



*The
Irish Garden Plant Society*



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Cover: H. G. Moon, *Nerine bowdenii*, originally published in *Flora and Sylva* 3 (1905).



Editorial

This is the last Newsletter of 2009 and it is good to report on areas where the Society is moving forward.

Dr. Noeleen Smyth has updated the IGPS website events calendar, fixture dates are now available on www.irishgardenplantsociety.org and it is hoped to add further material to the website in the near future.

A Fixture List is included with this Newsletter and due to popular demand is now a card as was previously the case. It is good to get feedback from members and it has also been suggested that the Newsletter should include a letters page, which will happen if there is sufficient interest.

The Irish Cultivar Day seminar raised many interesting and important points and there will be a report in the January Newsletter. One of the plants mentioned by Dr. Charles Nelson in his lecture was *Nerine bowdenii* and is discussed further starting with Dr. John David's article on page 40. There was also a good selection of Irish cultivars for sale at the Seminar and unsold plants will be available at the Leinster Plant Sale on 11th October.

Our sympathy is with the family of Thérèse Murphy who died in September after a short illness. Thérèse was a wonderfully energetic and enthusiastic Munster Representative on the National Committee who gave and expected total commitment from herself and her fellow committee members. May she rest in peace.

Mary

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Copy date for the January Newsletter 11th December 2009



Our Irish Orchids

By Dermot Kehoe

On my first exciting visit to the Burren many years ago I spent a long time looking for *Neotinea intacta* (now *N. maculata*). I did eventually find one but at that time was less overwhelmed by its subtle beauty. I was aware of its rare distribution in Ireland and therefore its scientific importance but the competition for my attention was severe with distracting clumps of the more colourful Burren Flora all around. Appreciation of our native orchids came much later. *Neotinea* and all the other wild Irish orchids are described and illustrated in a recently published book* by Tom Curtis and Robert Thompson.

Their small size means that many of our native orchids are missed in the field and this to some extent has helped their survival. They are a precious part of our heritage, rarely seen at even the best plant sales or in the gardens of the most picky gardeners. It is better so. Long may they thrive amid the grasses and weeds that are their natural companions.

We can and should however learn to appreciate their beauty, their extraordinary flower structure, their distribution and the details that distinguish the different species. All this and much more is to be found in this most welcome book. Each of the 15 genera, their species and sub species are described and illustrated with wonderful photographs, both close-up and growing in the wild. The essential topics of pollination, distribution and habitat are dealt with clearly in some detail. Altogether a most welcome addition to appreciating our native heritage. More please!

*“The Orchids of Ireland”, 160pp.

Published by National Museums, Northern Ireland.

Available at good bookshops, ca. €20.00



Meeting the Relatives Camphor and Cinnamon

By John Joe Costin

We have a little known understated attraction in our garden. It is a hardy small tree, native to Japan and is a member of the Laurel family. Its anonymity is inexplicable. It has a suite of ornamental features that unfold in sequence over the seasons, its autumn colours being exceptional. It is the Japanese Spicebush, *Lindera obtusiloba*, the star in this genus of 80 species. The RHS Award of Garden Merit, AGM, acknowledged its garden worthiness in the 1950s. I collected seed in a mountainside awash in autumn colours at their peak intensity at 1000m in the Southern Alps National Park at Minomi on the main island of Honshu. Its shining black berries were enticingly conspicuous set against a backdrop of its gorgeous yellow foliage. I know of no other plant that has its colour intensity or that match its prolonged autumnal performance. Its rich colour highlighted its distribution pattern on the hillside in the woods and in the wood edge vegetation. It did not need full sunlight to develop the colour. It had a similar intensity in shade and half shaded locations.

It was not a solo performance. Vying for attention with it in the woods was *Acer diabolicum* one of the largest leaved Maples but it has little autumn colour. *Sorbus gracilis*, a small compact bushy tree has scarlet red rose hips like fruits that are mistaken for a rose. I also collected the large red fruits of *Viburnum phytotrichum* attracted by their vivid crimson colour. It is a shrub about 2m in height and the rare *Rosa fujisanensis* a shrub 1.5m tall. It competed in a mountainside of native trees, many of them well known in our gardens *Cercidophyllum* was an intense red and *Sorbus matsumarana* and *Disanthus* were purple. The yellow of *Betula ermanii* and *Acer tschonoskii* Maples in red, orange and yellow. *Fagus crenata*, *Quercus mongolica* subsp. *crispa*, *Enkianthus*, and *Cimifuga simplex* looked magnificent in a crowded woodland.

Lindera umbellata var *membranacea* and *Lindera triloba*, now known as *Paranbenzoin trilobum* were the two other species I collected seed of. They are lesser ornamentals. It is a native also to Korea and China. The Japanese consider that two thirds of their flora is of Chinese origin, dispersed by the elements and the detritus of the Yangtze River collected on its route from where it rises in Tibet and coursing through Sichuan. This province is the prime source of hardy plants suited to our conditions and that of Japan. The leaves are variable in shape and size, but quite distinctive. From the heart shaped leaf base, 3 main veins arise and fan out. The size varies up to

10cm long by 8cm wide. The young leaves in spring are a feature. Conspicuously coloured orange to lemon before settling down to a lustrous leathery green.

At the first hint of heat in spring small dense clusters of yellowish flowers covered with silky hairs arise on the smooth brown bark. It needs trees of both sexes to produce the glossy black fruits. Even in winter it does not get lost in anonymity. It is a short-legged tree here that has a neat tidy branch network and growth habit, with round plumb reddish coloured buds set off against its smooth warm cinnamon coloured bark. In the wild it grows to 8m. here it has readily transplanted after 10 years. It is 3m in height and 1.5m in width. It germinates readily from seed after a 12 week cold stratification period. It should be more widely grown.

Lindera is a hardy member of the Laurel family, most of its relatives originate in the warmer tropics. All share a common aromatic biochemistry the source of a diverse range of products including dye, celluloid, foods, pharmaceuticals, insecticides and explosives.

Laurus nobilis

Lindera aromatics are sweeter and less pungent than that of *Laurus nobilis* the bay Laurel, the best known member of that family in Ireland. Commonly called the Sweet Bay, the Poets Laurel and the Roman Laurel. Its foliage was used extensively by the Greeks and the Romans to twine into wreaths to crown their heroes. Their reward for athletic champions and military heroes was the precursor of Olympic and Military medals. Its fruiting sprays were woven into wreaths to acknowledge great poets, hence Poet Laureate and Nobel Laureate. *Bacca laureus* (laurel berry) derived from the French bachelier gave rise to the modern term for recipients of degrees. Now we know it best through the recommendation of media chefs as a flavouring ingredient, as a topiary subject, or as a nice soap made from a fat extracted from its seeds.

Despite the evidence of knowing an old graceless 10m tall specimen growing near the ruins of a large farmhouse in North Co. Dublin, the Bay is growing at the very limit here of what it can tolerate, and is restricted to the warmer counties.

If the Mediterranean provides optimum growing conditions, Ireland offers the marginal minimum. The Bay luxuriates, flowers and berries under the clear skies, simmering heat and in the drought of Mediterranean cities. There its dull leaves absorb light, and cast shadows that offers welcome shade and suffuses the air in its vicinity with the aromatics of its volatile oils. The memory of a summertime experience may provide the motive

to grow it, but we cannot replicate that context on our breezy doorsteps. The infrequency of such conditions warrant mention in the 6 o'clock news. We enjoy ever changing light, a full catalogue of cloud types, the windiest land outside of the Aleutian Isles and wetness in all its physical forms. This is the land of the wind-sculpted tree, not the stolid topiarised specimen. We do not need dull leaved plants that absorb light. Ours is an epicentre for wind responsive vegetation and light reflective foliage. These add a dynamic to our landscape that is unattainable in the Mediterranean.

I realise one of the primary challenges of gardening is a dogged persistence to defy and if necessary spend a lifetime endeavouring to master the growing of particular plants. So the Bay Laurel now a generic term for poodle trimmed topiary specimens remain the object of desire to fulfil the swanky notions of hoteliers, hairdressers and householders.

Euonymus japonicus is a better topiary plant for both coastal and town gardens. Immune to salt, dust and wind, its glossy evergreen foliage is more vibrant, wind responsive and reflective under our moody skies.

Cinnamomum camphora

It was the sheer majesty of an unknown tree on the streets of Kyoto the old capital of Japan that introduced me to another Laurel family member. It tolerates a few degrees of frosts and so will grow in a few select locations in Ireland. It is listed in 2 gardens Fota and Illacullin, where it is of a modest size. However, if there was one tree that I would wish to grow here if I could, it would be *Cinnamomum camphora* the Camphor tree.

It was a gargantuan evergreen umbrella covering an entire street block measuring c30m across and forming a domed canopy 20m tall. It is a tree of great beauty, it has an elegant architecture matched by few other trees. Its new foliage is bronzed red, the evergreen leaves are large dark green lustrous and fragrant. When crushed a scent similar but more pungent than the Bay Laurel is emitted.

It cast a deep shade. Nothing grew beneath its canopy. It is a surface rooter, the huge plate of veinous roots seen in high relief against the bare ground. The network of roots mirrored the wheel of powerful black boughs that stretched horizontally to support the enormous canopy. Their strength and muscularity was enhanced and revealed by some careful pruning that discreetly removed drooping branches and leaves from beneath their boughs. Tree pruning is an art form in Japan. Its aesthetic goal is to reveal and enhance the essence of each tree, a universe beyond the commonplace functional crude lopping.

It is a native to frost free zones of Southern Japan and China but it has travelled well as a shade tree. It grows very well in the S.E. USA from

Georgia to Florida, where it is naturalised. The US champion tree at Darby Florida measures 67' x 103' in width. In southern California it is used as a street tree. It is tolerant of shade but is also the perfect park tree where the emphasis is on shade.

Camphor, the active ingredient of mothballs was distilled from the wood of this tree, man making use of the plants own insect repellent for his own purposes. Modern mothball are synthesised from naphthalene, itself a chemical derivative of camphor. It reawakened a childhood memory of an unappealing antiseptic smell associated with wardrobes and clothes cupboards. The wood is scented and was prized for bookcases, wardrobe, sailors' trunks, chests and it offered a practical advantage in the making of coffins.

