



*The Newsletter of the  
Irish Garden Plant Society*



*Issue 109      July 2008*



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### Front Cover Illustration:

A dierama seedling from my own garden. Their tendency to cross pollinate so readily and to self-seed so easily has, unfortunately meant that keeping any of the many Irish cultivars of dierama in cultivation is extremely challenging. The first dierama I grew in my garden was from seed received from the IGPS seed exchange. It was named as *D.* ‘Blackbird’, however, and although it certainly bore a very strong resemblance to the description of *D.* ‘Blackbird’, it could never properly be called such. Cultivars must be propagated by vegetative means and plants grown from seed of cultivars cannot bear the cultivar name.

In issue 44, Spring 1992, [“Dierama – What’s all the fuss about?”] Charles Nelson wrote, ‘*This is a famous group of plants, mainly originating in the Slieve Donard Nursery, but despite many claims to the contrary most of the cultivars...are probably extinct.*’

With dieramas, I think it is much the same as Romeo’s rose, ‘that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.’



# Editorial

We are truly fortunate gardeners here in Ireland and, while saying this, I am not referring to the usual benefits of gardening in such a mild climate or to the wonderful range of plants which we can grow but to the fact that we are the beneficiaries of the Office of Public Works. The title of this body might not immediately impress you but it is the OPW which conserves and develops some of the greatest horticultural assets of the country. The Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin and its ancillary garden at Kilmacurragh are certainly the jewels in the crown, so to speak, but there are other treasures also. Altamont Gardens in Co. Carlow is one close to my heart and readers will surely identify others located close to them.

If you have never received a copy of the events organised at the Botanic Gardens you should enquire immediately as they provide an outstanding service to gardeners both from an educational viewpoint and also by providing an exemplar of excellence in horticulture and in the conservation of Ireland's horticultural heritage. This is certainly not a cobweb-covered institution but one which is vibrant, progressing and ever seeking to forward Ireland's horticulture. A recent event, the opening of an organic fruit and vegetable garden is surely a fine example of their not only responding to present interests but of their leading the way for gardening trends and developments. Their sculptural displays continue to attract great attention and coax more people into the gardens where their interest in matters horticultural could not fail to be aroused.

A visit to Kilmacurragh Arboretum recently left me with a tremendous grasp of the treasures which such gardens can hold. Seamus O'Brien showed me an enormous plant of *Rhododendron delavayi* and, impressive as the plant was in itself, to be told that this was the actual very first plant of this species which ever flowered outside China was truly a profound experience for me. The seed was germinated at Glasnevin and the young plants sent to the Acton family at Kilmacurragh to grow on as the soil in Kilmacurragh was more suitable. Read Seamus' article on the Centennial Celebrations at Kilmacurragh in the newsletter for an excellent background but visit the garden for a wonderful experience – and join Seamus or one of the staff for their guided tours.

Fortunately for the I.G.P.S. we have had very active members from the "Botanics" over the years and I certainly hope this continues for each organisation is only as strong and vibrant as its members. My sincerest thanks to the O.P.W. and the people who work within that organisation.



## *Annual General Meeting, Bunclody, Co. Wexford, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008*

### **Report from Secretary, Mary Rowe**

The 27th AGM of the Irish Garden Plant Society was held in Bunclody, Co. Wexford on Saturday May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008. The weekend was organised by Marcella Campbell and the Leinster Regional Group and our thanks go to them. Below is a summary of the Chairman's report.

The Chairperson, Petronilla Martin began her address with a look back on the events of 2007. The most successful promotional event for the Society was undoubtedly Bloom 2007, Phoenix Park, Dublin. Twenty one new members signed up and over one hundred copies of A Heritage of Beauty were sold.

An Irish Cultivar Preservation Programme was launched and a subcommittee was set up, with Brendan Sayers as Chairperson, to gather information on the Irish cultivars grown by members with a view to propagating plants in danger of being lost to cultivation. The response from members was excellent and it is hoped that propagated plants will be available at future Plant Sales.

During the year Plant Sales were held in each of the regions and an excellent circulation of plants took place as a result of the regional groups liaising with each other. Unsold plants from the Northern Sale were sent to Dublin and likewise the remnants of the Leinster Plant Sale went to Munster.

Marcella Campbell has filled the position of Executive Secretary.

Looking forward, the Chairperson expressed the hope that an issue of *Moorea*, the Society's journal, would be produced in the coming year and mentioned that the Summer Luncheon will be held in the garden of Dermot Kehoe on the 16<sup>th</sup> July.

In conclusion she thanked the Regional Committees and also the National Committee who she said work tirelessly for the Society. She thanked Paddy Tobin for his dedication as Editor of the Newsletter and for his encouraging words in the Editorials.

Anne James was elected to the National Committee. The Chairman said that new committee members would be needed at National level in 2009 when some of the present committee will have completed their term of office.

Under “Any Other Business”, Olwyn Lanigan suggested that members should be notified of lectures by email as well as in the Newsletter. Ricky Shannon agreed and

suggested that there should be a space on the subscription form for members to include their email address.

Following the A.G.M. these are the members of the National Committee:

**Chairperson:** Petronilla Martin

**Vice-Chairperson:** Hilary Glenn

**Treasurer:** Ed Bowden

**Secretary:** Mary Rowe

**Northern Committee Representative:** Hilary Glenn

**Munster Committee Representative:** Therese Murphy

**Leinster Committee Representative:** Mary Rowe

**Public Relations Officer:** Therese Murphy

**Committee Members:** Marco Fussy, Janet Butcher, Carsten Ascherfeld, and Anne James.

### **Treasurer’s Report from Ed Bowden**

Though we finish the year with a surplus we have, over the last two years, eaten into some of our savings. It is for this reason that I have proposed an increase in our subscriptions from May 2009 onwards. This has been passed by the National Committee and at our recent A.G.M. The new subscriptions are based on the exchange rates that existed between the Euro and sterling in January 2008. If the present rate remains, the subscriptions for the sterling area will have to be reviewed.

Cost are constantly going up and, unfortunately, our membership over the last few years has fallen, not by a huge amount but by enough to affect our budget. So, I would like to ask people to keep the society in mind if they are fortunate enough to have “won the lotto” or still have some of that S.S.I.A. money. Donations are always accepted! It is also worth mentioning that members might keep the society in mind when they are making a will.

The accounts of the society should always reflect our activities. With this in mind, I will ask anyone who is engaged in any event that involve money (summer lunch, plant sales, lectures etc) to forward basic accounts to reflect their activities.

I am entering my fourth year as treasurer this year and feel I have played my part in contributing to the society. If anyone would like the challenge of keeping the society’s accounts in the black, I would be willing to pass the “books” on to them at the next A.G.M. Letters of interest can be sent via the Botanic Gardens, marked “I.G.P.S.”

**Income and Expenditure Account  
for the twelve months to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008:**

	2008	2007
<b>INCOME</b>	€	€
Subscriptions	12,914	11,551
Plant Sales	3,591	4,511
Seminar		822
Raffle	465	210
AGM (less expenses)		128
Summer Lunch (less expenses)		162
Art Workshop		50
Deposit Interest	19	8
	<b>16,989</b>	<b>17,186</b>
<b>LESS EXPENDITURE</b>		
Newsletter	7,479	7,395
Moorea Publication		4,467
Lectures	4,338	2,616
Executive Secretary	2,750	3,000
Bank Fees	184	224
Postage & Telephone	324	672
Printing & Stationery	936	613
Travel	34	223
Garden Visits	44	72
Audit Fees	363	363
Insurance	1,230	1,285
Subscriptions	206	263
Seed Offer		195
Bloom	263	
Irish Cultivar Project	210	
Sundry Expenses	501	174
	<b>18,862</b>	<b>21,562</b>
<b>EXCESS INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE</b>	1,873	4,376
<b>ACCUMULATED SURPLUS BROUGHT FORWARD</b>	6,272	10,648
<b>ACCUMULATED SURPLUS CARRIED FORWARD</b>	<b>4,399</b>	<b>6,272</b>

## Balance Sheet as at 31st March, 2008

		2008		1007
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>	€	€	€	€
Debtors & Repayments	1,245		1,021	
Cash at Bank and in hand	15,567		6,300	
	<b>16,812</b>		<b>7,321</b>	
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>				
Creditors falling due within one year	<b>1,049</b>		<b>1,049</b>	
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>		<b>15,763</b>		<b>6,272</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		<b>15,763</b>		<b>6,272</b>
<b>ACCUMMULATED RESERVES</b>				
Income an Expenditure Account		4,399		6,272
Funds: A Heritage of Beauty		11,364		
		<b>15,763</b>		<b>6,272</b>

*These unaudited accounts have been compiled by John O' Connell & Co, Chartered Accountants, Castletown, Rathmoylan, Co. Meath in accordance with instructions received from the Irish Garden Plant Society, from the accounting records and information supplied and explanations supplied to them.*

## New Membership Rates applicable from May 2009

<b>Ordinary Membership</b>	€30	£22
<b>Student Membership</b>	€15	£12
<b>Family Membership</b>	€42	£35
<b>Five Year Ordinary Membership</b>	€135	£100
<b>Five Year Family Membership</b>	€180	£140
<b>Group Membership</b>	€90	£66



# *Thomas Acton*

## *A Centennial Celebration at Kilmacurragh*

### *by Seamus O'Brien*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 1908, Thomas Acton died in his 82<sup>nd</sup> year. His will (in the archives at Kilmacurragh) makes interesting reading. He left the Kilmacurragh Estate to his nephew, Captain Charles Annesley Ball-Acton, of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Sir Frederick Moore was also remembered and received the rather large sum of £300. Mrs Moore of Addison Lodge (presumably Sir Frederick's mother) was left £100, while his sister, Helen Moore, received a matching amount. He further stipulated that £3 a year be paid to each of the men in the garden as he had done every year and he desired to be buried in the Deer Park next to a tree of *Pinus ponderosa*. Thomas, it seems, had fallen out with the local rector at Dunganstown and both he and his sister Janet (1824-1906), refused to be buried in the family plot within the grounds of Dunganstown Church. Instead their final resting place was to be beneath a group of Californian redwoods in the old Deer Park a short distance from their beloved arboretum.

Thomas Acton was one of the most remarkable plantsmen to have gardened in Ireland during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Born on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1826, he was the eldest son of Lt. Col. William Acton (1789-1855), a resident, improving landlord who is still fondly remembered in the area for his charitable works during the Great Famine. His wife, Thomas' mother, was Caroline Walker from Tykillen, County Wexford who was said to have had a 'terrific enthusiasm for the beauty of nature and the study of flowers and insects' and she passed this passion onto her children.

The Actons were a well-established Wicklow family. Thomas Acton's great, great, great grandfather, Thomas Acton I (d. 1671), came to Ireland as part of Oliver Cromwell's bloody conquest of Ireland. In September 1649, Cromwell and his army marched along the medieval Dublin-Wexford road (parts of this road still run along the eastern boundary of the estate) and passed the ruins of an old abbey and other old monastic buildings. These formed part of a monastic community founded by Saint Mochorog, a Briton of royal birth, who established a hermitage at Kilmacurragh in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century (his feast day is December 23<sup>rd</sup>). The abbey survived until the dissolution of Irish monasteries by Henry VIII in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and the monastery orchard (on the site of the present walled garden) was still extant in 1708 and appears on an estate map dating from that time. In lieu of wages Thomas Acton I was granted a substantial parcel of land in the area, including the ruins of Saint



Mochorog's Abbey. The foundations of the old abbey still exist and lie beneath the present Chinese garden east of the Pond Vista.

His son, Thomas Acton II (1655-1750), had the old abbey buildings torn down in 1697 and with the salvaged stone he built a fine, perfectly proportioned Queen Anne style house to the design of the noted architect Sir William Robinson (1643-1712). The five bay mansion was one of the first unfortified houses in County Wicklow and is one of the few remaining (albeit in a ruinous state) early panelled houses in Ireland. Comprising five reception rooms and eight bedrooms the house was perched on a hill facing east making it a chilly place to be in winter.

