088192-734-4. Stg.£25.

**Barbara O'Callaghan**

## Review of Recent Group Events

### African Plants for the Garden

By Dr John Grimshaw.

The night of 21 September was wet and stormy and the Dublin traffic was at its horrific worst. However, those of us who braved the elements to travel to the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin to listen to John Grimshaw's talk on African Plants for the Garden were given a rare treat. Dr Grimshaw is probably best known here as a noted galanthophile and co-author of the monograph *Snowdrops* but his interests and accomplishments in the world of horticulture are extensive and his interests range from bulbs to ferns to African plants.

We were taken on a tour of Africa starting with *Iris unguicularis* in North Africa; through Ethiopia with its many wonderful plants including *Rosa abyssinica* and *Primula verticillata* – the only rose and primula native to Africa. The giant *Lobelia rhynchopetalum* grows here to a height of 15 to 20 feet. In East Africa we saw the strange and wonderful *Dendrosenecio brassica* – a cabbage-like groundsel that lives on the equator at an altitude of over 9000 feet. Its rosettes close up each night as a protection against the nightly frosts. Then to South Africa where I learned (to my surprise) why *Nerine bowdenii* is hardy and *Nerine sarniensis* is not. It's simple really - one will tolerate our summer rain while the other will not.

Space does not permit the detailing of the many beautiful plants that Dr Grimshaw showed and discussed. The following examples are just a taste of what was an entertaining and a very interesting talk. *Diascia vigilis* is so called because it was found growing in the area of The Sentinels – remarkable peaks in the Drakensberg Mountains of South Africa. The beautiful red-flowered *Gladiolus flanaganii* is known as “The Suicide Lily” because it grows horizontally out from the dizzy heights of basalt cliffs and the various *Jamesbrittenia* hybrids that are coming on to the market should be sought out as the summer bedding plants of the future.

**Carmel Duignan**

### Autumn Workshop and Local Show

On Saturday 7 October an enthusiastic group of alpine gardeners enjoyed a social tea or coffee before our workshop in Glasnevin.

We had a lovely display of plants brought in by various members with cyclamen predominating. A number of the latter had very distinctive

decorative foliage patterned in silver. The sweet scent of a well flowered specimen of *C. cyprium* became more pronounced as the room warmed up. *C. persicum* 'Decorum' had particularly attractive silver/green foliage.

With the annual Show in mind we were reminded to check the size of our pot before planting up to ensure it is correct for the class in which we intend to exhibit. Good advice, as I know to my cost what happens when one enters a pot even half a cm too large.

Liam Byrne stressed the importance of giving spring flowering bulbs a light feed at each watering and spoke of the advantages of leaf mould in pots and in the garden. He also showed us the correct depth at which to plant bulbs in pots – he places them halfway down the pot and recommends a gritty compost.

George Sevastopulo advised us on how to choose plants for showing. He also told us about those plants that do not take kindly to being lifted out of the garden and those which don't mind a 'quick lift and put back'. In general plants with tap or fleshy roots resent the disturbance involved while fibrous rooted specimens hardly notice.

Billy Moore spoke on foliage plants, i.e., plants that do not need to be in flower to be put on the show bench. He covered cushion plants, plants with silver foliage, ferns, sempervivums and dwarf conifers. Any plant with decorative foliage suitable for an alpine show can be exhibited in the appropriate class.

We are so fortunate in our Alpine Group to have such a wealth of knowledge in our three speakers among others who answered our questions and then advised us what was wrong with the 'sick' plants we showed to them and told us the sad news of their illnesses!

After a very worthwhile few hours everyone was delighted to be going home with more knowledge and at least one or two plants won in the raffle.

**Tessa Dagge**

## **Alpines in Wales**

### **Dr Keith Lever 25 October**

Those of us who visited Keith Lever's nursery at Aberconwy in spring 2005 were looking forward with keen anticipation to his talk at the Botanic Gardens Glasnevin. This was held in conjunction with the RHSI and we were joined by a large contingent from the Ulster Group of the AGS. Keith and his son Tim were already busy selling plants when I arrived as many of the members had made a special effort to get to Glasnevin early. A well presented selection of excellent alpines was on offer and Aberconwy plants must now figure significantly in Irish rock gardens.