Sassafras albidum

Sassafras albidum in terms of leaf shape and neatness of habit has the nearest resemblance to *L. obtusifolia*. This tree is native to the eastern USA from Ontario to Florida. Its full flame autumn colour is a major component of the backbone of the autumnal glory in many states and is like *Lindera* predominantly of rich butter yellow, but it can stray into orange and red shades. The foliage is beautifully aromatic and considered the most perfumed in the family. Like *Lindera*, it has smooth brown bark, a neat, columnar habit, but it can grow to 25m. Sassafras is a tree of economic importance in the USA. Oil distilled from the bark of its roots, is a flavouring used in sweets, medicines tooth paste and root beer. It is not listed as growing in any Irish garden. This is not surprising. It is listed in the Plant Finder.

It was introduced from the USA in 1633 to Europe. Plants from the eastern North American States were the first exotics introduced from the many sources of our garden plants. They have been thoroughly evaluated and most have failed. Their climate has definite seasons. Their trees cannot survive in our vacillating indecisive ones. However, many grow well on the continent. Repeatedly we see continental suppliers marketing 'new' introductions, of eastern USA origin to retailers in Ireland. These assuredly always fail or become unthrifty and do not reach their potential.

This makes visiting the many fine Arboreta on the Eastern USA frustrating. There is much to admire, you can see many trees of a size, we would not encounter in Ireland. Invariably, what you most admire, history will have shown it to dislike our conditions. Seeing it growing in an Arboretum in the USA was one of my objectives but the abiding memory of a visit to the fine Holden Arboretum in Ohio is a culinary one. I was invited to join a group of 5 businessmen who met weekly for 6.45a.m breakfast in a small home bakery and coffee shop, run by an elderly Polish couple. Their speciality

was cinnamon with everything. She shuffled, he hobbled, both were lightly dusted in flour and the air was laden in the delicate fragrant aroma of cinnamon. It revived the other twin of sensory childhood scents. I regarded it as an exotic sumptuous taste and still do. The scent and the warm sweet taste of cinnamon, is as attractive, as that of Camphor is off putting. Yet they are sourced from related species.

Cinnamomum zeylanicum

The cinnamon tree *C. zeylanicum* is a native of South India and Sri Lanka. Cinnamon is sourced from the bark. There are large plantations of it in Madagascar and other sub tropical locations. It is a much smaller tree than Camphor and has a brown papery bark.

There are records of cinnamon being traded as a commodity in the Mediterranean from the 5th century B.C. It was once more valuable than gold to the Egyptians, the only spice specified in their mummification process. A smell of cinnamon has been detected during the unwrapping of mummies. If this is a testimony to its persistence, the inclusion of its oil in perfumes to provide a linger factor is well founded. It may also explain why the powerful warm spicy sweet and tenacious scent of that café in Perrysburg Ohio, lingers in my memory.

Umbellularia californica

Umbellularia californica is an evergreen tree that is a native of west coast states of the U.S. It is hardy, but is rare in cultivation, and the most pungent member of the Laurel family.

Mary Forrest in her cataloguing of trees cultivated in Ireland lists it in only 7 of our major collections. Perhaps, Hillier's tale that 'old school' gardeners indulged in extravagant stories of prostrate dowagers overcome by its powerful aroma deters the diffident, cautious and the unadventurous. The leaves give off a volatile oil that can cause sneezing and headaches unconsciousness and skin irritation in the susceptible. Volatility is temperature dependent and is unlikely ever to be a problem in Ireland. Despite the popularity of lavenders, we have shown little potential to reproduce the Lavender fields of Provence experience.

After growing the tree, I can report no ill effects after 10 years exposure, but then again I am no dowager. All parts of the plant are aromatic. In its native place it makes a large evergreen tree up to 80-100ft in height, clothed to the ground. In our cooler climate it will be a smaller tree and would thrive in drier soils. Its habit is far more elegant than *Laurus nobilis*. It has attractive large evergreen leaves, a neat habit, but it is slow growing. Its wood is very hard, durable and beautifully grained. There is a vibrant turnery trade on the U.S. west coast. Acquire a piece, if you are lucky enough to find one.



Seed Distribution Scheme 2009

By Stephen Butler

My apologies for a late report on last spring's seed distribution, hopefully the suspense of wondering how we did was not too traumatic for you all! We ended up with a grand total of 133 requests, slightly up on last year, and our first increase in many years.

As expected, I ran out of many long before the end of the season as the seed numbers were much lower per accession, a reflection no doubt on the horrendous seed collecting season of 2008. I did my usual number crunching to see which ones were favourite: -

No. of requests

23	<i>Lilium davidii</i>
22	<i>Astrantia major</i> (ex 'Ruby Wedding')
22	<i>Clematis integrifolia</i> (dark blue)
22	<i>Thalictrum aquilegifolium</i>
22	<i>Tropaeolum speciosum</i>
21	<i>Crambe cordifolia</i>
20	<i>Cyclamen hederifolium</i> (scented)
20	<i>Myosotidium hortensia</i>
19	<i>Arum italicum</i> 'Pictum'
19	<i>Lilium lancifolium</i> 'Flore Pleno'

Ok, I know, the first and last were sent as bulbils, not seed, but it still counts!

Only 3 had no requests at all: -

1. *Heracleum lehmannianum* (a monstrous Giant Hogweed without the sting – great plant!)
2. *Hieracium* 'Chocolate Dip'
3. *Mahonia japonica*

I look forward to receiving this years donations from our hardy band of seed collectors, to the usual address as below please. I am always amazed how, despite often awful weather, our collectors manage to pull together a full and interesting list. New collectors are always welcome, just make sure the seed is labelled fully, genus and species or cultivar name too please.

Stephen Butler, Curator of Horticulture,
Dublin Zoo, Phoenix Park, Dublin 8
Comments and queries to above, or stephencbutler@gmail.com



Rain By Rae McIntyre

My husband Davy had an American aunt whose visits here always seemed to coincide with typical prolonged spells of Irish rain. She had the irritating habit of saying nasally (the rain always affected her sinuses), “I guess this place is called Blackhill because it’s always raining here.” She could have been right.

The Met. Office in London predicted last March that the British Isles would have a scorcher of a summer. A Barbecue Summer. At that time I was downright pessimistic and said to anyone who wanted to listen – although nobody actually did – that, for the third year in succession, we were in for a rain-drenched summer. I knew this because of the frogs; in the pool, just outside our house, the frogspawn in mid-February was right in the four corners as it had been in 2007 and 2008. Only when it’s in the centre are we going to have a warm, dry summer. I have absolutely no idea why this should be. It just is. Then the ash trees were very late in coming into leaf; that didn’t happen until the third week in May, long after the oak.

If the oak is out before the ash
There’ll be a summer splash
If the ash is out before the oak
There’ll be a summer soak.

The word *soak* here has an interesting etymology. It originates from the Middle English *soke* meaning to suck, presumably moisture from the air, and in *The Concise Ulster Dictionary* the meaning of *soak* is given as to dry (clothes etc.).

We’ve had a real summer splash – that is if it could be called a summer. It was the wettest July on record and I suspect August’s rainfall figures will be high because I’ve lost count of the dismal wet days we’ve had. Some wit said that rather than being a barbecue summer it was a *Barbour queue* one. Someone else said that winter ended in the last week in July and began in the first week in August. I don’t know who noted that summer in

Ireland was just winter painted green and Billy Connolly, the Scottish comedian, said that Scotland had two seasons: winter and July. I think he'll even have to amend that this year.

And yet ... during this past year I've had three Australian first cousins and their spouses staying in our house. Any time we whinged about the rain they assured us how lucky we were because, in Victoria, they've had precious little over the past ten years. Before they came here my cousin Joy's husband Swen had a borehole sunk, at great expense, on his land only to discover there was no water. He then had to sell half of his stock of beef cattle when he returned to Australia. My cousin Gordon, a civil engineer, was ready to retire but he had to go back to work to manage the setting up of one section of a desalination plant at Adelaide; water is so scarce they have to use sea water. Stewart, his older brother, said he had been extremely lucky to sell his dairy farm two years ago and retire to Brisbane; his stress levels had been soaring before that. Yet another brother Charles, who wasn't here, had only been able to salvage a tenth of the apple crop last March on his fruit farm because the remainder literally baked to brown mush on the trees when the temperature stayed for a time at 45 degrees celsius. Apparently the heavier rainfall in this country has greatly helped the apple crops.

Growth here, in rain-drenched Blackhill, has been rampant. *Magnolia stellata* 'Royal Star', a tree – some books even call it a shrub – that is designated as being suitable for small gardens has grown perceptibly larger and now dominates the main garden. *Hilliers' Manual of Trees and Shrubs* describes it as 'a slow-growing Japanese shrub, forming a compact rounded specimen usually wider than high, seldom exceeding a height of 3m.' From a rough estimate I would say it is now twice that. *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, which lives not far from the magnolia, seems to have put on a growth spurt of two metres in the past year. These and other trees and the collection of rhododendrons, which have also increased in size, now completely dominate the main garden. They have managed to change its character by a process so subtle that I wasn't fully aware of it until this year. Looking at the garden from an upstairs window of the house I now see a predominant greenness, admittedly lush, with flashes of colour this month (August) from hot-coloured crocosmias and hemerocallis on one side and pink phloxes and a few still-flowering geraniums on the other.

This part of the garden has had two borders with perennials, sometimes annuals and tender perennials like dahlias, in colour schemes that were copied from the Italian Garden in Mount Stewart: the 'hot' colours in the

eastern side and 'cool' colours to the west. Small trees, as I believed them to be, were planted as vertical accents and showed a great ignorance and lack of foresight on my part because they've grown so large. The rhododendrons were planted round the periphery and, again, I wasn't able to predict how large they would become. The majority of them came from a Scottish nursery with ten or twelve baby rhododendrons packed into a box into which a folded-up coat would fit reasonably comfortably. Unpacking this used to be the highlight of many a dreary autumn day. For some years now I have missed out on this simply because I have no room left for any more rhododendrons. Some of the so-called dwarf rhododendrons have grown nearly as tall as I am – almost 6 feet.

So changes will have to be made. Looking back, I believe that many previous changes have been made, not on a whim, but as a result of rampant plant growth and this has been caused by rain. Anyway as many gardeners have pointed out – so often that it has become a cliché – gardening is a process not an end product. There is absolutely no question of any rhododendrons being removed from the garden but I can happily dispense with many perennials either to other parts of this garden or to other people's. Damp lovers are going to a boggy border in the stackyard. Andy, if and when he gets round to it, is going to drain this border and the water will be piped into a nearby small pool which desperately needs to be relined.