Kilmacurragh House was immediately surrounded by a formal Dutch style landscape park following the fashions of the period and elements of this, such as the remains of canals, great avenues and sweeping vistas, survive in the present garden. Thomas Acton II was also responsible for the Deer Park, an area of 40 acres completely surrounded by a 6 feet deep Ha-Ha, and for building the walled garden with its orangery (the latter still existed till the early 20<sup>th</sup> century). The old paddock walls (built in 1729) that now surround the visitor carpark are attributed to him.

Their eldest son, William Acton (1711-1779) married Jane Parsons of Birr Castle in 1736 and during their tenure the estate was further embellished. To celebrate their wedding a two-mile long beech avenue was planted in 1736 and fragments of this survive today. In 1750 his wife received a premium of £10 from the Royal Dublin Society for the planting of 'foreign trees' and in the following decades trees were planted within the demesne in tens of thousands. The old stable yard, first built in 1703, was substantially altered in 1762 to create the present courtyard with its fine coach houses.

William and Jane Acton had six children and their second son, Thomas Acton III (1742-1817) inherited the estate in 1779. He changed the name of the estate from Kilmacurra to West Aston in 1750 and this name remained in use for over a century. His wife Sidney earned premiums from the Dublin Society for growing small plantations and with this money she bought rare and exotic trees.

Her eldest son was Lt. Col. William Acton (1789-1855) and he was the father of Thomas Acton IV. As previously mentioned, William Acton was a kind landlord and he organised several famine projects on the estate to stave off starvation, not only of local people, but also of labourers from County Mayo. The restoration of the Ha-Ha around the Deer Park and by the front lawns and the building of two projecting and overlapping single-storey wings to the house were carried out in 1848 as part of this relief effort. In 1838 he levelled an area to the south of the main lawn and during this work a huge quantity of bones was unearthed. The tennis court (still extant) lies on the old monastery graveyard. The unearthed bones were placed beneath a stone cairn near the fishpond below the house.

William Acton planted many new exotic trees on the estate and during the 1820s he planted Kilmacurragh's famous yew walk (known locally as the Monk's Walk) along an old road that served as a pilgrim's route from the abbey at Kilmacurragh to nearby Glendalough. His choice of tree must have been inspired by one still extant yew tree estimated to be at least half a millennium old. This route, by the way, is perfectly aligned with the spring and autumn equinox and may have druidic origins and could indicate the existence of a pre-Christian settlement on the site.

Many of the exotic trees planted by William Acton were supplied by Edward Hodgins, who founded his famous nursery in nearby Dunganstown in 1780. A number of trees supplied to the estate by this nursery between 1820 and 1840 still exist including the Madeiran holly, *Ilex perado*, a weeping cedar of Goa, *Cupressus lusitanica* 'Glauca Pendula', the unaccountably rare olive relative *Picconia excelsa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* 'Monstrosa'. The latter is mentioned by Charles Nelson in *A Heritage of Beauty* (page 91) as the cockscomb ash, though he makes no mention of a cultivar name. Nothing is known about the origin of *Fraxinus excelsior* 'Monstrosa'. The cultivar was not named until 1872, though the Kilmacurragh tree was 1 foot tall in 1840 and was 10 feet 9 inches tall in 1877. It is now a substantial tree and grows on the Double Border lawn near the walled garden. Is this an Irish cultivar? We will probably never know. When Thomas Acton inherited the Kilmacurragh Estate in 1854 the house and gardens were already over 150 years old. Some time between then and the 1870s he changed the estate's name back to Kilmacurragh. Alas, his Irish must not have been so good. Up to 1750 the anglicised spelling was Kilmacurra, deriving from *Cill Mochurra* meaning the church or cell of Saint Mochorog. Thomas Acton's new Kilmacurragh, meaning 'the church of the plain', is quite incorrect, but it is too late to turn back now since two cultivars carry this spelling.

By 1854 the landscape park at Kilmacurragh, with its quaint Dutch ponds, canals, avenue and vistas must have been very mature, though by that period it was also seen as old fashioned and quite colourless. Thomas and his sister Janet swept away many 18<sup>th</sup> century features while incorporating others into a new, much enlarged garden. One of Kilmacurragh's best-loved features, the Broad Walk to the rear of the house was laid out at this time. Typically Victorian, Broad Walks survive in several Irish gardens and examples are found at Glanleam, Fernhill and Kilmacurragh. All are impressively wide walks lined with equally impressive trees and shrubs. Kilmacurragh's Broad Walk was planted with alternating rows of Irish yew, *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata', the crimson flowered *Rhododendron* 'Altaclerense' and the lower-growing *Rhododendron* 'Cunningham's White'. The rhododendrons were layered by Janet Acton herself and the walk was planted in the early 1870s. Today this walk is one of the garden's most magical features, especially in April when the fallen blossoms of towering rhododendrons transform the walk below into a scarlet carpet underfoot. Thomas and Janet were their own gardeners and while their great, great, great grandfather employed skilled Dutch gardeners to lay out the original park, the new

garden at Kilmacurragh was their vision and that of Dr David Moore, curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin.

Moore began advising the Actons in the early 1850s and from then on a remarkable collection of mostly wild origin plants was assembled at Kilmacurragh. Through Moore the Himalayan collections of Sir Joseph Hooker (1849) came here and formed the basis of what was to become Europe's most complete collection of rhododendrons from Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal. The gardens became an unofficial annex of Glasnevin, growing plants that could not cope with the cold climate and the shallow, heavily alkaline conditions of that Dublin garden. In March 1867 Moore could write to Hooker that he saw eleven kinds of his (Hooker's) rhododendrons growing happily at Kilmacurragh including the blood red *R. thompsonii*, *R. edgeworthii*, *R. wallichii*, *R. barbatum* and the magnificent *R. falconeri* which is in flower here as I write.

Another source of plants was Messrs. Veitch of Chelsea. Over their near 200 year history, this famous nursery sent twenty-two plant hunters all over the globe. The first of these, William Lobb, a Cornish man, travelled to South America during the 1840s, paying particular emphasis on the flora of central and southern Chile and in the 1850s he travelled to California. Acton was keen to take advantage of his garden's almost frost-free climate and was among the first to grow Lobb's new introductions. Many of these survive including magnificent specimens of the monkey puzzle *Araucaria araucana*, *Crinodendron hookerianum*, *Drimys winteri* var. *chilensis*, *Podocarpus nubigenus*, *Luma apiculata*, the rare Prince Albert yew, *Saxegothaea conspicua*, the Patagonian cypress, *Fitzroya cupressoides* and the Chilean fire bush, *Embothrium coccineum*. The garden soon became famous for these trees and in his famous work, *The English Flower Garden*, William Robinson mentions several of Thomas Acton's plants including the Chilean fire bush of which he stated '*It thrives near the coast in Southern Ireland and in Wicklow near Mr. Acton's, but soon perishes in less favoured places.*'

On the Pond Vista, that great glade between the old ballroom and the pond, a mammoth Californian redwood, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, dominates the area and this tree was raised from Lobb's Californian collections in the Yosemite Valley. Another of Veitch's plant hunters was Richard Pearce and one of his collections, the rather slow-growing *Eucryphia glutinosa*, dating from 1859, still grows to the rear of Kilmacurragh House.

Tom Acton had a rule of thumb to plant three of every important tree or shrub. One was planted where visiting plantsmen told him it would thrive, another where he thought it would survive and the last where it would unquestionably not survive. Examples of the latter may be seen on the brow of Westaston Hill that overlooks the house and estate. To this day, a line of exotics, like Himalayan rhododendrons, mighty North American conifers and Chilean trees, all planted by Tom Acton's gardeners, still grow on this wind swept site. Most are in ragged order and battered because of their exposed positions – except for two fine monkey puzzles. This tree inhabits the high

Andes of Chile where it is exposed to the same raging winds. In this case, a tree planted in a situation where he was told it would positively not grow, did survive, indeed it thrived.

Tom Acton ran Kilmacurragh like a private botanic garden and kept detailed records of his experiments. He trialed many, many plants for hardiness and the results of his successes and failures are noted in his trial notes. He certainly understood the needs of his plants, on one of his surviving hand-written lists dating from July 1893 he wrote of *Protea cynaroides*, “I think (it) may do well under (a) wall, keep him dry.” Following this tip the king protea has recently been planted at Kilmacurragh in a relatively dry spot near the walled garden. During his time at Kilmacurragh several trees were cultivated in the open air for the very first time in the British Isles and Ireland, most notably *Ceratonia siliqua*, the magnificent *Laureliopsis philippiana* from Chile and *Nothofagus moorei*, one of the most beautiful of the southern beeches. Tom Acton got his plant of the latter from Kew from where it had been introduced from its native eastern Australia in 1892. Augustine Henry noted in *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* that it was 18 feet high in 1906. This rare southern beech was named for David Moore’s brother, Charles who, following an early career at the Trinity College Botanic Garden, became Director of Sydney Botanic Gardens. He discovered the tree in New South Wales and, no doubt, Sir Frederick Moore was pleased to see it established at Kilmacurragh. Alas, it no longer grows here, though there are fine trees in nearby Mount Usher.

Two cultivars were selected at Kilmacurragh while Thomas and Janet gardened here. The best-known of these, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* ‘Kilmacurragh Variety’, is a slim, fastigate tree with a habit resembling the Italian cypress. An enormous specimen (perhaps the original) grows along the old estate entrance avenue in a double-sided avenue of monkey puzzles. The second, a cockscomb Japanese cedar, *Cryptomeria japonica* ‘Kilmacurragh’ forms a domed-shaped bush with fasciated juvenile foliage. The original tree grows in the Victorian Double Borders and both Kilmacurragh cultivars originated before 1900.

Thomas and Janet Acton were passionate gardeners and saw many exotic plants in their natural habitats, particularly those from North America. At a time when the Irish aristocracy and gentry took ‘Grand Tours’ to study art and architecture, the Actons departed from the norm and spent their time looking at trees and shrubs in their native haunts. By the 1860s, Tom and Janet had travelled the world. The highlight of their tour was when they trekked on pony back through the Yosemite Valley in California where they had the opportunity to study trees like the giant redwoods and the western yellow pine, *Pinus ponderosa*. Decades later their final resting place was beneath a western yellow pine in Kilmacurragh’s 18<sup>th</sup> century Deer Park.

While William Lobb was Veitch’s first collector, their last was E. H. Wilson and Thomas Acton purchased several of his discoveries from Veitch’s Coombe Wood

nursery. Wilson's plants raised from his expeditions for the Arnold Arboretum were sent later from the nursery at Glasnevin. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew became another major supplier. On an old list of rhododendrons, dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 1898 (in Thomas Acton's handwriting), the following are listed as having come from Kew, *Rhododendron decorum*, *R. arboreum* ssp. *delavayi* and *Rhododendron rex* ssp. *fictolacteum*, (mentioned by William Robinson in *The English Flower Garden* as the allied *R. lacteum*). These were raised in 1884 by Maurice de Vilmorin in his nursery near Paris, from seeds collected on the Cangshan Range in Yunnan province in western China by the French missionary and plant collector, Père Jean Marie Delavay. Maurice de Vilmorin had plants sent to Kew and the duplicates were forwarded to Thomas Acton. In 1904 the first recorded flowering of *R. arboreum* ssp. *delavayi* occurred at Kilmacurragh and that old Delavay plant continues to thrive here and has recently been propagated.

Following his father's death in June 1879, Sir Frederick Moore took up the role of garden advisor at Kilmacurragh. He was generous with his time and plants and as the late Charles Acton was to relate (in volume 9 of *Moorea*), 'when his father or he himself at Glasnevin received seeds or plants of calcifuge species from botanical explorers, they took them to Kilmacurragh...' Together Thomas Acton and Frederick Moore created the finest private plant collection on the island of Ireland. The gardens became a place of pilgrimage for visiting plantsmen. Successive curators of Kew were taken to visit Kilmacurragh by Sir Frederick Moore (or Freddie as Tom Acton called him). The first, George Nicholson, curator between 1886 and 1901, was particularly interested in the old orangery and the grapefruit varieties grown there. These apparently were difficult to come by and one of his letters to Tom Acton concerning these rare varieties survives in our archives. William Watson, curator from 1901 to 1922, visited Kilmacurragh in June 1905 and stated that Tom Acton's garden was 'the most interesting in Ireland'. There was very little evidence of keep but there was much judgement in planting. William Jackson Bean (Assistant curator from 1900, Curator from 1922 to 1929) also knew Kilmacurragh very well and was equally impressed with the quality and vigour of the gardens rare southern hemisphere conifers and flowering trees.