Keith started with an interesting survey of 'alpines' which are native to Wales. Different species colonized their own areas depending on the varying soils, drainage conditions and rainfall. While typical alpines such as *Saxifraga oppositifolia* and *Silene acaulis* grow on the mountains, plants such as *Anagallis tenella* and *Viola tricolor* were confined to the low lying sand dunes. These sand dunes had a particularly rich flora including many orchids and *Epipactis palustris* is to be seen in huge drifts. *Dianthus deltooides* in contrast was rare and he suspected it had been introduced recently.

He then outlined the history of his garden and nursery which had been run previously on a small scale to feed a garden design business.

Keith's father and his son are both keen plantsmen. Apart from some surrounding trees and shrubs the garden has a large raised bed, an area where inverted turfs provide a high degree of moisture retention and an alpine house. More recently he has experimented with a tufa wall where additional moisture is provided by a pipe led from the alpine house gutter. From the nursery stock we were shown some old favourites such as *Primula frondosa*, *Verbascum* "Letitia" and *Linum flavum* "Gemmell's Hybrid". On the moister turf bed he had successfully grown *Primula nana*, *Thalictrum keiusianum* and *Erythronium americanum*. Autumn gentians are of particular interest and *G.* "Shot Silk" flourishes in a filled in pond.

Enjoying similar conditions was the beautiful *Anemonella thalictroides* "Oscar Schoaf". Other shade tolerant genera in which he has a particular interest are *Corydalis* and the fortunei hybrids of *Saxifraga*. Selected forms of both have been named and propagated in the nursery. We were lucky that the hybrid of *S. fortunei* "Pink Mist" was for sale. *Corydalis* "Kingfisher" stands 12-15 ins. high and flowers for twelve months. It is a hybrid of *C. flexuosa* and *C. cashmiriana*. From the sun loving but shy flowering *Dianthus erinaceus* he has selected a more free flowering form and this is now available under the name of "Eileen Lever".

Tim has developed an interest in *Dionysias* and has successfully cultivated *D. aretioides* in the alpine house. Other favourites include *Androsace alpina* and *Thymus membranaceus*. *Sarmienta repens* has proved to be more difficult. Several slides of the sand beds in the nursery area brought this most interesting talk to a conclusion. Following a lively question and answer session the sales table was again the final focus of interest.

**Dermot Kehoe**

### **Alpines through an Artist's Eye**

**Rosemary Cox 9 November**

At this joint lecture with the IGPS Rosemary attempted to demystify the art of botanical painting by outlining her approach to producing some of her delightful and botanically correct watercolours which are always such a feature at AGS and RHS Shows all over the UK.



Rosemary, now such a well known and accomplished artist, was, until she had to take voluntary retirement, a geography teacher with only map drawing to her credit. It was as a result of taking a course in botanical painting at Harlow Carr that she started her painting career.

The theme of her talk was the way in which painting had made her look differently and more intently at plants, noting every detail, the slight tonal differences of colour on petals and leaves, the intricate and beautiful details of sepals and stamens, the delicacy of the anthers, sometimes using a magnifying glass. She pointed out the exquisite fineness of hairs on the stems of *Meconopsis horridula* and the furry buds of *Lilium pumilum*. She demonstrated with her slides how light affects colour and how shadow gives shape and form.

Usually she paints from nature, standing plants in pots on her dining room table but will also photograph a specimen from all angles, measuring height and width as she did before painting the beautiful Juno iris, *I. sibirica* ssp. *elegantissima* with its opulent heavy flower almost too big for the short, slender stem.

Her working method is to draw her subject plant onto layout paper using a 4H pencil, rubbing out and correcting until she is satisfied with the accuracy of her sketch. She shades the reverse all over with a 2B pencil, wiping off all surplus graphite with kitchen paper. Her drawing is then traced onto watercolour paper with a 6H pencil. She starts painting by putting on an all-over wash of the palest colour and continues layer by layer painting fine lines of colour acquiring depth and shape by this method of imitating nature as she demonstrated with a picture of *Cyclamen persicum* where she showed that the red of the petals was not block colour but made up of the finest of fine lines.

She mentioned our natural instinct for sensing when something is in proportion, the so-called 'golden ratio', and the importance of placing the focal point of a painting in the correct position.

This enjoyable lecture opened my eyes both literally and metaphorically and I shall, in future, look more closely at my plants and wonder at the immense complexity of even the smallest alpine.