Most of the damp-loving perennials are pink or mauve. When they are all removed from the main garden I am going to fill the spaces with rhododendrons that have been cramped elsewhere. The plants in the 'hot' border appeal to me much more than the pink and mauve flowered ones, so some of them will live alongside the rhododendrons. I love many species and hybrids of hemerocallis and enjoy matching them with different crocosmias. Kniphofias, tall flaunting red hot pokers, appeal to my vulgar nature although *Kniphofia* 'Percy's Pride' with its neat greenish-yellow flowers is more subdued and a perfect match for the green bells of *Galtonia viridiflora*. At Mount Stewart I love the combination of glaucous-leaved rhododendrons grown alongside *Kniphofia caulescens* with evergreen strapped leaves in a similar shade of blue-grey. I shall still retain my collection of hellebores which seem to grow surprisingly well alongside rhododendrons despite being described usually as having a marked preference for alkaline soil. Also I am fond of daffodils particularly the January-flowering ones such as 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation' and its close relation 'Crewena'. When the flowers on these are finished the withering leaves can be hidden by the fresh golden-green foliage of emerging hemerocallis.

I do not know why copious rainfall in summer should hasten the arrival of autumn but it does. In Limavady, which is about ten miles west of us, I noticed a number of trees in full autumn dress in the middle of August. Specimens of *Sorbus aria* 'Lutescens' in people's gardens have had their grey leaves yellowed, - like the grey hair of heavy smokers - for some time now, and the 'vomit trees' *Populus candicans* 'Aurora' have brown added to the hideous colour scheme of their leaves. Some herbaceous perennials here have been autumnal since late July: *Rodgersia podophylla* is reddish, *Darmera peltata* has vivid red borders on its dinner plate-sized leaves and *Paeonia veitchii* has orange-brown leaves.

Weeds have had a whale of a time in the rain and I am not winning the battle against them. In March a twenty ton lorry load of mulch (recycled council waste) was delivered here but it only covered half the cultivated areas of the garden. Weeding is much easier in those parts so I'm going to get another load when all the plant moving is completed.

In the meantime I'm trying not to think about how the increased growth of deciduous trees in the rain will result in a corresponding increase of fallen leaves to be cleared but I am cheered by the sight of rhododendrons covered in plump little flower buds.

NORTHERN GROUP PLANT SALE

Saturday 3rd OCTOBER

From 12 noon to 2 pm

The Northern Group Plant Sale will be held in
St. Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Avenue,
Belfast.

Plant deliveries from 9am.



Savanna Habitat at Dublin Zoo

By Stephen Butler

The latest development at Dublin Zoo, following our Masterplan, is our new Savanna Habitat, built during winter 2008/09, to provide a sand based (for better foot health) natural looking area for our giraffe, zebra, oryx, rhino and ostrich. A 4 metre high plateau gives exceptional viewing for visitors into the habitat.

The planting was very different to our last project creating an Asian Rainforest for our elephants. Then we wanted dense heavy planting, with screening all around to hide almost everything (including the elephants half the time). For the Savanna we aimed at keeping the planting scarce, wide spacings, but in clumps if that makes sense, trying to appear as natural as possible. 200 *Acacia - dealbata, longifolia* and *boormanii* - at 2m high will make the whole area look very different. Most plants came in small, 2500 *Anemanthele lessoniana*, 1000 *Chionochloa - conspicua, flavescens,* and *rubra*, 2000 *Stipa gigantea*, 2000 *Libertia - grandiflora* and *formosa*, as plugs or liners. Quick planting praise be. Many areas were to be viewed over, so ultimate height was an issue, only in a few spots could height be used as a screen, which we are more used to being asked for.

We did not want a too gardened appearance, other grasses used were highlight groups and drifts, for instance *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus', *Hakonechloa macra*, and *Helictotrichon sempervirens*. A few plants were used within sandstone block areas within the exhibit, large *Libertia grandiflora* (which normally nothing eats), *Iris foetidissima* (too smelly for anything to eat) and *Cortaderia selloana* 'Pumila' - a sacrificial planting for a good appearance at the official opening. All have been nibbled, or pulled out as grazed, but a few still survive where the rocks are harder to negotiate ...we live in hope and we have seeded an awful lot of *Libertia* and *Anemanthele* around the cracks and crevices too!

We continued our aim of introducing colour in places too, with *Camassia*, *Agapanthus*, specie *Gladioli*, *Dierama*, *Kniphofia*, *Chasmanthe*, *Crocsmia*, *Euryops*, and *Eucomis*. In choice places we have put in *Aloe striatula*, *Aciphylla aurea*, and *Aloe polyphylla*, and there is room for more choice plants later too. Obviously there is much scope for African

plants within this habitat, and I regard it very much as a work in progress - it is at present very exposed to wind, and is at least 3 degrees colder than the rest of the zoo. Main planting was finished in 5 hectic weeks, with much help from students from Glasnevin, and it has matured well over the summer, do come along and see!



Thérèse Murphy *An Obituary*

Thérèse joined the Munster committee over three years ago, when I was asked to take over the Chairmanship. She became our Secretary and also our Munster representative. Both roles she took on with calm enthusiasm and all items on her agenda were always attended to, quietly and efficiently. She was the main organizer of the Munster branch plant sale that was reintroduced in 2008 and her last contribution was the organization of the Munster annual summer outing on May 16th.

The visits were to Swiss Cottage at Cahir, Cahir Castle and finally to Mildred Stokes' garden at the foot of Slievenamon. As Mildred's husband had died a week or so before our intended visit, Thérèse had been in contact with her to cancel the visit. However, Mildred insisted that we should come, as it was a great help to her in dealing with her loss. Sadly, this was the last time that we saw Thérèse.

I know that Thérèse was very keen on furthering the ideals of the IGPS and her death means that our organization has lost a stalwart champion. Thérèse, we will miss you.

All our sympathies go to her husband, Dan and her children. May she rest in peace.

Martin Edwardes



The IGPS at Bloom 2007 -2009

By Petronilla Martin

Thursday morning the 28th June 2009 arriving at the Floral Marquee there was an air of excitement and an eerie silence unlike any other day leading up to Bloom 2009. Making my way to Stand 22, the IGPS Stand, I saw a white card on the chair, it took a little while for reality to dawn that Clós Éireannach had been awarded a Silver Gilt Medal – what a triumph.

How did we get this far and who were the key players? To answer these questions we have to go back to early 2007.

In February of that year we were invited to mount a Stand at Bloom in the Phoenix Park. The National Committee accepted this invitation and mounted an exhibition outlining the aims, objectives and activities of the IGPS in the form of posters and photographs. The plants were in pots and included *Solanum crispum* ‘Glasnevin’, *Athyrium filix-femina* ‘Frizelliae’, and *Viola* ‘Irish Molly’. We also had copies of ‘A Heritage of Beauty’ for sale.

When the judging took place it was mentioned that the planting was sparse and the Stand needed an improved plant display.

At the National Committee Meeting after the Show the weekend was reviewed and it was decided to update our posters and so in 2008 Carsten Asherfeld produced much-improved attractive vibrant posters. In 2008 the number of cultivars increased and were displayed in a small garden with pride of place given to a beautiful *Saxifraga* ‘Lissadell’. Despite 2008 being a very successful show for the IGPS, in that we gained a number of new members, again the exhibition failed to get an award.

In November 2008 Marco Fussy then a member of the National Committee was asked to design a garden for Bloom 2009, and within a short time he produced drawings of Clós Éireannach. Marco sourced the materials for the hard landscaping and Society members and their friends provided the plants.

On Monday 25th May returning from the IGPS A.G.M. in Antrim I found

Marco and Andrew Pendred with the floor of Liscannor stone down and working hard on the rest of the hard landscaping, including two raised beds faced with granite, a backdrop that included a window with a mirror used instead of one of the panes of glass which cleverly reflected the planting of the display. There was a small wall mounted water feature near the entrance.

On Tuesday morning the planting began. A large selection of cultivars had been assembled and included *Abutilon* 'Ashford Red', *Aconitum* 'Newry Blue', *Betula utilis* 'Trinity College', *Deutzia purpurascens* 'Alpine Magician', *Griselinia littoralis* 'Bantry Bay', *Meconopsis x sheldonii* 'Slieve Donard', *Primula japonica* 'Fiery Red', *Primula x chunglenta* Rosa 'Handle', *Ruscus aculeatus* 'John Redmond', *Saxifraga* 'Lissadell', *Viola* 'Irish Molly' and *Viola* 'Molly Sanderson'.

Larger posters were mounted and Andrew and Marco added – drainpipes, a rustic table and chairs, an iron stand with kettle and pot (black of course), boot scraper, and old garden tools. The finishing touch was placing moss between the paving stones and ferns in the drainpipes - nothing was left to chance. All was now ready for judging and the result a Silver Gilt Medal.

Many thanks to the members who manned the Stand over the last three years, and to everyone who donated or loaned plants.

It is very important that the IGPS continues to be seen at future shows and hopefully obtain the elusive Gold.

2009 Irish Landscape Conference

Date: 14th – 16th October

Venue: Tullamore Court Hotel, Tullamore, Co. Offaly

See www.heritagecouncil.ie for details or
Phone Anne Barcoe on 056 7770777



Following up *Embothrium* David Jeffrey

I have been following the correspondence relating to *Embothrium* with some personal interest. I bought my plant of *E. coccineum* in November 1971 from Shanaghans of Clonakilty, and proudly established it in our Howth garden, with its poor acid soil. There it thrived until two years ago, when it died of old age. I was proud to plant it because it was the first member of the family Proteaceae I encountered in the nursery trade.

My introduction to this family happened in Melbourne in 1962. My Ph.D. supervisor suggested that I investigate the phosphate metabolism of *Banksia ornata*, a large shrubby species endemic in South Australia. To cut a long story short, I became hooked on the family, and suggest it might be a more useful addition to the Irish garden flora than it is at present. A few genera are grown in Cork and Kerry gardens, but not widely.

A striking feature of the family is that it is part of the “Gondwana Flora”. This explains its strange World distribution, mainly in the southern hemisphere, but separated into clusters of development in South Africa, south-east Asia, Australia, through to southern and central South America. The evolving family was literally transported on different fragments of a huge plate of land, named Gondwanaland that gave rise to these continents plus Antarctica. The family adapted to two main habitat types, namely warm temperate forests, in the case of *Embothrium*, and extreme sites combining drought, low fertility and fire in South Africa and Australia.