In 1891 Acton and Moore sent exhibits of conifer specimens from Kilmacurragh to the Royal Horticultural Society's International Conifer Conference when Thomas Acton was awarded the Sir Joseph Banks Medal for the largest collection of conifers held in private hands. The Bank's medal was won again 40 years later by specimens submitted from Kilmacurragh by Sir Frederick Moore and Charles Acton (Tom's grand nephew). *Rhododendron* 'Thomas Acton' was raised at Glasnevin during the 1880s by crossing white forms of *R. arboreum* x *R. campanulatum*. It flowered in April and was said to have leaves intermediate between the parents and bore white flowers, spotted crimson. Hybrids and cultivars were rare in the Kilmacurragh rhododendron collection however and according to Charles Acton the family tended to look down on the Mount Usher

collection, which contained many cultivars, whereas the Kilmacurragh collection was based on species acquired through Kew and Glasnevin.

The Moores were not the only staff members from Glasnevin to advise the Acton family. William Parnell was appointed outdoor foreman at Glasnevin in 1868 and his name appears from time to time in the Acton family diaries. Charles Frederick Ball also knew the garden well and left published accounts.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1891, the same diaries mention the visits of Robinson and Burbidge – William Robinson and Frederick Burbidge. William Robinson was a frequent visitor, he loved the wildness and informality of Tom Acton's garden and it was through visiting wild Irish gardens like Kilmacurragh that he gleaned ideas for his revolutionary publication *The English Flower Garden* (published several times between 1883 and 1934). His writings went on to popularise natural gardening the world over and the style, of course, became known as Robinsonian gardening. Kilmacurragh is often described as a Robinsonian garden, though Thomas Acton was practising this wild, romantic style long before Robinson ever set foot in County Wicklow.

The second visitor, Frederick William Burbidge, was another of the Veitch plant hunters and from the hot steamy jungles of Borneo he introduced the enormous insectivorous pitcher plant, *Nepenthes rajah*. Burbidge later became Curator of the Trinity College Botanic Gardens in Ballsbridge and contributed articles on Irish gardens to various publications. In 1893 he penned a lengthy piece on Kilmacurragh and had it published in the *Gardeners' Chronicle*. Burbidge wrote well, almost poetically, and his article on Kilmacurragh makes good reading even today. Like Robinson he delighted in the wild beauty of Thomas Acton's garden and rebelled against the strict, formal styles of the Victorian period and the wasteful excesses of annual bedding:

“After seeing and enjoying many gardens in many lands, there is one delightful old pleasure – Kilmacurragh, in County Wicklow – that ever and anon rises up before me as being an ideal garden in many ways... It is an old garden to begin with, and its site is a fertile and sheltered vale not far from the sea... On three sides of the square-built grey mansion the lawns of greenest grass stretch away under the trees, and you get on fine clear days just a distant peep at the sea as it rolls in on the Wicklow shore.

The Rhododendrons would alone make the reputation of any one good garden, and they include one of the most complete series of the Sikkim and Bhutan (sic.) and Nepalese species that is known... Look where one may in this delightful paradise, one meets with rare and beautiful plants at every turn, every nook and corner is sacred to some little gem, and like all good gardens it is a changing kaleidoscope, never quite alike on any two days of the year. In March I have seen the snowdrop here 16 inches high, with grass-like Narcissus leaves, but even earlier there had been a glowing carpet of Crocus on the grassy

lawn before the drawing-room windows, and later on again there was a blaze of tulips and of daffodils...

After seeing a broad a beautiful old garden and domain of this kind, one feels an exaltation of the mind, and a consciousness of it being a something more pleasant and satisfying than a jam tart-like garden of the carpet beds, or crowded flower show... To thus see the cool lush grass, and the flowers, and the noble trees against the sky, and to see the great herons wheeling slowly overhead laden with fish dinners for their nestlings, and to catch just one last glance at the dappled fawns and their young ones in the bracken, is to feel that Pan is not yet dead, and to be assured in one's heart that there is something Arcadian left to us in the world after all."

Thomas Acton died on August 25<sup>th</sup> 1908 following almost six decades of managing the family estate and having created one of Ireland's most famous gardens. His 32 year-old nephew, Captain Charles Annesley Acton, then succeeded to Kilmacurragh. Born in Peshwar, India in 1876, he was educated following family tradition at Rugby and the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. Many of the Acton's led military careers and Charles followed this route. In 1896 he joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and served with the regiment in Malta, Crete, Hong Kong, India and Burma. In 1900 he was involved in the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in Beijing.

Following his uncle's death Charles resigned his commission and settled for a gentleman's life on the family estate. Back in Wicklow he became Justice of the Peace and High Sherriff for Wicklow, positions held by several of his ancestors. He continued to develop the estate and arboretum and his closest friends included Augustine Henry and Sir Frederick Moore. Moore continued to advise at Kilmacurragh and supplied many newly introduced plants from the nursery at Glasnevin.

Alas, those happy days were short lived. With the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, Charles and many of the gardeners at Kilmacurragh headed for the battlefields on the French Front. On September 25<sup>th</sup> 1915, Charles Acton, while trying to assist a fellow soldier, was mortally wounded by an explosion at Loos. He was only 39. Kilmacurragh then passed to his only surviving brother, Major Reginald Thomas Ball-Acton, father of the late Charles Acton (music critic for the *Irish Times*). On May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1916, just eight months after his brother's death at Loos, Reginald was killed in action in Ypres. Few of the gardeners came home from the war. Thus, in eight years Kilmacurragh had three consecutive owners inflicting death duties amounting to 120% of the value of the estate. This placed enormous financial pressures on the family and, after two centuries, the Actons left Kilmacurragh House.

The Great War had a devastating effect on the arboretum. Before the war eleven men and two boys maintained the grounds; following the death of Charles and Reginald, the gardens were maintained single-handedly by the old Head Gardener. Writing in 1929, Lady Moore was saddened by the flight of the Actons from Kilmacurragh and the slow

demise of the arboretum, ‘the toll of the Great War, followed by the unhappy period from 1919 to 1923, closed many a garden as well as demesne gates... Few plants have been added to the collection since 1914. The old ones are cared for by the same old man for 40 years. When one blooms he sends a post card – *Let yez come soon, rosydandry falconyera or lowther is an admiration*. The summons is obeyed and his verdict proved true’.

Both *Rhododendron falconeri* and *Rhododendron Loderi* Group are in bloom here as I write, a reminder of a dedicated predecessor who carried the arboretum through its most difficult years. There are other reminders of this sad period at Kilmacurragh. In the walled garden a line of mature maidenhair trees, *Ginkgo biloba*, grows, planted just over a metre apart. Tradition has it that this was a nursery bed and since the garden staff believed that the war would last only a few weeks, the young trees were left in-situ with the belief that they would be placed in their permanent positions when staff returned that autumn. No one came home from those bloody battlefields and the maidenhair trees still grow in their nursery positions.

Kilmacurragh’s tragic history is well known and the fallen crimson blossoms of the ancient rhododendrons on the Broad Walk have been said by one visitor to be as symbolic as the Flanders poppies.

For over two centuries a fine Spanish chestnut dominated the northern edge of the lawn in front of Kilmacurragh House. Local lore had it that when it fell the last member of the Acton family would die. That same tree was said to have been quite dead following the war and it appears as a decaying corpse in a photograph from the early 1930s.

After 300 years of family ownership, Charles Acton sold the house and demesne in 1944. His mother, with the aid of Sir Frederick Moore, made several attempts to have Kilmacurragh purchased as a satellite garden of Glasnevin. They were almost successful on several occasions until a recession, the emergency or a change of government dashed their plans. Charles was delighted therefore when in 1996 Kilmacurragh became a sister garden to Glasnevin and thus became part of the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland. No doubt his grand-uncle Thomas would be delighted to know that his garden is now being replanted by Glasnevin and is safely in State care with the Office of Public Works. On June 9<sup>th</sup>, the current family heir, Peter Acton planted a rare Italian oak, *Quercus dalechampii* in the arboretum at Kilmacurragh as part of the centennial celebrations. His wife, Sarah, very kindly planted a fine young Wollemi Pine.

**On Sunday August 25<sup>th</sup> at 2.30pm a guided walk outlining Thomas Acton’s life’s work in planting the arboretum will be led by Seamus O’Brien and Myles Reid. For further details of events at Kilmacurragh see [www.botanicgardens.ie](http://www.botanicgardens.ie)**





## *After the Deluge*

by *Rae McIntyre*

When I wrote for the April *Newsletter* I was pleased that there was a sheugh that had ambitions to become a stream at the bottom of the garden. That just hasn't happened but before I go on to relate developments, or rather the lack of them, let me tell you about a letter I had from Joe Kennedy (of primrose-breeding fame) of Ballycastle, written at the end of April. Joe is caretaker of the Ballypatrick Weather Station (up on the mountain between Ballycastle and Cushendall) for the Met. Office and he has the rainfall figures for recent winters. The figures for the months of January, February and March were as follows: 2005: 276.1mm; 2006: 277.4mm; 2007: 388.5mm; 2008: 500.3mm. He wrote after this last, 'No wonder that your sheugh overfloweth!' No wonder indeed. He had also given me the figures for the months of October, November and December. In 2004 the total was 443.2mm; 2005 had 430.7mm; 2006 had 491.3mm but in 2007, before the deluge, the total rainfall for the 3 months was 275.5mm.

It will be interesting to see what they are for May and June. As I write this on June 10 we've had seven weeks of really dry weather and I have actually had to use the hose. Doing so is not a common occurrence round here and I've been smug when I've heard of people in other parts of the province having to water. I am anything but smug about conditions in the top stackyard bed. This is the bed originally intended for plants needing sharply drained conditions – the only place in the whole garden where I kept improving the drainage over the years so that I could grow grey-leaved, sun-loving plants. After the bed lay under water for two months I've said goodbye to that idea. *Allium* 'Globemaster', the most expensive cultivar of the family, that had been starting to increase, has died and there is only a single specimen of *Allium giganteum*. I thought *Lavandula stoechas* might have survived but the top of it just lifted off like a cap. There's not the faintest hint of *Agapanthus* 'Headbourne Hybrids'. One cistus has survived but looks as if it's only there under sufferance. Happily, the two roses in the bed are doing better than ever. One thing that I've noticed in gardening is that things are never completely awful; something always performs especially well just to cheer one. The rugosa rose 'Blanche Double de Coubert' is well laden with lovely white blooms that should last for most of the summer. The other is the 'Scottish Rose', *Rosa spinosissima*, which came from my friend Nora's garden in Edinburgh, appropriately enough. It bears its myriad small pinkish-white blooms on a very spiny bush for three weeks, at the very most, but I enjoy them while they last. Later they're followed by small, almost black hips.

This bed has to have a makeover. I've watched so many television gardening makeovers on the gardening channel on Sky that the word immediately invokes an image of decking, gravel and spotty planting of things from the nearest garden centre. No thanks! The makeover has already been started by removing the few surviving herbaceous plants and planting them in a bed that has much better drainage; I don't know why I didn't realise this years ago. When conditions are right the whole bed is going to be sprayed with glyphosate because it is absolutely riddled with scutch/couch grass. Every year I do a major weeding session in it and always think I have removed this pernicious weed but it always returns. Last September Andy and I were convinced we had beaten it and he wheeled several barrowloads of good topsoil from a nearby building site to it (I wasn't encouraging him to steal it – the building site belonged to us at the time). Not only did the scutch/couch grow more enthusiastically than ever but we had imported a lot of the loathsome bindweed as well. Spraying weeds round here is not easy because there is ALWAYS a wind blowing and it's amazing how far spray can drift, especially on to well-loved plants.

Instead of battling against nature I am going to use plants that enjoy damp conditions. These are not going to be soggy-soil-loving leafy big things like filipendulas, rodgersias and darmeras because I'm tired of these. Instead, I have consulted Beth Chatto's book *The Damp Garden* (J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd. 1982) one of my top five favourite gardening books, to find descriptions of plants that have less imposing foliage but are more floriferous and that will harmonise with the roses.