**Winifred Bligh**

## **22<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Weekend at Termonfeckin**

**17 – 19 November**

The main problem in writing about this year's discussion weekend is how to avoid the overuse of superlatives. In a word it was superb. It was fully booked, the talks could hardly have been better, the atmosphere was warm and friendly and there was lots of fun. There were 72 paying guests including 24 from the Ulster Group, 2 from Scotland, and 1 from England. The Cork Group was also well represented.

After dinner on Friday some ten participants showed slides (limited to a maximum of ten each). This was a diverse and most interesting presentation of beautiful pictures. Liam McCaughey surprised some in the audience by showing the way in which a digital photo could be enhanced on the PC. We were honoured by the presence of those great plantspeople, Henry and Margaret Taylor from Scotland who as well as showing some lovely slides also distributed packets of very interesting seeds to the audience.



Henrik Zetterlund, Harold McBride and Wol Staines at Termonfeckin.

Photo: Billy Moore.

Our three speakers pictured above were on duty on Saturday. **Wol Staines** kicked proceedings off with a very fine talk on alpines at Glen Chantry, the wonderful garden created and maintained by himself and his wife Sue in Essex. The extensive alpine beds are constructed of Westmoreland limestone and tufa. He showed a mouth-watering selection of slides of the more accommodating but nevertheless beautiful alpines. Highlights for me were *Galanthus* 'Primrose Warburg', *Eranthis* 'Guinea Gold', *Paeonia mascula* ssp. *russoi*, *Saxifraga stolonifera*, *Origanum* 'Bristol Cross' and *Iris winogradowii* but the list could go on. Daphnes, Trilliums, Corydalis, Primulas and many bulbous plants abounded with each slide outdoing its predecessor. *Polygala calcarea* 'Lillet' is a stunning plant which I have struggled to grow for years. Wol recommends an occasional application of magnesium to keep it in good health. This talk covered only the alpine dimension of Glen Chantry but on its three acres Wol and Sue grow a huge range of plants including herbaceous perennials, trees, shrubs, grasses, woodland plants and bulbs. There is also a nursery. I wonder if the Committee can be persuaded to organize a trip to Essex one of these years.

Crevice gardening has become very popular in the past year or two and **Harold McBride** who is always at the cutting edge in these matters has constructed a crevice garden on his patch which he told us about. It measures 17 ft. by 1.5 ft. and is home to some 220 plants mostly raised from seed. In the crevices there is about 8 inches of sharp sand overtopping a standard gritty alpine compost. Because of the lean growing conditions and the recent origin of the bed the plants are still very small, and while Harold showed us pictures of his new feature his slides of the plants were taken elsewhere. Some crevice gardens I have seen have struck me as being rather ugly, although alpines like them, but Harold's construction is aesthetically pleasing as well and I look forward to seeing the reality in the near future. His slides were mainly of what he called 'comfort zone plants' although one person's 'comfort zone' might be rather challenging for another. Listing the plants he illustrated would be pointless suffice it to say that the main *genera* covered were Androsaces, Gentians, Violas, Campanulas, Dianthus, Penstemons, Aethionemas and Papavers. Harold's talk was as usual full of cultural tips and was much appreciated by a rapt audience. A couple of packets of seed were provided for everyone after the talk and I should mention here that Harold's generous donation of good plants for the auction provided a significant contribution to the group funds.

After lunch **Henrik Zetterlund** who is responsible for alpines and bulbs at Gothenburg Botanic Gardens in Sweden talked to us about two trips he made to Iran in 2002 and 2003. This was a fascinating talk from a horticultural botanist of great authority. Contrary to what many of us would expect Henrik and his colleagues found that most Iranians they met were very friendly to Westerners. While the talk was mainly focused on bulbs, my

abiding memory of it is the wonderful specimens of *Dionysias* that they found, some growing in granite ( e.g., *D. curviflora*) and others in limestone (e.g., *D. xanthina*) including some new species. The most outstanding specimen for me was a large rich pink cushion of *D. iransharii* – really breathtaking. There is a large collection of this wonderful, but difficult, genus in Gothenburg. We were rather disturbed to learn that there is a view among some botanists that it should not continue as a separate genus but should be included in *Primula*. We also saw some gorgeous bulbous plants in the genera *Fritillaria* (*F. gibbosa* being outstanding), *Tulipa*, *Colchicum*, *Corydalis*, *Iris* and *Muscari*, a genus for which Henrik is developing a passion and one which he feels is underrated. A new celandine, *Ranunculus kochii* was recommended as a good garden plant as was a new large-flowered *Gagea* yet to be named. As well as pictures of plants we were also shown something of the countryside and its people as well as ancient sculptures from Persepolis. Finally we were shown a plant of *Gypsophila aretioides* which was several meters across and must have been in excess of 200 years old.