In Australia, many of the genera have evolved to exploit the heathland niche, perhaps just penetrating dry forest. These types have two obvious features. First they can accept bushfire as a regular feature of their environment. We tried in vain to find any stand of heath that was more than 50 years old. I concluded that this is a powerful survival trait, facilitating phosphate recycling. They achieve fire survival by possessing massively woody seed follicles, which only open when exposed to high temperature.

The other feature is the possession of “Proteoid roots”, first noted in the

19th century. A more modern and useful term is “cluster roots”, as they are surface roots with very high densities of persistent root hairs. In the bush they comprise a surface halo of roots, sometimes some metres in diameter. I interpret this as a macro scale nutrient intercepting surface. The other odd thing about all their roots is that they are not mycorrhizal, a counter intuitive feature in an otherwise nutrient efficient group.

Why should we attempt to grow the Proteaceae? Gorgeous flowers and attractive evergreen leaves are the easy answers. I do not think that climate in Ireland is an especially limiting factor for the more southern species, but soil may present more difficulty. A nutrient poor, well drained, acid soil is more difficult to achieve than any other combination of factors. Pot culture is an obvious solution.

The family contains many genera, but two immediately suggest themselves to Irish gardeners. A genus that is easy to grow and obtain is *Grevillia*. Most are low, well behaved shrubs, with a long flowering period in the winter months. We grow several specimens teamed with small *Acacias*, *Correas* and a *Prostanthera* – a token heathland group.

More problematical are the *Banksias*, and more desirable for all that. Several *Banksia* species and cultivars are listed in Plantfinder (2009), but I have not encountered any in Ireland so far. I would certainly like to hear about any collections here. We grew *B. marginata*; a small coastal species from Victoria, in a cool greenhouse in TCD, but I have never had the chance in our own garden.

The Australian garden flora has undergone a revolution over the last 40 years, with many native plants common in gardens. Selections and hybrids are increasingly available. We should tap into this rich fare. A selection is now displayed in the National Botanic Garden, Canberra.

LEINSTER GROUP PLANT SALE

Sunday 11th October at 11 a.m.

The Annual Plant Sale will be held in the Hall at

Our Lady of Dolours Church (Pyramid Church) Glasnevin.



Collectors' Corner II – *Cynara cardunculus* *Peter and Nicola Milligan*

As mentioned elsewhere, most of our gardening centres on two main interests: hardy herbaceous perennials, and vegetable and fruit culture.

When growing herbaceous perennials we like to collect and trial many of the old varieties and the same approach is adopted in the kitchen garden. In this article we consider a very old favourite of the Victorian kitchen garden which we grow in a perennial bed. This plant, *Cynara cardunculus*, the cardoon, brings a truly wonderful architectural effect to a planting and provides splendid flower heads as a bonus.



While I had read about cardoons in several old texts neither Nicola nor I had seen one in the ‘flesh’ so to speak until we watched a BBC television series called *The Victorian Kitchen Garden* [1].

In this series a former head gardener, Harry Dodson, revealed the secrets used by Victorian head gardeners to grow a truly amazing range of fruit and vegetables. During one episode the cardoon made an appearance. Mr Dodson describes the plant as follows: “A Cardoon looks like a cross between a giant Celery and an Artichoke. It’s a vegetable more favoured on the continent than in Britain.” [2]

If you want a more technical description of this plant you can refer to the RHS A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants [3] which describes *Cynara* as a “Genus of about 10 species of clump-forming, thistle-like perennials found on well-drained, sunny slopes and grassland in the Mediterranean region, N.W. Africa, and the Canary Islands”. There follows a botanical description of *C. cardunculus* and the perhaps better known ‘cousin’ *C. scolymus* (the Globe artichoke).

Now I know we have a very favourable climate in our garden - the southern end of Co. Down forms a nice peninsula with Strangford Lough on one side and the Irish Sea on the other - but to say we have a climate approaching that of the Mediterranean would be stretching the point considerably.

Notwithstanding we have had no trouble growing this plant. We obtained stock from one of the stands at the annual plant fair held in the grounds of Mount Stewart and positioned the plant in one of the beds that run from the greenhouse down to the main lawn and gravel garden at the front of the house. It has been given no special treatment and has flourished as can be seen from Nicola’s photographs.

Although considered by many to be a relic of the Victorian era, references continue to crop up in gardening literature. For example in 1960 John Organ produced a book [4] with the aim of encouraging readers “to grow and bring to the table vegetable varieties not generally well known in this country”. He describes the plant as “the cardoon when well grown resembles a gigantic stick of celery” and goes on to say “the plants must be blanched before being eaten but the flavour is still extremely bitter”. He ends the section with a recipe which seems to consist of cooking the cardoon in such a way as to ensure its natural flavour is well hidden.

Following on in 1975 Arthur J. Simons, in his *New Vegetable Grower’s Handbook* [5], makes reference to the cardoon. Again the plant is compared to celery and general instructions are given for propagation, planting out, growing on (basically lots of water and food) and finally guidance on blanching.

From the culinary perspective Mr Simons says “the white stalks and thick leaf ribs can be eaten raw in salads, or they can be cooked or braised in accordance with any recipe for cooking celery”.



And more recently in 1998, reflecting a revival in growing heritage plants, Sue Strickland devotes a page to the cardoon [6]. Again general growing instructions are provided with the inevitable instructions to blanch and use in salads, soups and stews. Ms Strickland does list two varieties: Gigante di Romagna – a tall decorative plant with silver-grey architectural leaves, and Rouge d’Alger – popular in France in the last century and, as the name suggests, with red edged leaves and a red tinge to the stalk.

Given some of the descriptions concerning the preparation and subsequent consumption of the cardoon you may think that the plant is inedible.

Monty Don [7] describes how he and his wife grow cardoons but does not mention any culinary use. However in the opening pages of this book Mr Don points out that he grows an avenue of artichokes and cardoons down one side of the vegetable garden. In effect he uses these vegetables as an architectural bridge between the vegetable garden and the flower borders.

Another of our favourite authors, the late Christopher Lloyd, makes passing reference to the cardoon in his wonderful book *Gardener Cook* [8]. Given Mr Lloyd's passion for vegetable gardening, and his associated skill as a cook, it is perhaps a warning to note that he says "... although their young stems can be blanched for eating like celery I have never tried this out. But cardoons are handsome plants in a border setting, which is their place in the garden".

Most recently the plant is grown at Heligan. In their book, *The Heligan Vegetable Bible* [9], Tim Smit and Philip McMillan Browse describe the cardoon. The section devoted to the vegetable is contained in a chapter entitled 'Other Oddities' and ends with the inevitable comment "The blanched stalks from the inner leaves of the crown are used as a winter vegetable when they are boiled and served with a sauce".

It would appear that our Victorian forebears must have been desperate for vegetables if they endured the consumption of the cardoon. It is interesting to note that Mr Dodson records that "the first and last place I ever knew to grow cardoons on any scale was Stansted Park. They were popular because Lady Bessborough was French".

Normally we try to find an Irish connection with the plants we write about. Sadly, despite a lot of hunting, we cannot find an Irish cardoon. We will have to settle for growing the plant in Ireland.

So, if you relish a culinary challenge, or want some wonderful architectural effects in your borders, try growing a cardoon. And, if you find a tasty recipe for this old Victorian favourite then please let us know!

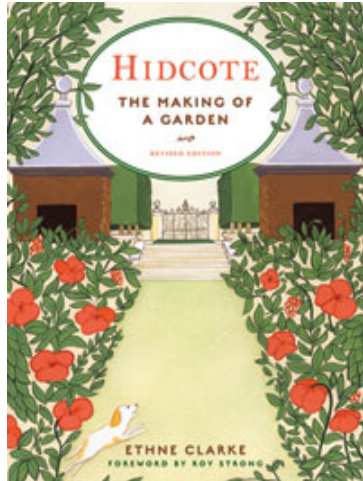
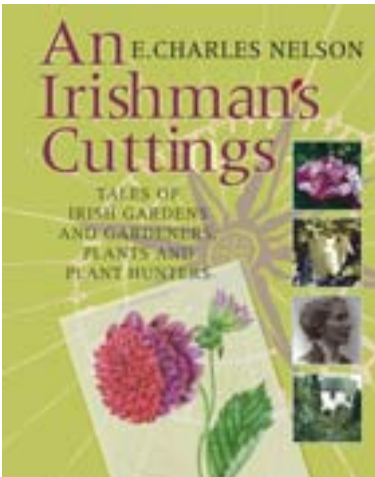
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Worth A Read by Paddy Tobin



An Irishman's Cuttings – Tales of Irish Gardens and Gardeners, Plants and Plant Hunters by E. C. Nelson.

Charles Nelson was a founding member of the IGPS and he has continued to make a significant contribution to the Society over the past twenty five years, most notably in his writing. This latest contribution of his is simply outstanding which is a surprising comment really as this book contains no new material but is a selection from the articles Charles has contributed to The Irish Garden Magazine since 1992.

Perhaps, it is the fact that the articles have been gathered together in book format which appeals to me; magazines are so temporary, even disposable, but a book has that feeling of being more permanent and is certainly a better medium in which to present work which is worthwhile and which we would wish to have available to us for easy reference in the future.

Let me nail my colours to the mast. I admire Charles Nelson's writings greatly. His choice of material, attention to detail, vigorous research, obsession with

accuracy and correctness all presented in a most pleasant style make all his work a pleasure to read. That he has so regularly directed his talents to material, which is of the essence of IGPS interests, has made him the author who most surely must appeal greatly to our members.

I have been trying over the past few days to put my finger on what it is about Charles' writing which so appeals to me. I believe it is, quite simply, that he tells a story well. He is enthusiastically interested in plants, their origins, the people associated with them, the story of how they came to be with us and all the little interesting background details which add layers of enjoyment to a plant. It is about provenance, I suppose. I don't recall him writing about a plant in simply scientific technical terms though I have no doubt he does so wearing another of his many horticultural hats. For him, every plant has a connection, a story, something which adds further interest than its simple beauty. I'm beginning to think he is a bit of a plant gossip, really, as there is never a plant without a story. This is what makes treasures of our plants; the fact that they have associations; that they have significance beyond their own intrinsic worth and Charles Nelson seems to simply adore this aspect of horticulture and is the master of presenting his vast knowledge and enthusiasm to us in a wonderfully enjoyable and inspiring manner.