Instead of alliums and *Gladiolus byzantinus* (another total failure in the wet) I am going to plant camassias and leucojums because these already do well in other places in the garden. Using different varieties such as *Camassia cusickii*, *Camassia esculenta* and *Camassia leichtlinii* it is possible to have tall racemes of blue or creamy white flowers over a six-week period.

*Leucojum aestivum* 'Gravetye Giant' (Summer Snowflake) revels in damp, even wet, soil and has heads of nodding white bell-shaped flowers for weeks on end. The hybrids of *Narcissus cyclamineus* thrive here but I have so many daffodils all over the garden that I don't think it could take any more. Still ... I might succumb and plant a few bulbs of *N.* 'Lemon Silk' which I saw in the Daffodil Garden in Coleraine.

The following herbaceous plants have all been tried and tested here in damp conditions: *Aquilegia*, *Aster*, *Astrantia*, *Cardamine*, *Centaurea montana*, *Chelone*, *Dicentra*, *Erigeron*, *Geranium endressii* (will grow anywhere), *Heuchera americana*, *Hosta*, *Iris innominata*, *Iris sibirica*, *Lysimachia clethroides*, *Phlox paniculata*, *Polemonium caeruleum*, *Primula secundiflora* and *Veronica teucrium* 'Crater Lake Blue'.

What about the sheugh at the bottom of the garden? In the April issue I was making great plans for it. On April 29<sup>th</sup> Davy and I went to Dublin to a concert in the National Concert Hall. We travelled by train so between Coleraine and Belfast and then between Belfast and Dublin I viewed every sheugh from one side of the train. Let me tell you that Ireland seems to be full of them. On the return journey, the next day, I studied them from the other side and made yet more plans. I was still on a high from the glorious music the previous night, which was resonating through my head, and the primroses growing abundantly beside the tracks were magical so I got a bit carried away.

Back in Blackhill I came down to earth with a bump. The border, where the leylandii hedge had been was just a weedy, rooty stretch of soil and the sheugh still needed a lot done to it. During May's near-drought it dried up completely and is now just an ugly trench of cracked clay soil. Fortunately it can't be seen from the upstairs windows of the house as I thought when the trees were still leafless. One of the effects of the excessively wet winter is a tremendous surge in growth of all the trees and shrubs in the garden. Not only have their dimensions increased but their foliage seems to have doubled.

Another effect, and I don't quite know why it should be, is a perceptible increase in the bird population of the garden; this is despite six semi-feral cats living malodorously in the defunct farm buildings. I feed the cats but I don't feed the birds. Still there are birds' nests everywhere and I could spend a lot of time watching a wren going in and out of her nest in the bay tree just outside the kitchen window.

### *Early Irish Gardens by Brian Kingston*

*Early Irish Gardens* was researched and produced to highlight and promote an awareness of the abundance of early pleasure gardens that once existed on the island of Ireland in the 1500s and 1600s, a subject area that has been neglected in the Irish heritage record. This book is the first comprehensive study of sites that once existed (some still do) in Ireland and the first study of its kind to have plotted a distribution of these gardens and to quantify the numbers that once existed.

The book is a valuable research tool for anybody wishing to explore the subject in detail. It has a comprehensive bibliography with footnotes included. The book details over 60 known garden sites from that period. There are some period maps and drawings included as well as photographs of some of the remaining gardens from that period. Books can be ordered directly from the author by e-mail: contact Brian Kingston <[irishgardenresearcher@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:irishgardenresearcher@yahoo.co.uk)>. Price, including postage and packaging, is 10 euro/10 pound sterling. Please note that there is only a limited number of copies available."



## *A Further Note on Primula*

*by Joe Kennedy*

In the April 2008 Newsletter, Robert S. Myerscough had enquired about the *Primula* 'Kinlough Beauty'. This interested me as I had once a virtually complete collection of all the old named and unnamed primroses. I had made a point of collecting them from all around the country, insisting that they had to be ancient and of Irish origin.

This was forty years ago. I found that, eventually, they lost their vigour and became hard to keep going. I decided to keep the genes going by breeding from them. I have done this for thirty years now, raising thousands each year. I select the best and dump the rest and confine it to five or six lines.

I found that 'Kinlough Beauty' and 'Lady Greer' were probably siblings and some others were closely related. I can still spot the influence of 'Kinlough Beauty' and 'Lady Greer' after all this time.

The Garryards were different; 'Guinevere' was only fertile as a pollen parent. The dark leaved types have greatly improved over the years. I would love Mrs. Johnson, Cecil Monson, Eda Hume and others of that era to see what had arisen from their plants; Jack-in-the-Greens, Hose-in-hose, Jackanapes and a variety of small and interesting types. Dr. Molly Sanderson knew Cecil Monson and she encouraged me in my breeding while she was around.

I am losing my own vigour now and recently Pat Fitzgerald, who has a most impressive set-up in Co. Kilkenny, has been field trialling some of mine. So they may find their way back in to Irish gardens. They are not meant to be bedding plants but little jewels to be tucked away here and there and treasured.

*Joe Kennedy, Ballycastle, Co. Antrim*

*Note: Joe's enthusiasm for primula and his success in breeding excellent plants has been admired for many years. Hopefully, we will all be able to enjoy his 'little jewels' in the near future when Pat Fitzgerald has worked his propagation magic on them. Ed.*



## *“And What Bird Is That?”*

*by Anne Cronin*

In the April Newsletter Therese Murphy made an eloquent plea for the sharing of knowledge and expertise among gardeners at all levels.

At the AGM in Wexford I was at the receiving end of some much appreciated, freely given and very practical knowledge from fellow IGPS members who were present. I was about to go away from Ireland and leave my garden virtually unattended for eight long weeks. Because of this I had resisted the temptation to buy any plants during the AGM weekend.

However, in Altamont on the Sunday afternoon, I had a moment of weakness (and who wouldn't amongst the treasures on offer in the garden-centre). After all, there is a precedent for grand temptation in a garden setting! I had long since lusted after a yellow Magnolia and had searched Cork garden-centres without success for *Magnolia* 'Gold Star'. Here in front of me were not just one but several healthy, well-shaped specimens of *Magnolia brooklynensis* 'Yellow Bird'. I fought temptation for all of three minutes as I realised I was about to commit the grave horticultural sin of "arboricide" if I planted a young and vulnerable tree and then, forty eight hours later, left it to fend for itself for two months without watering. I actually walked away several times in that three minutes but the delicate, pale yellow petals seemed to develop a slightly cupped and beckoning curve that drew me back each time. I asked the kind friends who were chauffeuring me that weekend if there would be room in their car for the little tree. Alas, there was to be no deliverance from temptation this time. They assured me that their capacious hatch-back could cope.

I wrote the cheque and sat on a wall with my new acquisition by my side as I waited for my friends. When some other IGPS members came along and paused to admire it, I told them of my problem and how badly timed my purchase was. There came a generous flow of sound and practical advice which was all based on hands-on experience. Apparently I wasn't the only one who made a habit of regular garden desertion. This advice came from gardeners from places as far apart as Killorglin, Cork and Dublin. The consensus was that planting as soon as possible on the morrow was advisable. The planting-hole was to be well "puddled" with a bucket or two of water, the tree planted and covered over with soil. No departure from regular planting procedure so far! Next instruction was to cover the soil around the tree to a diameter of

at least a metre and a half with several layers of dampened newspaper. Finally a mulch of grass clippings was to be applied on top of the newspaper to a depth of four inches.

Next day, Monday, we did all these things, using a whole week's copies of the *Irish Examiner* and two bags of grass from the lawns' last-minute mowing. On Tuesday I was away at the crack of dawn on a journey that took me over two thousand miles to a somewhat barren island in the middle of the Aegean, where I struggle to grow a few *Aeonium arboreum* and the odd Pelargonium.

One night some weeks later I said, more to myself than anyone else, "I wonder how 'Yellow Bird' is doing at home?" Out of the warm, velvety darkness of the Cycladic night came the sleepy query from the very man who had done the planting "and what bird is that?"



Sometimes I think fondly of those young roots revelling in the damp soil of Inniscarra on the banks of the Lee. Maybe they are having an early morning look at the penultimate page of the *Examiner* as they indulge in that time-honoured practice of seeing "Is there anyone dead that we know?" They might also take a quick glance at the "sca" (scandal to non-Corkonians) before they settle down for the night under their snug eiderdown of grass clippings. Soon I shall be able to check in person.

*A line drawing of Magnolia brooklynensis 'Yellow Bird' by Anne Cronin*



## *Dix-Medal Awarded to Mr Brian Duncan*

*Press Release from the Royal General Bulbgrowers' Association,  
April 2008*



On the second day of the World Daffodil Europe Tour 2008, the chairman of the Royal General Bulbgrowers' Association (KAVB), Mr. Langeslag, presented Mr. Brian S. Duncan of Northern Ireland the Dix-Medal to honour him for his outstanding hybridisation work in daffodils. Mr. Duncan is not only a keen hybridiser but is also very active in horticultural societies. At present he is the chairman of the Daffodil and Tulip Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and was involved in the founding of the Northern Ireland Daffodil Group. He is an active provider of information on daffodils for the American database Daffseek.

About 500 cultivars are raised by Mr. Duncan and they include the well known cultivars: 'High Society', 'Elizabeth Ann', 'Monza', 'Reggae', 'Sportsman', 'Smokey Bear', 'Fragrant Rose', 'Lilac Charm', 'Border Beauty' and 'Copper Queen'. They are all included in The International Daffodil Register and Classified List 2008. Mr. Duncan's quest is not to find just another beautiful show bench daffodil, but to create a good daffodil for the forcing and growing industry on one hand and a nice performer at shows on the other hand. The intrinsic qualities of cultivars are of eminent importance for a better culture with less phytological disorders. Mr. Duncan is also very active in spreading his ideas in this field and is sharing his knowledge. His open and friendly attitude together with an enormous enthusiasm for daffodils makes him a welcome visitor to everybody.

The J.F.Ch. Dix-medal can be awarded to someone who has done outstanding work in the field of hybridisation of bulbous crops. The medal is named after Mr. John F.Ch. Dix, one of the first pioneers in tulip hybridisation.

*Note: Congratulation to Brian on his receipt of this award. It is a great to see someone producing today's Irish cultivars being so honoured. On behalf of the IGPS I would like to all our congratulations. Ed.*



# *Magnolia Memorandum*

by Peter & Nicola Milligan

If asked where my gardening interests lie I would be inclined to say “hardy perennials, and fruit and vegetable production”. In truth ‘hardy perennials’ should really read ‘herbaceous perennials’ as I have little interest in growing shrubs apart from the old shrub roses.

However, each spring my attention is drawn to the Magnolia family. Who can resist watching the various members of this delightful family break into flower. The most frequently grown members of this family appear to be *M. stellata* with its wonderful star shaped flowers or the equally beautiful ‘candles’ that grace *M. x soulangiana*.

Each year, watching these beautiful plants flower, I would say “we must buy one for the garden” and some form of virtual memorandum would be created but never acted upon. I say ‘virtual’ because no actual note was made to reflect the intention or to remember a choice cultivar name. An old saying of my mother’s comes to mind concerning the road to a certain hot place being paved with good intentions!



However, the combination of two events caused intention to give way to determination. During one of our visits to the walled garden at Greenmount in Co. Antrim, Alan - the head gardener - remarked on his desire to obtain a specimen of a truly wonderful magnolia – *M. wilsonii*. Subsequently, I read about a member of the Magnolia family that had pendulous rather than upright flowers.

*Magnolia wilsonii* in bud on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Photograph by Nicola Milligan



Looking back I can not remember where I read about this plant. I know that the reference is there - somewhere in the numerous books, periodicals, magazines and articles that we have amassed over the years, and that litter the house, but where?



*Flower opening on Magnolia wilsonii. Photograph by Nicola Milligan*

In any event attention was focussed on *Magnolia wilsonii*. The plant was discovered (as reflected by the name) by the plant hunter E. H. Wilson, in Western China, in the early twentieth century.