On Sunday morning we had another talk from Henrik about the bulb houses at Gothenburg. This was quite simply a *tour de force*. The range of bulbs that is grown in Gothenburg is astonishing and the slides produced constant gasps of admiration from the audience. I started to tick plants that appealed to me on the supplied list but quickly gave up when I realized that I was placing a tick against almost everything. Henrik is passionate about bulbs and this comes across in his talks as does the great depth of his knowledge and experience albeit with great modesty. The late great botanist **Per Wendelbo** has been a hugely influential figure in the gardens and an inspiration to his successors and Henrik's admiration for him was very evident. There is little doubt in my mind that Henrik will prove to be just as inspirational to those who follow him. His two talks were truly memorable.

The final talk of the weekend was given by Wol on the flowers of southern Greece in autumn and spring. Again maintaining the very high standard of previous contributions he took us on a tour of the Peloponnese showing plants, habitat and historic monuments. This leisurely trip in which bulbs again dominated was the perfect finish to the formal part of the weekend.

As well as the formal talks there was also plenty of opportunity for relaxation. After dinner on the Saturday evening we had a table quiz organized by **Jamie Chambers** which everyone seemed to enjoy. This was followed by the Plant Auction conducted with his usual aplomb and increasing professionalism by **George Sevastopulo** ably assisted by **Carl Dacus**. **Susan Tindall** brought plants for sale as did Henrik and of course there was our own sale of plants donated by participants. **Peggy Parker** and **Gwenda Wratt** organized the sale of cards, notelets and other items and Peggy produced her traditional crossword which most of us attempted. **Rose Sevastopulo** organized the raffle. Apart from all these activities the

weekend also provides a wonderful opportunity to chat to fellow enthusiasts about plants or whatever. **Valerie Keegan** chaired proceedings quietly and efficiently and our thanks must go to **Joan Carvill** and **Mary Glennon** for organizing everything, to **Anna Nolan** and her team for the plant sale, to **Martin Walsh** for organizing the speakers and to everyone else who helped to make our 22<sup>nd</sup> Weekend such a success. Book early for next year. Names like **George Sevastopulo**, **Janis Ruskans** and **Jim Archibald** are being talked about.

**Billy Moore**



## Fixtures

**Thursday 25 January, 8 pm**, St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan, A.G.M followed by a talk by **Brendan Marnell** on 'Raised Beds & Tufa'.

**Thursday 1 February, 8 pm**, NBG, Glasnevin, **Alan Furness** 'Accommodating the Trickier Alpines in the Garden'.

**Saturday 24 February, 12.30 pm**, Lunch at Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire followed by a talk by **David Lapsley** on 'Beautiful Patagonia'.

**Saturday 24 March, 2.30 pm**, St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan, Local Show and Workshop.

**Thursday, 29 March, 8 pm**, St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan, **Ciaran Burke** 'Alpines - not just for the Rockery'.

**Saturday 31 March, 2.30 pm**, Visit to **Brendan Marnell's** garden at 7, Leopardstown Avenue, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.

**Saturday, 14 April**, Greenmount, Ulster Group Show.

**Thursday 19 April, 8 pm**, NBG, Glasnevin, **Ian Young**, 'Bulb Log Live'.

**Saturday 28 April, 1 pm**, Cabinteely Community School, Cabinteely, Dublin Show.

**Thursday 10 May, 8 pm**, NBG, Glasnevin, **Mary Angela Keane**, 'The Habitats of the Burren'.

**Friday 25 to Sunday 27 May**, Visit to the Burren – see booking form for details.

**Sunday 17 June, 2 - 4 pm**, Visit to **Anna Nolan's** Garden at 12, Shanganagh Vale, Cabinteely, Dublin 18.



## **Officers and Committee**

**Chairman & Show Secretary: Val Keegan**

**Hon. Secretary: Joan Carvill**

**Hon. Treasurer: Mary Glennon**

**Fixtures Secretary: Martin Walsh**

**Committee:**

- Jamie Chambers**
- Arthur Dagge**
- Michael Higgins**
- AnneMarie Keoghan**



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