I haven't told you what is in the book, but the title does that for me and all I need to add is that I have made an almost permanent dent in the armchair cushion since receiving it as I have read it without stopping. It is an absorbing and wonderful read. This is a good recommendation for material all of which I have read previously. No IGPS member should be without this book as it informs and serves the aims of the Society perfectly. I should add, as it would be terribly remiss of me not to, that the illustrations are excellent. Charles has sought out a wonderful selection to illustrate the book and many of the illustrations are stories in their own right – but that's another story for Charles to tell us. I can only wish this book every success and hope that Charles and Collins Press will co-operate again to produce a further volume of Charles' articles.

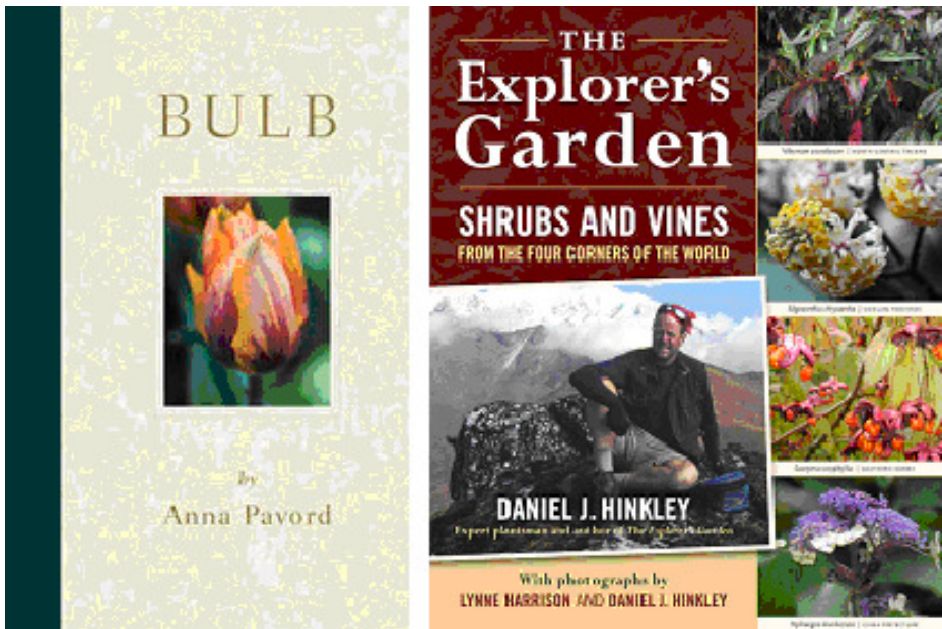
[An Irishman's Cuttings – Tales of Irish Gardens and Gardeners, Plants and Plant Hunters, E. C. Nelson, The Collins Press, Cork, 2009, HB, 224pp, €29.99, ISBN: 978-184889-005-3]

Hidcote, The Making of a Garden by Ethne Clarke

The title doesn't do justice to the range of material covered in this book. Of course, we are given the story of the creation of the garden by Major Lawrence Johnson but there is far more besides. The author gives an interesting background family history, a good insight into the Major's personality, his interaction with other well-known gardeners of the time, an account of his garden, Serre de la Madonne in the south of France now a French national

monument and the story of the handing over of the garden to the National Trust.

The author has researched her subject intensively and her treatment has great depth and interest as a result. This book goes well below the surface and presents a fascinating insight into this most influential of English gardens, one recognised as representing the essential English garden. This book is an update of the original 1989 edition and a very worthwhile read, I really enjoyed it. [*Hidcote, The Making of a Garden, Ethne Clarke, Norton, London, 2009, HB, 176pp, £25, ISBN: 978 0 393 73267 2*]



Bulb by Anna Pavord

An excellent author and an outstanding photographer are surely the essential ingredients of a good book. Here we have Anna Pavord, a renowned gardening author with many excellent books to her credit, and Andrew Lawson, an award-winning photographer, who has illustrated many books, combining to produce a book of great appeal.

The book covers a selection of about six hundred bulbs, the author's favourites, and a selection which will give the reader a good introduction to a wide range of bulbs. Each entry gives some of the history of the bulb, background information on its name, how it came to be introduced into our gardens and, very importantly, how best to grow it. Advice is given on how best to use each bulb in the garden and the important information is summarised in an "at-a-glance" section which accompanies each entry.

Gardeners who have taken an intense interest in a particular genus may find the entries less than required but the book aims at the gardener with a general interest in bulbs who wants to grow a wide selection and as such it fulfils its brief excellently. The book itself is beautifully produced and of the highest quality.

[Bulb, Anna Pavord, Mitchell Beazley, London, 2009, HB, 544pp, £30, ISBN: 978 1 84533 41]

The Explorer's Garden, Shrubs and Vines from the Four Corners of the World by Daniel J. Hinkley

This is a follow-up book to Dan Hinkley's 1999 "The Explorer's Garden, Rare and Unusual Perennials" and while the wait for this book was rather long it is now a joy to have it to hand at last.

Dan Hinkley has travelled to the four corners of the world in search of new plants and in this book he reports on those which have appealed to him and which have succeeded in the garden. On several occasions he travelled in the company of Sue and Bleddyn Jones of Crug Farm in north Wales. I mention this as many readers will be familiar with the extraordinary range of plants available at Crug Farm and this will give an idea of the range being described in this book. Many of the plants will be familiar, a testament to our good fortune that the Irish climate allows us to grow an eclectic range, while others will be new to us and ones for us to search out.

The enthusiasm of the author is infectious, his descriptions detailed and his writing style appealing, making this a most informative and enjoyable book. It might, however, have detrimental effects on one's wallet, as you will surely wish to grow many of the plants he describes.

[The Explorer's Garden, Shrubs and Vines from the Four Corners of the World, Daniel J. Hinkley, Timber Press, London, 2009, HB, 352pp, £30, ISBN: 978-0-88192-918-8]



A Delight of Dierama

Gary Dunlop

What better collective noun, could one conjure up for dierama, than delight? This relatively small genus of bulbous plants hails largely from South Africa where the plants are commonly known as the Hairbells, because of the fine hair like threads from which the flowers hang, though this is often mis-spelt as Harebells in publications. **(Batten 2005)** In the British Isles they are sometimes called Wand Flowers or more frequently, and romantically, ‘Angel’s Fishing Rods or Venus’s Fishing Rods’. These are probably variations on ‘Fairy’s Fishing-rod’, the name given them by Fredrick Burbidge. **(Fitzherbert 1914)**

Few would guess from the overall appearance of dierama that they are members of Iridaceae, the iris family. From tufts of evergreen grass-like foliage, slender wiry stems emerge, from which clusters of bell shaped flowers dangle on even finer thread-like short lateral shoots. The majority of species are indigenous to South Africa, but the geographical range of the genus runs much further north with several species occurring at relatively high altitude in tropical East Africa, in Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique. A separate occurrence of one species in Ethiopia, echoes the distribution of the genus Kniphofia.

Dierama pendulum was the first dierama to be discovered by the Swedish botanist Carl Thunberg, in 1772. **(Hilliard & Burtt 1991)** This species has the most southerly range of the genus, so it is not surprising that it was the first to be found, as the botanical exploration of South Africa began around Cape Town. The northward exploration of South Africa concentrated initially on the western side, where no dierama grow, which would account for the delay in other species being discovered. The newly-discovered plant was subsequently named as *Ixia pendula*, in 1782, by the younger Linnaeus. **(Hilliard & Burtt 1991)** This plant was transferred into the genus *Sparaxis*, in 1812, by Kerr-Gawler in the notes accompanying the illustration of *Sparaxis tricolor*. **(Ker-Gawler 1812)**

Interest in dierama was established in the late 19th Century in Northern Ireland. The Daisy Hill nursery listed both *Sparaxis pendula* and *Sparaxis pulcherrima* in 1897 in the 23rd Catalogue of Hardy Plants. Dierama may have been listed earlier, but few earlier catalogues survive. By 1912, the nursery was tentatively acknowledging the change in genus name but listing only the one species *Sparaxis (Dierama)*

pendula, but also listing a white form of it, in the Nursery Home Grown Seed list. By 1914-5 catalogue no.67 only listed *Sparaxis (Dierama) pulcherrima*, which might indicate that demand was temporarily outstripping the supply of *Dierama pendula*. By 1919-20 three forms of *Sparaxis (Dierama) pendula* were listed, presumably the original pink form of the species as obtained, a white form and a palest pink form '*pallida*'. The Daisy Hill Nursery never seems to have increased the range of *Dierama* beyond this or attempted any hybridisation, though '*pallida*' may have been a cross between the other two forms. The same three forms were listed well into the 1920s.

The manager of the Slieve Donard Nursery, the other leading nursery in Northern Ireland during this period, developed an interest in *dierama*. According to Leslie Slinger, writing in 1957, his father William first '*obtained corms of this lovely plant some 35 years ago*', which would be about 1922. **(Slinger 1957)** However, Charles Nelson considers the origins of some of the earliest cultivars, named by William Slinger, to be rather earlier. **(Nelson & Deane 1993)**. The nursery first got an RHS Award of Merit in 1921 for *Dierama pulcherrimum var. album*. There is no record as to where this white form originated, but it may have been descended from the plant grown at Kew.

The 'Donard', as the nursery was commonly known, raised and named over 30 cultivars over the subsequent decades and was still selling *dierama* when it closed in the early 1970's. The early cultivars were all supposedly different coloured forms of *Dierama pulcherrimum*, with some variation in height and habit, and also an increased flower size from the basic species. It is likely that the Donard must have obtained several different forms of *Dierama pulcherrimum* in order to develop the range of colours and forms which they gave cultivar names to, mostly based on bird names. However, it would be surprising if William Slinger, having developed an interest in the genus, did not extend the range of *Dierama* grown by obtaining the limited range of *dierama* which Daisy Hill offered.

Very few illustrations survive of the early Donard cultivars, but the RHS Trials department at Wisley have five botanical illustrations of *dierama* cultivars which gained Awards of Merit. They are *Dierama* 'Heron' 1923, 'Kingfisher' 1924, 'Windhover' 1928, 'Skylark' 1934 and 'Falcon' 1938. Judging from the botanical illustration, it is unlikely that *Dierama* 'Heron', which is estimated to have been raised about 1915 **(Nelson 1993)**, is in fact a form of *Dierama pulcherrimum*. The flowers open too widely for that species, and the tepals are proportionately short in comparison to the length of the anthers. When

compared with Auriol Batten's illustrations in the monograph, the illustration shows a plant, which more closely resembles *Dierama latifolia*, a species which would not have been known by name at the time, but is known to occur in the deep wine colour of *Dierama* 'Heron', *Dierama* 'Heron' was also noted for being tall, which again is a characteristic of *Dierama latifolia*.