Described by Bluebell Nursery [1] as “this striking, rare, Magnolia .... It is a beautiful introduction with pendulous, downwards facing, white and fragrant flowers with crimson centres in midsummer”.

A not dissimilar description appears in the RHS Encyclopedia of Garden Plants [2] where the description includes “In late spring and early summer, bears pendent, cup-shaped white flowers, to four inches across, with crimson stamens”.

In search of more information on this plant I read through the relevant works of some of my favourite authors (E A Bowles, Alan Bloom, etc.) but to no avail. While Bowles and Bloom mentioned Magnolias there were no references to *M. wilsonii*. The classic text, The Botanical Garden [3], did yield a wonderful photograph of the flower and the resultant fruiting head.

It was clear that this was a real beauty, and an unusual one, but one not easily found in the average garden centre. However the elusive article had made reference to a garden in N. Ireland (Benvardeen) that was well known for *Magnolia wilsonii* and sometimes offered specimens for sale. So, ‘Google’ to the rescue. One quick search and the existence of the garden was confirmed, its location determined and an expedition mounted.



*Magnolia wilsonii* flower fully opened. Photograph by Nicola Milligan

Benvardeen is situated in Dervock, near Ballymoney in Co. Antrim. This historic estate was built in the 1630’s and owned by the Montgomery family since 1798. Whether or not it was maintained perfectly over the years I do not know but it is in perfect order now. Terence Reeves-Smyth in Gardens of Ireland [4] gave the following description - “There are very few fully-maintained walled gardens in Ireland and Benvardeen’s is undoubtedly the best in private hands.”

Reeves-Smyth goes on “Gravel paths and low box hedging divide much of the one and one half acre upper garden, whose curved walls support beautifully trained fruit. A colourful herbaceous border runs through the garden’s centre, punctuated by pergola arches wreathed with old rose climbers .... The adjacent lower garden is devoted to kitchen stuff, all beautifully ordered behind box-edged paths in the true 19<sup>th</sup> century style”.

While I may mutter darkly about the reference to ‘kitchen stuff’ (as an avid kitchen gardener such a reference deserves some form of revenge) Reeves-Smyth full review is well worth the read and the gardens well deserve to appear on everyone’s gardens-to-visit list.

When Nicola and I visited the garden did not disappoint and we thoroughly enjoyed our visit including the requisite tea and buns (an important element in all plant collecting visits). But what about the Magnolia?

Well, at the entrance to the gardens was a stall selling the surplus fruit and vegetables produced from the lower walled garden but no plants were on sale. However, just inside the entrance and adjacent to one of the greenhouses, was a small section housing some plants and hiding at the end were two pots containing infant plants of *M. wilsonii* – propagated on site by the garden staff from the large parent plants. One was purchased and on returning home, was ‘moved on’ into a large tub.

That was four years ago and the ‘baby’ has grown into a healthy specimen standing at around three feet and this year we were rewarded with the first flowers - three beautiful, pendulous flowers appeared and they were well worth the wait. As shown in Nicola’s photographs the flowers were in bud on the 9<sup>th</sup> May and fully open (and in fact starting to fade) on 18<sup>th</sup> May.

While our specimen is still a small plant it will reach about twenty feet in the fullness of time. Bluebell Nursery reports that a specimen in their arboretum reached a height of 3 - 4 m and a spread of 3 m in 12 - 15 years.

Perhaps this is not a plant for very small gardens but, if you have the space to spare and want a truly beautiful and unusual Magnolia, then travel to Benvarden and see if you can find this gem in the sales area – it is well worth the trip.

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# Exploring *Cyripediums*

by Keith Lamb

It was a generous gift eighteen years ago of *Cyripedium reginae* that made us realise that at least some of these hardy ladies slipper orchids – cyripediums – were not too difficult to grow. *C. reginae*, with its large pink lip (‘slipper’), has been with us ever since, growing well in peaty soil as well in neutral loam.

For long we would not have ventured to try other species as many offered were probably dug up in the wild, a procedure not to be encouraged as many populations of these plants would be vulnerable to such depredation.

Recently, however, laboratory procedures for raising hardy orchids from seed have been developed and hybrid cyripediums have appeared on the market. These often show hybrid vigour, making them more amenable to garden culture. These plants are expensive, so it is to be hoped that in time they will become cheaper, though probably they will be offered only by specialist nurseries.

The story of *C. calceolus* being driven to virtual extinction as a British native by the depredation of collectors underlines what could happen in other European countries where it still survives. In this instance, however, one of the new hybrids, called *C. ‘Emil’*, looks so like *C. calceolus* in flower that it could replace the latter in the garden. It is in fact *C. calceolus* x *C. parviflorum*. It is a good garden plant which has been with us for six years and has made a fine clump, often with two flowers to a stem.

*C. ‘Gisella’* and *C. ‘Gisella Pastel’* are two more that have done well, for ten years and six years respectively. The former has reddish flowers and the latter yellow. Our latest acquisition is *C. kentuckiense*, a species fairly recently discovered in N. America. It has huge creamy yellow ‘slippers’. We do not know yet if it will survive, though we are encouraged so far by the growth of its hybrid ‘Phillip’ which has large flowers spotted with red.

A most intriguing species is *C. plectrotricum*, a real dwarf only a few inches high which bears little flowers in white and brown, each with a little projection suggestive of a tiny goatee beard. It has been with us for two seasons and has formed little clumps of stems.

There are many other cyripediums to explore, both species and hybrids – cautiously in view of their high prices.



## Regional Reports

# Annual General Meeting

### Hardymount Garden

The first visit of our 2008 AGM took us to Hardymount, home and garden of Sheila Reeves Smyth. The initial sweep up the curving drive took us past a group of flowering cherries in full blossom and a huge Spanish Chestnut on the main lawn – a magnificent specimen thought to be around 250 years old.

Sheila took us through to the walled garden where we focussed most of our attention. Here she has created a treasure of a garden. A small lawn and formal pond by the entrance provide an open space to take in the rest of the garden – to the right, mixed borders against the wall, lines of gnarled espaliered apple trees and a regular grid of flower beds whose contents spill out onto grassy paths; to the left, separated by a wide grass path leading to a pair of *Eucryphia*, trellis dividers and a pergola partially screen the vegetable garden while providing tantalising glimpses of more ornamental planting in the distance.

The overall effect at this time of year was of quietly ordered relaxation, with blue and white carpets of bluebells filling the main beds and vibrant splashes of hotter hues coming from tulips just going over. Closer inspection of these and the surrounding borders revealed some marvellous plants.

The espaliered apples were underplanted with *Geranium phaeum*, tulips, aquilegia and irises. In the borders *Dicentra* and peonies sat alongside more exotic *Echium* and *Melianthus*. In a corner the flower colour of a white abutilon was picked up by an adjacent marble bust on a pillar and was echoed in the silvery foliage of a Pineapple Broom

In the main borders, roses were trained onto large hoops, providing height and structure to the planting, and through the massed bluebells we could see emerging shoots of the pleasures of summer to come.

In the corner furthest from the house there was a touch of modernity – a charming blue painted seat with thatched canopy flanked by matching Versailles style planters of Fatsia, set on a paved terrace with pots of tulips, Aloes and a marvellous Chatham Island Forget-me-not – its blue flowers picking up the colour of the seat and its glossy leaves shining in the warm sun. This sunny corner gave a view down through the perfectly ordered fruit and vegetable garden, flanked by more espaliered apples underplanted with a drift of white narcissi. Further along, a stand of cardoons partly screened a small but very productive glass house.

The pergola linking the ornamental garden to the more productive areas was well clothed with a range of climbers – wisteria, honeysuckle, *Rosa* ‘Schoolgirl’ and *Clematis* ‘Broughton Star’.

I have since been told that this is essentially a summer garden and have indeed seen pictures of the main beds in glorious high summer luxuriance. It is testimony to the skills of Sheila Reeves Smyth that even before this seasonal climax, we were able to enjoy a beautiful garden rich in planting, relaxed atmosphere and friendly charm. It augured well for the rest of our weekend visits.

*Patrick Quigley*

### **Newtownbarry House and Garden, Bunclody.**

Immediately adjoining Bunclody, Newtownbarry House is approached through a beautiful avenue of mature broadleaved trees. Horses and sheep graze peacefully in the surrounding fields. In front of the house an ancient blue cedar towers over a carpet of bluebells.



Clody Norton and her daughter Alice welcomed us warmly to their family home, and gave us a very interesting tour of the house. Mrs. Norton's ancestor, Robert Westley Hall-Dare, had it built the house in the 1860s. Designed in Classical Italianate style by Sir Charles Lanyon and built of ashlar it sits solidly in mature pastoral surroundings.

There are many interesting features in the house. A magnificent carved wooden staircase leads to the upper floor where the glazed barrel-vaulted roof allows light into the area now used as an Art gallery. Portraits show the continuing family resemblance through the generations. Particularly interesting is the "Ros tapestry", a work in progress depicting Wexford historical scenes which is laid out on a large workbench in the library. Three local people at a time work on this section of what will be, on completion, the largest tapestry in Europe. The quality of the needlecraft is very impressive.

But we were here to see the garden too and we emerge into the sunlight to stroll around the 5-acre garden which includes a rose garden, a lake and a sunken garden with features from the 18th and 19th centuries and foundations older than those of the house. Restoration of the garden has been continuing since 2003 with Wexford woman, Imogen Stafford, as fulltime gardener and, since January 2008, with the help of Martin Newman, who previously worked at Powerscourt.

The gardens are interlinked and lead gently around to the lovely surprise of the sunken garden which is the central feature in a very large 17thC walled garden with newly planted herbaceous beds. Local man 'Dinky' Donoghue's whimsical garden seat adds to the magic before one turns from the "high" garden down stone steps to the intimate sunken garden with stone grottos at each end. These were designed by Lady Lucy Annesley in the 18th C. This garden is enclosed by stone walls about 5ft. high with narrow herbaceous beds at the base and on top long beds of *Lavandula* "Hidcote" with rugosa roses behind. One can imagine the heady scents of summer here.



*One of the idiosyncratic garden seats at Newtownbarry House*

In the centre of the sunken garden are 5 large herbaceous beds; each is enclosed by low box edging; a central bed with a fountain, surrounded by 4 symmetrical beds. The planting throughout is practical. Ajugas, white dicentra and pink campion look well in the narrow beds. Hellebores, pulmonarias and artichokes feature in the larger ones. Two beautiful bronze herons add to the scene. Elsewhere there is a good combination of hosta, brunnera and heuchera; the grey, purple and blue looking well together.



*The sunken garden at Newtownbarry House*

Leaving the sunken garden through one of the stone grottos, one was immediately in mature mixed woodland with the sunlight slanting through unfolding copper beech leaves. There is a lot of new planting here including acers, foxgloves, vinca, camellias and *Corylopsis* “Spring Purple”.

The woodland path leads back to the house, to the ancient yews and the raucous sound of crows busily making their nests in venerable Scots pines. This is a very old garden now being rejuvenated with loving skill. Many of us intend revisiting Newtownbarry for the added pleasure of staying in the house which is a Failte Ireland approved B&B. [www.newtownbarryhouse.com](http://www.newtownbarryhouse.com)

*Shirley Musgrave*

### **Visit to Altamont Gardens**

The weather was very good for our visit to Altamont on the Saturday afternoon of the AGM. When we were all assembled at the front of the house, Paul Cutler who is the head gardener, gave us a brief history of the house and gardens. He then took us on a guided tour.



The history of Altamont goes back at least to the sixteenth century. It is thought that originally there was a convent on the site, but there are no records in existence to back this up. The house as it exists today was built upon the remains of an earlier dwelling dating back to the sixteenth century.