Dierama 'Kingfisher' looks to be correct for the species *Dierama pulcherrimum*, but the appearance of both *Dierama* 'Windhover' and *Dierama* 'Skylark' could be considered to show some hybrid influence. *Dierama* 'Windhover' was reputed to reach a height of 9 feet (2.7m), which is much taller than the normal range of the species *Dierama pulcherrimum*, but just above the maximum for the species *Dierama latifolia*. This would add further weight to the conjecture that the early Donard cultivars were not exclusively raised from the one species, *Dierama pulcherrimum*. There is sufficient variation in these early illustrations to raise doubt that only the single species *Dierama pulcherrimum* was involved in the breeding of the Donard cultivars. A degree of hybridity would more readily explain the variation that was achieved. The photograph of an unidentified cultivar that accompanies C M Bailey's brief account of some of the Donard cultivars, would again support this thesis, as the plant illustrated is quite different from *Dierama pulcherrimum*. (Bailey 1925).

An historical comment, presumably written much later by Leslie Slinger, is reproduced by Nelson: "*Originally Dierama pulcherrimum, or Sparaxis pendula to quote its previous name, was a constant species but variations in colour and shape of flower began to appear after generations had been raised by seed.*" (Nelson 1993 p.45) This comment not only indicates some confusion between two species, or a presumption of synonymy, but is based on an assumption that the plants first grown by his father were a single species. The presumption, that successive inbreeding of a single species would produce a significant variation in flower colour and shape or in the height and habit of the flower stems, is highly questionable.

The main impetus in the Donard Nursery breeding programme came after a small red flowered species *Dierama pumilum* was obtained 'prior to 1939' from a lady in South Africa. It was used to hybridise with the stock of dierama which the Donard were already growing. This plant was subsequently identified as *Dierama dracomontanum*, after the species had been established in 1988! What is now established as *Dierama pumilum* is a small yellow flowered species. (Hilliard & Burt 1991) Seed of a small yellow flowered species was sent at the same time, but the seedlings only flowered once before they died.

The hybrids between *Dierama dracomontanum* and *Dierama pulcherrimum* gave rise to an intermediate sized group of cultivars, named after the Shakespearean characters in a Midsummer Night's Dream. At least some of these smaller cultivars, such as D. 'Iris', D. 'Puck' and D. 'Titania' inherited the fairly vigorous clumping habit of the smaller parent. D. 'Iris' represented a distinct colour break as it was a pale lavender colour, or medium Bishop's Violet, as the pre-war RHS colour chart termed it. What seems today to be rather vague terms for colours, which were used to describe the Donard dierama, turn out to be quite specific colour references to the original pre-war version of the RHS colour chart. **(Horticultural Colour Chart 1 & 2 1938 & 1941)**

Surprisingly, no other nursery in the British Isles seems to have taken a serious interest in the genus and for half a century it was a speciality of the Slieve Donard Nursery until it closed in 1974, after the death of Leslie Slinger. In the days before garden centres and container-grown plants, plants which took 4-5 years to flower and promptly died back, albeit temporarily, when transplanted from the open ground, were not likely to be regarded as worthwhile by many nurseries. Vegetative propagation of dierama cultivars is very slow and certainly not economic, though micro-propagation has radically altered the situation in recent years. Even with the advent of container grown plants, a 4-5 year investment for flowering dierama, is not economic when compared with many other herbaceous or bulbous plants, which are of marketable size in 1-2 years. By apparent bulk, such plants clearly seem to the plant buying public to be much better value for money than the few grassy leaves of a dierama in a pot.

Conrad Leighton in his book on Cape plants devotes a chapter to 'Cape Blooms Abroad'. His comments on Dierama, written for a South African readership, are worth quoting at length.

"My biggest surprise in Stratford-on-Avon was seeing Ariel, Miranda, Oberon and Titania, not as sprites and fairies on the stage of the Stratford Memorial Theatre, but as magic wand flowers of the Veld exhibited at a Warwickshire horticultural show on the grassy banks of the Avon. Ariel and Oberon are fuchsia purple, Miranda and Titania rosy pink. They were hybrids from dierama seed which reached Ireland as a gift from South Africa and were grown in Co Down where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea. They were first raised by Leslie S. Slinger whose father first grew corms of our Dierama pulcherrimum nearly 40 years ago. Both father and son have achieved notable successes in hybridisation from generation after generation of seedlings. Bird names were given to the first new forms of dierama and the Royal Horticultural Society awards of

merit were gained for Heron, Kingfisher, Raven, Plover, Windhover and Skylark. Our arid veld and the Emerald Isle have vastly different climates, but the dieramas prefer a rich moisture-retaining soil and are very much at home there. (Leighton 1960)

Doubt has been cast on whether any of the Donard cultivars still exist. One reason suggested is that dierama self-seed into the clumps, but this would not be a very common occurrence as the weight of the seed pods normally bend the stems well clear of the clumps. A more compelling reason is related to the limited life span of the corms and clumps of dierama. They require lifting and splitting and the removal of the old dead basal corms on a regular basis, about every 5-10 years, depending on the rate at which the corms clump up. Corms around the perimeter of a clump will perform better than those corms at the centre, which will in successive generations become smaller, and stop flowering. One other underlying reason is that many of the plants sold as cultivars by the Donard were apparently very similar looking seedlings, as the cultivars were very slow to increase vegetatively. This practice is not unknown in the nursery trade when demand, which may be short lived, outstrips supply. It is thus not possible to be absolutely certain whether some of the original cultivars still exist. Some plants of good provenance, which match the descriptions still exist, and even if they cannot be guaranteed to be correct, they do at least give a good indication of what the true Donard cultivars were like.

A set of all the surviving Donard cultivars at the nursery was given to Castlewellan Arboretum when the nursery closed in the early 1970's. Regrettably, all were subsequently lost, though not before a selection of corms, of most of them, had been obtained by a local Co Down horticulturist Crosbie Cochrane. He discovered that all the corms had been lifted and potted up, to enable the perennial weeds to be eradicated from the bed in which they were growing. The names of the various cultivars had already been lost or mixed up, but he has kept the corms, in cultivation for over 30 years, and moved them with him, when he moved to a new house and garden. It has been possible, from the available descriptions and colour references, to identify some of the cultivars with reasonable confidence. Those that have been identified are *Dierama* 'Avocet', 'Bullfinch', 'Flamingo', 'Iris', 'Merlin', 'Puck', 'Redwing', and 'Titania'. *Dierama* 'Avocet' was never released commercially, but was distinct in having purple flashes over a pink base, similar to the much-prized pattern in virused tulips. The writer was generously given a corm of each of these cultivars, by Crosbie Cochrane, which significantly augmented the collection of Donard cultivars with reasonable provenance. The writer obtained a corm of *Dierama* 'Blackbird' from the late Drs Bill and Gretta Lennon, some 20

years or more ago. The plant was subsequently verified as being correct by Philip Wood. It has proved to be very slow to increase vegetatively and does not come true from seed even when self-pollinated. The resulting seedlings vary considerably in height and colour, thus confirming its mongrel parentage. The name *Dierama* 'Blackbird', has been much misused in commerce in recent years, with a variety of seedling *Dierama* sold under the name. The situation was not helped by a dull pink seedling of *Dierama pulcherrimum* being named as *Dierama* 'Blackbird' by Ray Brown, which was illustrated in Plants magazine. **(Van der Werff 2000)**

Like so many plants from South Africa, dierama come from areas of summer rainfall, they like moisture in the growing season, particularly in mid-summer when they flower, but are mostly used to dry conditions in winter and resent waterlogged conditions so will not grow well in heavy or clay soils. They will grow quite satisfactorily in light free draining soils, which do not dry out in summer. *Dierama* do not seem to be particular as to the Ph of the soil, they are tolerant of an alkaline soil though a neutral to acid soil is likely to suit them best, particularly as some species occur naturally in peaty areas in the wild. **(Rix 1988)** They do not need a rich soil but will not resent a little feeding, periodically. However, it is more important to periodically reinvigorate clumps of corms by digging them up, splitting them, and removing the old dead basal corms. The corm should then be replanted between 50-100mm deep, depending on the size of the corm, and 50mm or more apart to allow for each corm to clump up, without overcrowding its neighbours.

When planted in the open ground, rather like bluebells, *Dierama* gradually bury themselves deeper into the ground. They do however employ a rather different method. Each year a large white fleshy tapering root develops downwards from the corm, called a contractile root. When this root dies back it shrivels to a narrow wiry root and in the process it pulls the corm deeper into the soil. New corms form on top of or to the side of the older ones, and when clumps become overcrowded the new corms gradually reduce in size and stop flowering. The evergreen foliage is initially upright but can become lax with age. The older leaves die back but do not rot quickly and can accumulate making the clump very congested. The old leaves are best periodically removed, for if left to accumulate they can eventually almost choke the centre of the plant, depriving new foliage of light, and will eventually cause the clump to collapse. Their old leaves are remarkably tough and are best cut off close to ground level, rather than trying to pull them out, which can result in cut hands or damaging or even the removal of the growth point. The collapse and apparent death of an old congested

clump is not as disastrous as it may appear. After removal of the dead and dying foliage, the corms should be lifted, split and replanted. It is the peculiar characteristic of dierama that they die back when transplanted. This may well account for many gardeners believing that they cannot grow dierama, or that they have killed them when transplanting or dividing them. All that is needed is patience, and preferably a marker in the ground where the corms have been planted. Hilliard & Burtt question the conflicting advice as to when the best time to transplant dierama is. The implicit advice of the Donard nursery is that the corms can be transplanted in autumn or spring. This reflects the *modus operandi* of a traditional nursery where the plants are grown in the open ground and dispatched, when normally dormant. Several plantsman or gardeners recommend lifting and dividing clumps immediately after flowering. **(Robinson 1933) (Fitzherbert 1914)** The truth of the matter is that dierama corms can be transplanted at any time of the year. However, the timing will affect the re-growth of the corms. Basically, the re-growth or re-generation of dierama corms is dependant on soil temperature. Whether moved in autumn or spring, the corms will not start into re-growth until the soil is warm enough, usually in late spring. Within limits, the warmer the soil, the more quickly will re-growth occur. Transplanting dierama, just after they have flowered, when the soil is warm, enables the corms to die back and re-start into growth before autumn. Once the corms have started into growth and the leaves have appeared above ground, they will probably continue to grow, even when the soil temperature has fallen below the temperature critical to trigger re-growth, but at lower temperatures growth will cease, and this will vary with species. Thus from the gardeners point of view summer transplanting just after flowering, as recommended by Robinson and Fitzherbert, is usually best.

One way of speeding up the re-growth process, is to transplant the corms into pots which can be brought inside to warmer temperatures. Care must be taken not to disturb the roots too much when planting out the forced corms in the garden. The time required for dierama to flower again after re-planting is related to the overall size of the plant. The small species will usually flower much more quickly than the larger ones. Some small species can be transplanted in early spring, and given warm enough conditions will flower the same summer. The larger species will take an additional year to flower. When corms are transplanted, they usually start to make offset corms when re-growing so that once flowering starts, there will usually be a number of flowering stems which will increase annually until the plant is in decline. Dierama are quite amenable to being grown in pots, though deep pots, such as long toms are preferable.

Dierama are easily raised from seed, which is usually produced in abundance. Seeds can be planted directly in the open ground, and germination and some initial growth often takes place in early autumn before the onset of winter. Alternatively seeds can be sown indoors when ripe in late summer or in spring. Once the young plants have reached flowering size, corm disturbance will result in die back of the foliage. The mature corms of dierama will withstand being dried out for a short period, though juvenile corms will not.

Dierama are attractive plants, which should be much more widely grown, especially the larger species and cultivars, which are easier to grow than some of the species. Dierama are truly one of the delights of the garden.

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Regional Reports

LEINSTER

Saturday 13th June Leinster Annual Summer Lunch

The Annual Summer Lunch was held in the garden of Corinne and Richard Hewat at Rathmichael Lodge, Ballybride Road, Shankill, Co Dublin.

It was a beautiful sunny day so all the colours were in full glow in this very lovely garden. Roses were growing in abundance, Corinne has a great love of Roses both old and new, but the older ones, though sometimes more difficult, are her special favourites. *R.* 'Tuscany Superb', *R.* 'Fantin-Latour' *R.* 'Madame Alfred Carrière', delicately coloured and scented, *R.* 'Charles de Mills' like a ballerina's skirt, and so many more.

Many of the roses are underplanted with *Nepeta* and hardy *Geraniums*. An enormous *Rosa* 'Adélaïde d'Orléans' fully in flower completely covered a large apple tree.

The herbaceous borders on either side of paths that went under rose arches were well filled with *Persicaria*, *Campanula*, *Veronicastrum*, *Phlox*, and an unusual dark stemmed *Thalictrum flavum*. A plant that was a great favourite with the group was *Silene fimbriata*, also receiving admiring glances were *Galega officinalis*, and *Cephalaria gigantea*, to mention just a few.

A good specimen of *Celmisia* 'David Shackleton' was in healthy vigour as was a large stand of the pale pink *Watsonia pyramidata*. Overall these borders are softly coloured and looked wonderful in the sunshine. Hidden behind them was a vegetable garden.

There was a good attendance and it was a very social occasion, strolling through the garden or sitting and admiring the view or eating the lovely lunch provided by Ricky Shannon & Co. This occasion is just what a summer garden visit should be and it is with grateful thanks to our hosts Corinne and Richard for giving us such a day.

Janet Wynne

NORTHERN

August 6th A Visit to Lisburn Castle Gardens

As we gathered under the Lord Robert's (founder of the Lord Roberts Workshops) oak planted in September 1903, we were confronted by a shepherd, shepherdess and a sheep. I thought the sheep was delightful and if anyone ever remembers the name of the plant used, I could be tempted to do a spot of copying.

Our enthusiastic guide, Emma Briggs, began by explaining that 5 years ago this whole area had been a wilderness with dark and gloomy areas of unsavoury reputation. With a 50% input from the Heritage Lottery Fund, this was now an open family area where people picnic, ride their bicycles, stroll and walk their dogs.

As with all public parks, Lisburn Castle Garden has the usual collection of monuments and mementoes. The War memorial laden with names, many still connected to the area, and near-by is the elegant Egret Fountain (herons to be exact). This is mentioned in a letter of 1890 but who gave it, and why, is unknown. The Wallace fountains were originally erected in France to provide clean drinking water. This one has returned to Lisburn. Richard Wallace died in 1890 and, in 1892, public subscription raised the Wallace Memorial, now kept graffiti free by vigilance. The Crimean bronze cannon, complete with the Russian double eagle visible to the agile, stands on the site of the old manor house.

In 1609 Faulk Conway bought 66,000 acres for £500 and built a house. In 1641, the house was rebuilt and the 1650 map shows Lisburn Castle as an E-shaped building, however in April 1707 the Castle burnt down and appears to have been abandoned immediately. The site was cleared by throwing the debris into the terraced gardens, and then abandoned, grown over and forgotten. The site of the house became a public park.

The site has been cleared and opened up, the ha-ha and a bowling green have been restored, beds planted and there is a wonderful water feature of a very large red granite ball gently turning on a small flow of water. The challenge was there and it took the concentrated efforts of several males to slow the ball, such is the force of water.

While clearing a particularly unsavoury area of dense vegetation a wall with musket loops was discovered, suggesting an 17th century defended house at what was then the only crossing point of the Lagan between Belfast and Dublin, all around was marshland.

In 2003 excavations began and the garden that was revealed was beyond expectations. The gardens ran from the current Market Square to the River Lagan, about half the gardens survive to-day, including the terraces.

The garden had been constructed between 1630 and 1650, and was in the symmetric Dutch style. Over 10,000 objects have been recovered, including play dolls, gaming tokens and pottery from all over the world. The Perron, under its double staircase is the only one in Ireland, it was known locally as “The Dungeons”. Finds suggested this was a potting shed.

There are four terraces and the top terrace was for the ladies to walk. At the eastern end is a “gazebo”, with a tiled floor and three complete bread ovens. A fake adorns the western end. This terrace ends in a fine turret that is grand and defensive together. The bottom terrace is an orchard and fish pond. On this level, human remains were found, probably from the 1641 rebellion.

Originally, the terraces would have been tiled, expensive Dutch tiles have been found, today this effect is achieved by the use of different stones.

The planting is simple and reflects the original planting, clipped box edging and espalier fruit trees. Large delph and glass pots would have decorated the terraces. To those of us used to enthusiastic herbaceous borders and tumbling creepers this was stark but, though I found all that bare soil vaguely disturbing, the overall effect was calming and restful.

P.S. There is a ghost in the gardens.

Marion Allen

September 5th Garden Visits in Co. Tyrone

Nos 55 and 53 Syerla Road are both country gardens situated in the lush rolling landscape around Dungannon, truly the countryside of “Tyrone amongst the bushes”.

Valerie and Jim Robinson’s 2 acre garden at No 55 has been developed from a field over a period of 15 years with many stunning features and sympathetic planting. The front garden slopes down towards the road and the eye is immediately drawn to a stand of *Sorbus*, the bright orange berries contrasting with a golden carpet of heathers, closely clipped and producing the “cloud” effect so favoured by designers. To the right was one of two stunning urn sculptures crafted by Valerie from the slates of an old building and placed strategically, to be viewed from an arbour seat near the vegetable garden.

I commented on several handsome specimens.....an Acer and a *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' to be told that these were rescued from the £1 stall at a sale. Beside the Acer, a *Tropaeolum speciosum* already dripping with its bright blue fruits, scrambles through a conifer.

Close by, a small pond is surrounded by Rodgersias, astilbes and irises and beside the seat by the pond a honeysuckle provides scent for those who want to linger. Next we come to the vegetable garden, which is Jim's domain. As a series of raised beds, it provides most of the family's fruit and vegetables with some to spare.

The striking feature of this garden is the abundance of sitting areas and in the upper lawn area there are no fewer than six positions to take full advantage of the sun and of the superb planting schemes. Amongst the many choice shrubs we noted some lovely hydrangeas in full autumn glory, the intensely fragrant *Viburnum x carlcephalum* and *Itea* with its elegant green tassels. Nestling in a sheltered corner was a healthy specimen of *Meconopsis napaulensis*.

As we wandered back through Valerie's garden to visit No 53, we were intrigued by the pungent smell from a carpet of pink flowers, which were identified as *Phuopsis stylosa*. This low- growing hardy perennial comes from the Caucasus Mountains and flowers continually from spring to late autumn. Dr. Church's garden at No53 is a garden of rooms with densely packed herbaceous borders and interesting specimens of trees and shrubs. Many of us identified closely with the rows and boxes of choice plants bought at sales and gardens and waiting space to be planted.

In the garden room to the right of the house were some fine specimens of acers in particular an *Acer griseum*, the paper bark maple as well as a lovely *Prunus serrula*. Here also was a striking bed of *Monarda* with its showy flowers and aromatic foliage and nearby clear yellow rudbeckias lit up the fading summer borders. As we meandered through the garden, we spotted many gems---a fine bonsai specimen of larch; an *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku' in a large pot beside the door; *Rosa* "Stanwell Perpetual" with some of its dainty little buds ready to open. We lingered in a small garden room under a huge spreading *Prunus*, probably 'Kanzan', and imagined the riot of spring colour of the surrounding rhododendrons and azaleas.

Our visit to these two gardens, side by side, was a delight on three counts----- a beautiful day at the end of a prolonged period of rain; the large number of butterflies observed from painted ladies to peacocks to spotted woods and last but not least, the enthusiasm of the Robinsons and Dr. Church for their gardens and plants.

Yvonne Penpraze



Who was Mary Sealy?

In the course of my research on *Nerine bowdenii* I came across a letter by that eminent plantsman E.B. Anderson in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* for 1963. Anderson was writing about the varieties of *N. bowdenii*, as he was at that time something of an authority on bulbous plants, and had introduced *N. bowdenii* 'Quinton Wells' to gardeners a few years before. In his letter he mentions another variety to which he gave the name 'Mary Sealy'. This cultivar he said had "flowers much darker than the type" and was sent to him from Ireland. He named the cultivar after the owner of the garden and I assume that the garden was in Ireland.