*The house at Altamont Gardens. Photograph by Martin Edwardes*

The estate eventually came to be called Altamont in the late 18th century through some connection with Marquis of Sligo. Lord Altamont was the title conferred on the eldest son. The House has been altered and added to by various owners from 1740 onwards. The St. George Family actually turned the house back-to-front, building on a porch with a decorative fanlight, giving its present Georgian appearance. In the 1850's the family, called the Borrors, apart from having an extension added to the north of the house, had the famous lake dug out by hand after the famine to give employment to the local population. Over one hundred men with horses and carts spent two years completing this enormous task. The Broad Walk and terraces leading down to the lake were laid out at this time with the addition of many beds, pools, summerhouses and statuary. Walks were also laid out through the ancient oak woods and ice age glen down to the river Slaney. A hundred hand-cut granite steps were laid to bring people safely down the steep slope to the river. There are a hundred steps as, being a bit of a "Doubting Thomas", I had an irresistible urge to count them while climbing up the steps from the river bank. The woodland walks and One Hundred steps are believed to be influenced by William Robinson, the famous garden designer.

In 1983 Corona North and her sister Diana inherited the estate from their mother Isobel

Lecky Watson. The garden at this time was an overgrown wilderness and it was Corona, a passionate plants woman, who started the major task of restoring the garden. Having restored the garden with tremendous zest and vigour and I gather with little money, Corona North sadly died in 1999, but left the estate to the Irish Government in order to preserve this beautiful garden for the people of Ireland.



*The lake at Altamont. Photograph by Martin Edwardes*

Paul Cutler led us to a small courtyard in which Corona often enjoyed sitting and then into the walled garden containing two very long borders. These borders are relatively new and were created in remembrance of Corona North. Friends from all over the gardening community donated plants for this new feature. I read in a book that a Lilac (*Syringa*) bought from the nursery at Altimont over twenty years ago by a woman from Castleknock, County Dublin actually ended up back at Altamont because it got too big for the owner's suburban garden. A lot of the plants in the new borders have strong links to the history of Irish gardening. One such plant is a *Ligularia* discovered by Augustine Henry and another is a Tibetan rose collected by Seamus O'Brien.

The beds are divided by colour which at the height of the summer will boast long bands of yellow *Helianthus*, *Chrysanthemums*, creamy *Campanula thyrsoides* running into *Salvia*, *Aconitum*, *Nepeta* and *Delphiniums* to name but a few. As it was May time for our visit, the borders were lined with spring flowers, pink and red tulips on one side and yellow tulips on the other.



*The double borders in the walled garden at Altamont. Photograph by Martin Edwardes*

After the walled garden, we went down a short avenue of magnificent old beech trees under planted with thousands of daffodils. We, of course, visited the beautiful lake which is covered by thousands of water lilies and bordered again by magnificent old trees. One of the trees is a *Pinus sylvestris* which is considered by Thomas Pakenham to be the “ best specimen of Scots Pine in the country”. The path leads from the lake to the Ice Age glen, over the stream, and into the oak collection. The glen is home to over a hundred varieties of rhododendron and number of Sessile oaks. In our walk around the grounds, we came upon a new arboretum which seemed to be planted with an extensive selection of *Sorbus* trees.

We headed down to the River Slaney to walk along the river bank and headed back up again by the ‘One Hundred Steps’. At the top of the hill we came to a small temple from which there are great views of the Wicklow and Blackstairs mountains. At this point it was time to head for the very well run nursery that is situated in the walled garden.

I would like to pay tribute to the work carried out by Paul Cutler and his team. The gardens are very well maintained to a very high standard and, what is very surprising,

are totally free to the public. Janet and I are looking forward to revisiting the gardens in the summer.

*Martin Edwardes*

**Lisnavagh, near Rathvilly, Co. Carlow.**

Some locations reveal themselves slowly and Lisnavagh is one of them.

On arrival we were all much taken with the sweeping view over the park and off to the distant hills, a view interrupted only by occasional fine trees, with more woods planted at the sides. Lisnavagh is very much a place of trees. It is not alone heavily involved in the timber business and in encouraging the use of native woods, but is also a good place to see trees of all ages.

The IGPS group was even more impressed to learn that our viewing position on the lawn was once the site of the principal rooms of the house, which was substantially reduced in scale in 1953. Usually architectural amputation, like crude pruning, remains very evident but here the Architect, Alan Hope, had managed to shrink and reorder the house so that the loss of some two thirds of the fabric still leaves a pleasing Tudor revival house, but one which is now much smaller than when Daniel Robertson built it for the family in 1847.



*A view, looking towards the house at Lisnavagh. Photograph by Bob Bradshaw*

Over time too the Robertson designed garden features vanished or changed. The family were more interested in breeding cattle than in gardening and much of the credit for the more recent revival of the garden can be given to Lady Jessica Rathdonnell. Of course the Yew walks are a venerable feature, but the young shrubs and trees are mainly her doing. They looked particularly well to us as we strolled through under-planted primroses and bluebells, admiring the Camellias, Azaleas, Wellingtonia and Embotrium. Topiary was clipped in squared-off shapes near the house. An L-shaped raised border was closely planted, with roses, magnolias and more unusual shrubs

including a Tulip Tree, while the last lingering tulips testified to an earlier show of bulbs at this location.

Only the owner's kindness steered me on to the walled garden, well concealed on the other side of the drive. Here much of the original large space was now devoted to soft fruit bushes, while old espaliered trees still grew on some walls. In part of this enclosure, a raised swimming-pool now occupies the former home of a long gone "pineapple pit". Lest the bathers be bored, this warm enclosure was strongly planted and was shared with an ornamental pond, a *Magnolia grandiflora* and a *Clerodendron* amongst others, the latter was still to show leaves.

Evelyn Waugh, dissatisfied with post-war Britain, seemingly considered moving to Lisnavagh in 1947, but he eventually decided to risk staying on under Labour. Even his notoriously critical eye could not have found fault with Lisnavagh.

*Bob Bradshaw*

### **The Bay Garden**

As I sailed through the beautiful countryside of Wexford the sun, a rare specimen so far this year, was high in the sky. The yellow of the fields of oilseed rape were spectacular in their contrast to the surrounding greenery. I thought, "Am I in heaven?" but 'twasn't 'til I entered the Bay Garden, owned by Frances and Iain Mc Donald, that I realised – no, this is heaven.

The curvature of the beds, punctuated by large specimen trees, accentuated the perfection of the garden. For example, *Magnolia stellata*, a gentle pink specimen, was a joy to behold. The funeral garden with its sombre colours made a sobering statement on our mortality: "As life is but a gleam of light between two eternities, no second chance for ever more."

From there we moved to the garden of grasses and then to a spacious sweeping garden with colour in abundance. The beauty of the garden could only be excelled by the warmth with which we were entertained. Tea – "the cup that cheers but does not inebriate" – and gorgeous cakes. Yummy!

*Kitty Hennessy, Berrings, Co. Cork*

### **"Lucy's Wood", Barker's Road, Bunclody**

This garden was begun in 1989 by Frau Erica Marten. She had been trying to get her hands on its 1-acre site for some time. A former beet field, it had been used as a golf driving range by her husband but when a golf ball smashed through their nearby greenhouse the issue was decided. Essentially this is a rectangular garden with good use of "borrowed" landscape and interesting borders and island beds.

There are fine specimens of *Magnolia grandiflora*, *Davidia involucrata* and *Paulownia tomentosa*, Apple Trees from the Seed-Savers Association, *Cornus controversa variegata*, *Abutilon*, *Lavatera*, *Myosotis* and *Pheasant-Eye Narcissi* made a very pretty

picture. An interesting sculpture by Wicklow stone artist Niall Deakin stands quite near the entrance. A water feature is promised which will have a Bog-Oak centrepiece. Seating is well placed among the many varieties of roses, rhododendrons, irises and lilies in the borders.

The AGM group visited this garden on Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> of May. Its proximity to our base at the Carlton Millrace Hotel (Bunclody) meant that we could stroll there and back on a very pleasant evening. If you could not make it please note that the gardens are open from May 20 - September 15 in 2008. Telephone 053 937 7256 for further instructions.

*Mary Bradshaw.*

### **Tombrick Garden**

Tombrick garden was started in 1989 and its 1.5 acres are planted with trees, shrubs and herbaceous perennials. Its different levels are linked together by a series of gravel paths.

We were greeted at the entrance by the perfume of a sweet smelling *Skimmia* in full flower. Around the south-facing house are raised beds and rockeries filled with sun loving plants. Sloping away from the house and overlooking the Slaney valley are herbaceous perennials and woodland plantings.

Following the path around the back of the house are a series of streams flowing into a pond where beautiful black ducks are lazily paddling, their plumage glistening with a purple sheen in the sunlight. Piped water from an irrigation scheme built in bygone days by Franciscan monks, and redirected by owner Walter Kelly, provides water for the streams and pond in the garden.

The poultry happily roaming through the garden give a distinct rural feeling and one realizes that this garden is part of a working farm. The flower beds, shrubs and trees all merge to give a delightful relaxed feeling.

Tombrick was the winner of The All Ireland Viking Garden Competition in 2006.

*Marcella Campbell*

### **Monday 5th May 2008, A Visit to Stonewell Cottage.**

On arriving at Marie O'Leary's garden, the first glimpse of the stone fronted building, with the beautifully laid out box hedging, indicated that careful thought had gone into this garden. The design of the hedging was so much in keeping with the granite stone of the cottage walls.

The Spring garden area still had some good colour. In one corner was a lovely *Fagus Silyatica* 'Dawyck', perfectly slender and tall, and in another corner was a young metasequoia.

Later interest is guaranteed with a summer planting full of roses while an *Acacia baileyana* 'Purpurea' is obviously going to be a highlight. In this area, as in other areas, the planting showed the eye of a flower arranger, both in the foliage used and the colouring chosen, as in the dark phormium behind some silver birch. The different levels added interest as did an *Acer palmatum* 'Linearilobum', which will be a good specimen.

Marie is planning and working a manageable vegetable area and the potatoes 'Orla' could be a tasty dish. Albeit no better than the delicious cream teas which were served. This is a garden to be enjoyed during the summer and was well planned around Marie's home. The visit was much appreciated by the group. Thank you, Marie. Like so many of our gardens, this garden had the aura of a loved garden.

Rita Craigie

## Northern Ireland

### **The Clotworthy Spring Lecture at Clotworthy Arts Centre, Antrim in conjunction with Antrim Borough Council.**

#### **"Colour in Spring" Averil Milligan, Head Gardener, Rowallane**

An almost even mix of members and non-members filled the lecture theatre at Clotworthy House to hear Averil Milligan speak about Rowallane in the spring. We began with a shot of a *Magnolia* against a blue sky, surely the best way to see Magnolias. She showed the small but perfectly formed *Primula denticulata* which likes damp shady conditions along with the leaves of the pure white-flowered *Helleborus niger* 'Potter's Wheel' which are good for cutting. Averil is a flower arranger and is constantly looking for new ideas. The large tomentose leaves of *Rhododendron falconeri* make this an attractive plant even without the large white flowers.

Averil's account of sweet smelling plants included the green-flowered *Daphne laureola* which is easy to grow and has year long foliage and the early-flowering *Corylopsis sinensis veitchiana*, introduced from the Himalayas in 1927. The white flowered *Lysichiton camtschatcensis* is fragrant, unlike its cousin the American skunk cabbage which no-one could describe as sweet-smelling! *Malus hupehensis* was collected in the Himalayas by Ernest Wilson; it is free-flowering and fragrant. The bark of the Japanese *Trochodendron aralioides* is aromatic and unusually the flowers have no sepals or petals; the lemon "flowers" are the stamen.

As an example of good contrast and early colour Averil showed the delicate blue-flowered *Clematis alpina*, the pure white *Erythronium* 'White Beauty' and the robust red of *Chaenomeles* 'Rowallane Seedling'. Rowallane has given its name to several other plants. Mr. Armytage-Moore discovered the vine weevil resistant *Primula*

'Rowallane Rose' in the walled garden and it is intended to reintroduce it there while *Viburnum plicatum* 'Rowallane' came from Sir John Ross's garden at Rostrevor.

By mid-spring, the Rhododendrons begin to dominate at Rowallane. Many of these came from the Himalayas and the red/purpled flowered *Rh. thomsonii* is the parent of many hybrids, one being *Rh. 'Shilsonii'* (*R. barbatum* x *R. thomsonii*) which has a lovely bark and bears red flowers in the early spring. The seed pod is an attractive blue-green and the lime green calyx remains attached. Finally, it layers itself elegantly giving the appearance of a compact multi-stemmed plant.

The rock garden was created at Rowallane 1920-1930 period and might better be described as a woodland rock garden with plants such as *Disporum smithii* with its white flowers and orange berries, a plant for deep shade and also one which is tough and with rampant tendencies.

A wild area was created some years ago by a former Head Gardener Mike Snowden and this has matured into an experience of wild flowers, among them orchids *Platanthera* and *Dactylorhiza* spp. which make this an attractive area in spring.

The rarest plant in the garden is *Carrierea calycina* with deep green leaves and red petioles. The seed was collected by Earnest Wilson and Mr. Armytage-Moore corresponded with him about this plant. In 1919, Mr. Armytage-Moore paid the Slieve Donard Nursery 3s 6d for a specimen; it is not certain if this is the same plant or a descendant. The only other known plant in Ireland is at Birr Castle but their *Carrierea* flowers. It is thought the Rowallane specimen is too immature to flower, but after 90 years one feels it is either a slow maturer or indeed a descendant of the 1919 plant.

Mr. Hugh Armytage-Moore had an eye for landscape and his gardens are now over 100 years old. Averil's main task is to keep the mature look; a visitor who saw a 30' rhododendron expects to see the same 30' rhododendron 30 years later! All pruning and replacements have to be done as subtly as possible and Averil has found it best to re-start plants *in situ* where possible.

She has found Mr. Armytage-Moore's diaries and nursery invoices invaluable in maintaining the gardens. She has the diaries from 1904 to 1925 but, sadly, the 1930's diaries are missing. He recorded every plant he bought or was given, its source and where he planted it. For example, he recorded that on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1904 he paid James Veitch 15/= for two plants of *Davidia involucrata vilmoriniana*, the Handkerchief Tree. Also amongst his papers are letters from Ernest Wilson and George Forrest. He was a plant selector, not just a plant collector, and the garden reflects the skill with which he selected his plants. The spirit of Mr. Armytage-Moore is very much alive in Rowallane today.

*Marion Allen.*



# Leinster

## “The Changing Flora of Ireland”

Declan Doogue spoke to the Leinster group on March 27<sup>th</sup>. He posed many questions as to how and why changes occur, the acquisition of many new “wild” species and the disappearance of others. He wondered what are the “drivers of change” and pointed out that patterns of distribution are not random. Examples were given of *Crithmum maritimum* which grows on shingle or rocky shores. It is useful as it defines certain vegetative types. Patterns of distribution act as predictive tools, indicating the nature and impact of change. He mentioned the decline of *Crambe maritima*, another shingle species, which is now very rare. We have around 70 species in need of protection in Ireland and one of the greatest problems is the lack of interested amateurs willing to give their time to record and determine the status of various species.

Introduced species have been responsible for “crowding out” the natives. These introductions might be medicinal plants or ornamental garden “escapes”. The problem of Giant Hogweed is becoming worse and having a huge impact on riverside verges. *Buddleja davidii* on the other hand is becoming rarer “in the wild”. *Oenothera glazoviana* is now invading sandy fallow in Donabate. This land has been cultivated in the past and its level is much reduced so it is suitable for the *Oenothera* species. *Lupinus arboreus* is to be found on roadsides in Wicklow and Wexford. Each urban (and suburban) area has its own set of weeds, as all gardeners know!

Threatened habitats include arable, damp grassland, woodland, dune grassland, sandy fallows, salt marshes etc. Cornfields have been “blitzed” by farming and the beautiful *Papaver rhoeas* is now confined to roadside edges. Stubble management leaves cornfields barren. However, some wild flowers e.g. Persian Speedwell can survive in cornfields because they have staggered germination. The Corn Marigold, *Chrysanthemum segetum* originally a plant of acid soil, has migrated to grassland and is still common in Wexford and the West of Ireland.

Another plant with a problem is Hemp Nettle that liked to grow in gravel pits. These quarries are processed so quickly nowadays that there is no time for seed to be sown so the plant cannot establish itself. Sandy fallows are threatened by “creeping suburbanisation”, holiday homes, etc. Declan recommended that gardeners should not attempt to tame the roadside verges adjacent to their plots as this leads to loss of habitat for plants and their dependent insects and birdlife.

Some plants are bio-indicators; as *Ranunculus peltatus* is of clean water. This plant is still to be found growing under the bridge at Ballymore Eustace. Plants like *Achillea*

*ptarmica*, a plant of wetlands and damp grasslands, will be threatened by lowering of the water-table if they have short roots and by grazing if they are naturally taller.

There is quite a lot of money available for the promotion of bio-diversity. (Environmental Statements have become an industry) but there is not enough interest in protecting bio-diversity. Yet, there is some hope. *Senecio crucifolius*, a species of groundsel is to be found growing near Dublin Airport and much of our flora, driven off golf-courses is surviving quite well on their margins. The largest number of species of Irish wildflowers is to be found in the South-East and South-West Ireland and the habitats of rocky seashores of the Dublin coast are very little interfered with, with some really spectacular locations in North Co. Dublin.

Mary Bradshaw

### **Dr. Tim Ingram- “The Smaller Woodland Plants”.**

This lecture was arranged jointly by the IGPS and the Alpine Garden Society and took place on Wednesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Dr. Ingram, a nurseryman from Faversham, Kent specialises in plants for dry situations. He grows many drought- tolerant woodland plants in his own garden and feels that these are best shown to advantage in a mature garden. He showed us some wonderful slides of interesting plant groupings at Wakehurst Place and Knightshayes Court (National Trust), Kew, Beth Chatto’s garden etc.

Dr. Ingram likes to stroll through woodlands and observe e.g. the underplanting beneath a *Cornus nuttallii* hybrid at Kew and under an *acer* at Knightshayes Court. There were some very pretty pictures of a coppiced woodland in Kent where the natural mix of celandines, wood anemones and bluebells intermingled very well. There were also some inspiring images of *Fritillaria meleagris*, *Erythronium*, *Dicentra* and *Hellebore spp.* growing under and close to rhododendrons at the same location. He advocates weakening the grass in a large site and introducing woodland plants e.g. *Dicentra*, *Lamium*, *Myosotis*, Cow Parsley in a flamboyant wild mix.

He showed *Ranunculus ficaria* ‘Brambling’ the dark-leaved celandine at Hyde Hall, complimented by *Brunnera microphylla* and *Omphalodes cappadocica*. He recommends that the seeds of *Jeffersonia dubia* be sown immediately in June and that *Epimedium x versicolor* not be sheared in winter but allowed to remain on the plant until the new growth appears. He likes *E. x rubrum* for its strong colour but warns us to beware of rabbits when growing this species.

Trilliums have a strong appeal and are always a talking point with garden visitors. In general they establish better when grown from seed. He recommends lots of leaf-mould and patience! Seed must be cleaned to avoid fungal disease. He showed us slides of *Trillium* ‘Kew Beauty’ and *T. rivale* but admitted that *T. luteum* has never set seed in

his garden. Recently, Dr. Ingram has taken an interest in ferns and finds that *Polysticum spp.* suit his dry conditions well.

All in all, this was a very interesting lecture with an emphasis on “natural” planting and combinations. The larger woodland planting is very impressive but he reminds us that the smaller “choice” plants are perhaps grown more suitably in a trough where they can be better cultivated and appreciated.

*Louise Butler*

## *Munster*

### **Friday 4th April “Spring in the Garden” Mary Waldron**

There was another good turnout for the talk given by Mary Waldron. Many will know of Mary, as she is a regular columnist in the Irish Garden Magazine. She has a large garden close to Lough Owel in Westmeath, which she started from just a bare field a good few years ago. Dr. Lamb who lives nearby has been a great source of inspiration to Mary and has acted as a mentor in the development of her garden.

Being close to the Lough, the garden can be quite windy, so particular attention has been paid to planting that is suitable for the conditions. She grows a lot of daffodils including *Narcissus* “Ambergate”, a Division 2 daffodil, flowering in mid-spring, which she considers is a great performer. She also grows *Narcissus* “Empress of Ireland”, a Division 1 daffodil, which flowers again in mid-spring and is one of the largest white trumpet daffodils.

She also has a particular passion for Trilliums including *Trillium grandiflorum* which she finds is quite vigorous and clump forming. It produces flowers in spring and summer which are pure white often fading to pink. They are planted under deciduous trees providing conditions such that they are kept wet in winter and dry in summer. As it is a particularly windy site, she is unable to grow Rhododendrons, except for one, namely *Rhododendron* “Curlew”, a dwarf variety with small leaves which produces numerous trusses of funnel shaped bright yellow flowers in mid-spring.

Mary can only grow Magnolias which flower in late spring and early summer, one of which is *Magnolia wilsonii*. She grows a lot of Daphnes including “Jacqueline Postil” and *Daphne burkwoodii* “Ingrid”, but gave a warning that daphnes are short lived and can suddenly die for no apparent reason. Mary had almost given up on seeing flowers on her *Davidia involucrate* (the handkerchief tree), but it did eventually flower after seventeen years. She made a very philosophical point that if one does not plant these trees, even though you might not live to see them flower, nobody else will either!

Mary is another true gardener who gets out there to garden in all conditions. Her daughter is apparently following in her footsteps, as she recently bought a garden with a house in it! Again Mary's talk was full of practical tips and advice, to which there was a great enthusiastic response, judging by the numerous questions that followed.

*Martin Edwardes*

### **Visit to Annesgrove**

On a rather chilly Saturday in April a small but enthusiastic group met in the car park of Annesgrove Gardens for a quick picnic before meeting with Patrick Annesley who was giving us a guided tour of the gardens. We began in the walled garden where Rosamund pointed out the interesting things to see in the borders. Although quite early in the season for herbaceous plants, the philosophy of repeating focal plants and having one side mirror the other was clearly visible in the double borders. There were some beautiful dark wine tulips called 'Arabian Mystery' complementing the young foliage of the herbaceous peonies and Rosamund pointed out that she has no problem keeping tulips going annually so long as you plant them deeply and label them!

Patrick then joined us and took us out into the upper level of the garden which contains the larger part of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia collection. The advantage of the topography of Annesgrove is that you are able to look down upon the flowers of these shrubs and trees, thus seeing them at their most beautiful. Patrick pointed out an especially lovely Rhododendron called *R. williamsianum* which had quite different leaves and lovely pink bell shaped flowers. We moved down along a woodland path to the lower level where you walk along the river bank before entering the damp garden where the temperature was a palpable few degrees warmer. So welcome! The planting of *Lysichiton* along the bog area was in full flower and looked stunning. The new foliage of the *Cercidiphyllum* was also a focal point as there were several large specimens of this tree along the river's edge. One oddity that Patrick drew our attention to was *Lathraea clandestina* which is a parasitical plant and seems to favour the Alders. In this garden, dense thickets of bamboo created a jungle atmosphere, totally different in character to the upper garden. Large groups of *Hosta*, *Hemerocalis* and *Peltiphyllum* were just emerging and would make a return visit worthwhile when they attain their full glory later on in the year.

We then climbed a steep path to bring us back up to the higher level and a few were rather keen to revisit the walled garden where Rosamund still has a few treasures for sale. We said goodbye to Patrick who had given us a very informative tour of the garden and I am sure many will return later in the season to see this lovely garden in its summer finery.

*Janet Edwardes*



## *Looking Ahead*

### *Munster Fixtures*

By popular request, it has been decided to move the day of all future meetings to the second Monday of the month, instead of the first Friday of the month. Apparently nobody liked the Friday evenings! The venue is the same i.e. SMA Hall, Wilton Cork starting at 7.45p.m. The first meeting of the Autumn will be as follows.

#### **Monday 13th October**

##### **"My Garden in Winter" a talk by Charlie Wilkins**

Charlie Wilkins is a regular columnist in the Irish Examiner and also writes for the "Garden Heaven" magazine.

### *Leinster Fixtures*

#### **Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> July: Summer Lunch.**

(See enclosed booking form)

#### **Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> September**

##### **Finn Haugli - 'Growing Asiatic Plants at Tromso Botanical Gardens, Norway',**

Joint lecture with the Alpine Society

#### **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October Lecture**

##### **'From Jekyll to Jellicoe and Beyond, The Story of Sutton Place'**

Lecture by John Humphris, former Garden Manager of this magnificent modernist garden.

#### **Saturday October 4th at 6.30pm Hamwood House and Gardens.**

Rita Craigie and Sarah Angel have arranged a visit for members to the home of Mrs. Ann Hamilton, Hamwood House near Dunboyne. A small Palladian house was built in 1768 by the Hamilton family, agents to the Dukes of Leinster. The gardens developed

with a conifer walk, many interesting shrubs and spring bulbs. We expect to see a walled garden and a rock garden also. The visit will involve a tour of house and gardens, a social evening and supper.

**Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> October Leinster Plant Sale**

Our Lady of Dolours Church Hall, (Pyramid Church) Glasnevin.  
Doors open at 11.00 a.m. All plants and volunteers welcome!

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> October**

**'Ireland's Beautiful Bogs' Lecture by Dr. Catherine O'Connell.**  
Chief Executive of the Irish Peatland Conservation Council.

**Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October Joint lecture with RHSI**

**At The Wesley Centre, Leeson Park -----PLEASE NOTE**

**' Contemporary Mixed Borders' by Jimi Blake.**

Jimi is the well- known proprietor of Huntingdon Gardens,  
Co. Wicklow.

**Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> December 'Christmas Lecture'**

**'Elegant Leaves, Favourites and Hens' a personal look at current fashions in gardening.** By Carmel Duignan, Plantsperson and Gardener.

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2009**

**'Rare and Unusual Plants for your Garden'**

Lecture by Paul Maher . Curator of the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin.

**March 19<sup>th</sup> 2009**

**Wol Staines talking about Glen Chantry. Essex**

## *Northern Fixtures*

**JULY 8 – GARDEN VISIT, Ken and Dawn McEntee,**

7 Main Street, Hillsborough, Co. Down BT26 6AE; 6:30pm for 7.00pm. An interesting town garden to the rear of the old Barrack House, which is divided into 3 different areas, leading to a formal pond in a hidden garden. Amongst the mature planting is a *Gunnera manicata*, a *Cornus controversa* and a 'Rambling Rector' rose. Guided tour. Donations for charity. Parking on Main Street and public car park.

**AUGUST 3 - ANNUAL PICNIC & GARDEN VISIT, Noreen Brown,**

Walworth, 45 Walworth Road, Ballykelly, Co. Londonderry BT49 9JU; picnic 1.00pm, tour 2.00pm (lasting 1 hour). Behind the ancient manor and bawn lies the

recently restored walled garden with lavish plantings of roses, shrubs, trees and herbaceous perennials. Donations for Ulster Gardens Scheme. Parking on road.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Limavady pass through Ballykelly to just before de-restriction signs; opposite the 'Droppin Well' pub and Texaco garage turn right on to Walworth Road. House is on right.

#### **OCTOBER 4 - ANNUAL PLANT SALE,**

St Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast. 12.00 - 2.00pm - deliveries from 9.00am.

*Plants & volunteers wanted. Contact Peter Milligan on 028 4278 8739.*

**NB CHANGE OF VENUE.** We have received comments from members for a number of years regarding the use of outdoor venues for our annual plant sale. This year we have moved to a new indoor venue which we hope will be more appealing. There is car parking available and access for disabled. As always we need a good supply of plants so please start propagating early ! Customers also required so don't forget to spread the word and tell your friends

**DIRECTIONS:** St Bride's Hall is at the Malone Road end of Derryvolgie Avenue which runs from Lisburn Road to Malone Road. There is a car park adjacent to the Hall

#### **OCTOBER 29 - THE CLOTWORTHY LECTURE,**

Clotworthy Arts Centre, Antrim; 7.30pm. 'Bantry House – A History of the House and Garden', Nigel Everett, Bantry, Co. Cork. Situated in an enviable position overlooking Bantry Bay, Bantry House and Gardens have a long history of development. Restoration of the gardens started in the late 1990's and continues to the present day. Refreshments provided. Members free, non-members £2.00. Joint with Antrim Borough Council. **Please note that the Arts Centre is due to close for refurbishment later in 2008 and the venue for this talk may change. For confirmation of venue closer to the time please contact Patrick Quigley 07801 299263 or check web-site [www.habitas.org.uk/jgps](http://www.habitas.org.uk/jgps)**

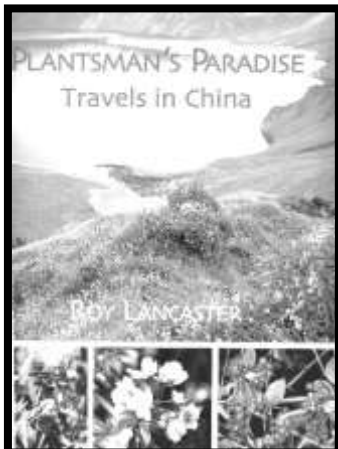
#### **DECEMBER 3 - THE MALONE HOUSE LECTURE,**

Malone House, Barnett's Park, Belfast; 7.30pm. 'Tender Plants at Home in Irish Gardens', Paul Maher, Curator of the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin. We have seen an increase in the range of tender and semi-tender plants being grown in our gardens. Paul will discuss the experiments which have been conducted in recent years showing how we are pushing the boundaries of accepted wisdom on plant hardiness. Free. Refreshments provided. Joint with Belfast Parks.

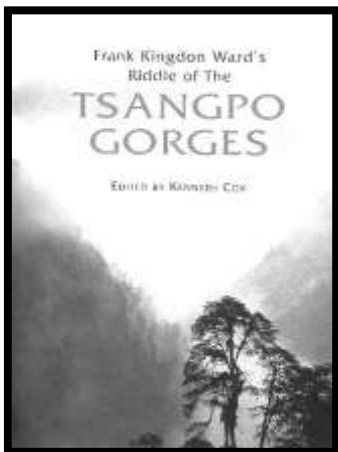


## Worth a Read

I truly enjoy a good book and have a selection to recommend to you in this issue.



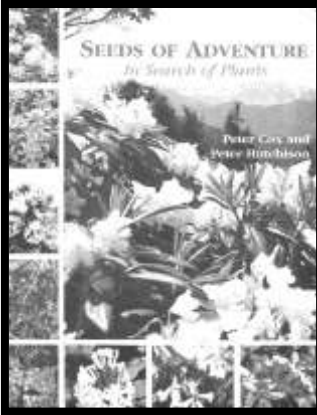
Reissued almost 20 years after being first published this book has stood the test of time, giving a very readable account of Roy Lancaster's many journeys in China, and his infectiously enthusiastic descriptions of the interesting plants he encountered there. The original black and white photographs have been replaced by 1,000 of the author's own colour photographs. This is quite simply an outstanding book, an absolute must-have, a true magnus opus. [*Plantsman's Paradise – Travels in China, Roy Lancaster, Garden Art Press, 2008, HB, 511pp, £39.99, ISBN: 978-1-85149-515-3*]



Frank Kingdon Ward explored the Tsangpo Gorge, the deepest gorge in the world carrying Tibet's Yarlong Tsangpo river in 1924 – '25. Kenneth Cox, Kenneth Storm Jn. and Ian Baker spent ten years retracing the route of this expedition and this book recounts these adventures with accounts of the country, the people, the plants and animals found there. The original Frank Kingdon Ward text is complimented by the additional material added in this book and includes a foreword by his widow, Jean Rasmussen, and a brief biography of Kingdon Ward. The accounts of the later expeditions are very well illustrated with colour photographs and include notes on the history of exploration in the area, its geography and geology as well as present threats to

the habitat. This is another outstanding book. [*Frank Kingdon Ward's Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges, edited by Kenneth Cox, Garden Art Press, 2008, HB, 335pp, £35, ISBN: 978-1-8519-516-0*]

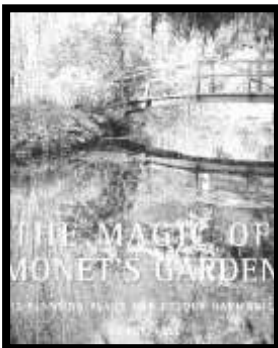




Peter Cox and Peter Hutchinson have made extensive travels in search of hardy plants and this book sixteen of those journeys, among them the Himalaya, western China and Turkey and regularly to places no other western plant hunters had ventured since the likes of Frank Kingdon Ward. As might be expected from a member of the Cox family, there is a strong interest in rhododendrons, many new or lost in cultivation. With over 700 colour photographs this is a book for the plant enthusiast and the armchair traveller. It is an outstanding, informative and very enjoyable book. *[Seeds of Adventure – In Search of Plants, Peter Cox & Peter Hutchinson, Garden Art Press, 2008, HB, 415pp, £35, ISBN: 978-1-870673-58-7]*



After Russell Page's death Marina Schinz and Gabrielle van Zuylen, both friends and enthusiastic admirers of Page, decided that they would attempt to preserve and document what remained of his work. Gardens can vanish, change completely or fall into disrepair so very easily and they felt that the legacy of a great man could be lost. This book certainly fulfilled their brief. It is an outstanding testimony to the genius of Russell Page, essentially a book of brilliant photographs with sufficient text to outline the background to each garden and the development of Page's style and approach over the years. It is a brilliant, outstanding, inspiring and beautiful book. *[The Gardens of Russell Page, Marina Schinz & Gabrielle van Zuylen, Frances Lincoln, 2008, HB, 255pp, £35, ISBN: 13:978-0-7112-2694-4]*



And finally, and very briefly, here is a most enjoyable book on a garden of great beauty. Claude Money believed he was good at only two things, "painting and gardening" and in his garden at Giverny he painted with plants and flowers. The author discusses this work of art, Monet's approaches to this work and how it can be replicated on a smaller scale in our own gardens. I adored this book! *[The Magic of Monet's Garden, His Planting Plans and Colour Harmonies, Derek Fell, Frances Lincoln, 2008, HB, 160pp, £25, ISBN: 978-0-7112-2737-8]*



# *Snippets*

## **Change in Chairperson in Northern Ireland**

Patrick Quigley has stepped down as Chairperson of Northern Region although he will continue to keep involved in Northern activities. Peter Milligan is taking over so, as Patrick has told me, things are in good hands. Best wishes to Peter.

## **Ballymena Garden Club: Royal Horticultural Society Lecture**

Take note of what is expected to be a very interesting lecture by **Judy Harry: “The Planter’s Palette – Choosing Plants to Create a Garden Picture.”** This is a Royal Horticultural Society and will take place at the Braid Arts Centre, Bridge St. Ballymena on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30p.m. For tickets and information contact Mrs. Judith Hamilton, telephone: 028 - 25649358

## **Dungarvan Flower and Garden Club Wednesday, 3rd September 2008.**

Dungarvan Flower and Garden Club also hosts what promises to be another outstanding lecture: **“The Gift of the Gabb” by Casper Gabb** of The Green Room Natural Elements Design, Garden Designer, Winner of a Gold Award and Best City Garden at the Chelsea Flower Show 2006. Venue to be confirmed. For further information contact: Torie Essex: 051-291126; Bridget Blackwell: 058-44463 or Ann Mangan: 058-41248

## **The Professional Gardeners Guild (PPG) Annual General Meeting, 3 – 4 October**

The Professional Gardeners Guild (PPG) will, for only the second time in its history, hold its Annual General Meeting (for Britain & Ireland regions of the guild) in Ireland on Saturday October 4th next. The weekend includes a visit to Helen Dillions garden, dinner at Lodge Park, Straffan, the AGM meeting itself on Saturday 4th, at the National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin, with a guided tour of the gardens also scheduled.

Saturday’s events conclude with dinner in Dublin Zoo with guest speaker Senator David Norris. If you are interested in attending the dinner at the zoo, tickets are available, cost €50. The weekend is rounded off with a visit to Mount Usher Gardens in Ashford, Co Wicklow. This weekend is open to members and non-members although, availability is limited. For details contact: - Patrick Ardifff, 23, Celbridge Road, Leixlip, Co. Kildare, Ireland. Tel. 086 347 0617 e-mail: patrickardifff@eircom.net





# The Newsletter of the Irish Garden Plant Society

## The Irish Garden Plant Society

### The Aims of the Society are:

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

### *Correspondence:*

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

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

## Issue 109, July 2008