All this might seem to be a rather abstruse piece of history except for the fact that there is a form of *N. bowdenii* in cultivation today, wrongly named 'Hera', which has distinctive flowers with narrow tepals that are darker pink than typical *N. bowdenii*. It has also been referred to as the "Irish clone" and is said in Bob Brown's catalogue (Cotswold Garden Flowers) to be the most widespread clone in Ireland. At present, other than its incorrect identification with 'Hera', which is a cross between *N. bowdenii* and *N. sarniensis*, we do not have a name for this cultivar. At the Hardy Nerine study day held by the RHS in October 2007 it was agreed that this cultivar is so outstanding that it needed a name.

It is my hope that by bringing it to the attention of Irish gardeners someone might be able to let me know, although it is now over 45 years since Anderson wrote his letter, who Mary Sealy was and where she gardened. It would be even more fascinating if someone has or knows of plants of this variety of *N. bowdenii* that could be traced back to Mary Sealy, which would make it possible for its relationship with the "Irish clone" to be established and we might be able to give it a proper name at last.

John David
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Nerine bowdenii in Irish Gardens: A short history and a conundrum By Charles Nelson

There are around twenty three different species of *Nerine*, all native in southern Africa. One is hardier than the others and this is the one that is very familiar in Irish gardens, its vivid flowers making a splash every autumn. *Nerine bowdenii* (variously also called giant nerine, Jersey lily, Pink spider lily) is rare in the wild being restricted now to a few scattered localities at high altitudes in the Drakensberg in South Africa; its range was more extensive in the past but over-collecting has extinguished it in some places. The flowers are in various shades of pink. Its stamens do not project beyond the curling petals. The strap-shaped leaves can be present most of the year, while the flowering stems rise, one stem per bulb, between September and November in the northern hemisphere.

William Edward Gumbleton (nicknamed “Gumbo”) of Belgrove, near Cobh, County Cork, was probably the first to cultivate this plant in Ireland, and must also have been one of the first anywhere outside South Africa to grow it. The species was discovered in the late 1800s, and introduced to cultivation about 1898 by Athelstan Hall Cornish-Bowden (1871–1942), one-time Surveyor-General of the Cape Colony.

Cornish-Bowden sent the bulbs to his mother at Newton Abbot in Devon. Mrs Cornish-Bowden must have passed bulbs to Veitch’s nursery in Exeter, and she also sent some to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (for much more information about the history of *Nerine bowdenii*, see Dr John David’s excellent account in www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/plant_groups/NerineStudyDay.pdf). “Gumbo” got it too from “a leading nurseryman in the west of England” (surely also Veitch’s of Exeter) and early in 1904 he wrote about the plant in *The Gardeners’ Chronicle*, calling it *Nerine excellens major tardiflora*. It had “very large flowers of a pleasing shade of light pink, with a darker line down the centre of each petal”.

Gumbleton also provided specimens to Kew, one (dated 14 November 1904) becoming the type specimen for the species’ name (preserved in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), and *Nerine bowdenii* from his garden was the basis also for the colour plate published in *Curtis’s Botanical Magazine* (tab. 8117,

1907) as well (it seems, although this is not explicit) as an earlier plate, painted by H. G. Moon, issued in *Flora and Sylva* 3 (May 1905). He probably grew this species in one of his glasshouses along with other Cape bulbs, so it is not clear when *Nerine bowdenii* was first tried outdoors in Ireland. In *Irish Gardening* 14 (October 1919), the following was published (it was signed “B”):

Nerine Bowdeni as an outdoor plant is quite a recent feature in gardens, but one that has come to stay. Judging from our experience so far, it is quite as amenable to cultivation in the open as *Amaryllis Belladonna*, and enjoys the same conditions. Generally speaking, the *Crinum*s, *Amaryllis* and *Nerine* require warm, well drained soil and sunshine to ripen the bulbs sufficiently to flower well. ... A native of S. Africa, *Nerine Bowdeni* can now be purchased cheaply, and will be welcomed by many who wish for interesting perennials with beautiful flowers. The flowers are pink, with a darker line down each segment, and are produced in umbels of from 6 to 12 flowers, produced at the end of a tall stem from 18 inches to 2 feet high. The note was accompanied by one of Miss Elsie Miller’s photographs, almost certainly taken at Glasnevin. There was also a report of *Nerine bowdenii* in full flower in mid-November 1922 at Glasnevin in a border adjacent to the plant houses (*The Gardeners’ Chronicle* 72: 339). These plants grew and bloomed better than ones kept in pots, it stated.

When I was preparing my talk for the Irish Cultivar Day seminar held at Glasnevin on 5 September 2009, I searched *The Irish Times*’s archives and noticed that the earliest mention of *Nerine bowdenii* occurred in the newspaper in 1924, and it was a fairly regular subject for columnists including G. O. Sherrard, W. J. Toal, Verney Naylor and Ruth Isabel Ross. Between 1957 and 1963 Drummonds, of Dawson Street, Dublin, advertised *Nerine bowdenii* for sale frequently; whether they had stock and simply could not get rid of it, or whether they were importing plants in substantial quantities, cannot now be told. Granted that plants can come from many different sources, both wild and cultivated, we might expect old, long-established clumps of *Nerine bowdenii* growing around Cork to have some distant connection with W. E. Gumbleton, and so represent one of the earlier introductions especially if they are clones propagated simply by division. Do Cork plants match the original description “very large flowers of a pleasing shade of light pink, with a darker line down the centre of each petal”? But, *Nerine bowdenii* can also set seed and it is quite probable that some plants in our gardens are seed-raised and so there is probably a lot of variation between clumps in different gardens.

As far as I was aware when compiling *A Heritage of Beauty* a decade ago, there was no distinct Irish clone of *Nerine bowdenii*, nor had any clone been selected and/or raised in Ireland: I did list Gumbleton’s *Nerine excellens major tardiflora* (p. 155) without realising what it was! However, thanks to information from Dr John David (Royal Horticultural Society’s Garden, Wisley)

we can now add to the catalogue the following names which may prove to apply to just a *single* clone of *Nerine bowdenii*:

‘Gigantea’: a “larger flowered variet[y]”.

There is an enigmatic reference to this in E. B. Anderson’s book *Seven Gardens*, 46 (1973): “Whether the larger flowered varieties, known in the Cotswolds as *N. bowdenii* ‘Fenwick’s variety’ [sic] and *N. bowdenii* ‘Gigantea’ in Ireland, are from seed or were later introduced from South Africa, I do not know.” (‘Fenwick’s variety’ is correctly ‘Mark Fenwick’; it has conspicuously glittering pink flowers, on stem to 75cm tall.) Anderson had also ambiguously linked ‘Gigantea’ with Fenwick’s clone in an earlier note in *The Gardener’s Chronicle* (141: 343 (1957)). Nothing more seems to be known about this; E. B. Anderson (see below under ‘Mary Sealy’) referred to it in *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* 81: 125 (1956) and in *Hardy Bulbs*: 143 (1964) without describing it in detail.

“Irish Clone”: “Large deep pink flowers, taller and more richly coloured than normal.”

Also listed as “Chris Saunders” (2007 catalogue of Cotswold Garden Flowers); incorrectly as “Hera”. The first name cannot be established because Chris Saunders has declined stating that it was “was only passing through his hands”.

Bob Brown, the owner of Cotswold Garden Flowers, was told by the person who gave this plant to him that “This is the most widespread clone in Ireland” although that seems an unsustainable claim. Whether this clone is the same as the following is uncertain at present.

“not Hera”: “distinctive for their narrow perianth segments and intensely coloured young buds”.

This is merely an informal label for perhaps more than one plant. According to “Report of the proceedings of a hardy *Nerine* Study Day held at RHS Garden, Wisley on 26 October 2007” (www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/plantgroups/NerineStudyDay.pdf).

“On show on the day were a number of plants, distinctive for their narrow perianth segments and intensely coloured young buds and were referred to informally as “not Hera” as they had been obtained as ‘Hera’. Material from Margaret Owen (MO 59) was from Ballyrogan Nurseries [Co. Down] as well as MO7 which had been obtained from Bridgemere Nurseries in 1996. Chris Sanders (pers. comm.) confirmed that the plants sold as ‘Hera’ from Bridgemere had originally come from Michael Wickenden [Kircubben, Co. Down] under this name in the early 1980s. It is highly likely that this material also originated in Ireland. This is a distinctive plant with horticultural merit and more work needs to be done to establish its precise origin, but once this is done it would be appropriate to provide a cultivar name.”

'Mary Sealy': flowers "much darker than the type" [see Dr John David's note above].

This was a plant that the great alpine gardener, E. Bertram Anderson, who once lived at Sandymount, Dublin, wrote "... I was sent [it] from Ireland, and this I call 'Mary Sealy', after the owner of the garden" (*The gardener's chronicle* **153**: 205 (1963)). Could this be the same as "Irish Clone" and/ or "not Hera"?

As I said at the seminar earlier this month, I have not been able to trace any Mary Sealy in connection with Irish horticulture, and have no idea where her garden was in Ireland. Can anyone help, please?

At the Glasnevin seminar I suggested that the IGPS should consider as a modest project making a collection of clones of *Nerine bowdenii* from around Ireland, or at least gathering photographs and information about the plants presently growing in Irish gardens, especially old, long-establish clumps. I hope this will be considered, and that the enigma of *Nerine bowdenii* in cultivation here can be elucidated.

My thanks to Dr John David for his invaluable comments and for raising the matter of 'Mary Sealy' in the first place.

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Global Warming and Gardening at the Arctic Circle

By Thomasina O'Neill-Harmon

I had the pleasure of visiting Iceland this year and one of my most interesting finds among all the glaciers, geysers and volcanic rocks was Akureyri Botanic Gardens, 65 deg North, almost on the Arctic Circle. Founded as a place of conservation in 1957, but as far back as 1911 a group of local women started a garden on this site for the enjoyment and pleasure of the community. Akureyri is Iceland's second largest town after Reykjavik and is situated at the top of the deepest Icelandic fiord. Even at mid summer snow capped mountains surround the town while fertile farming land stretches up the slopes. My guide told me this year Iceland had less snow than usual in late winter and then in May a very heavy snow fall.

Salix was the most abundant plant catalogued in the native Icelandic plants section in Akureyri Gardens. There were also Saxifraga and a very interesting Clover, *Trifolium pratense* measuring 10 cm across. It was amazing to see there so many varieties of Willow from tiny *Salix reticulata* to *Salix caerulea*, a tree reaching 25m (80ft). Cricket bats are made from this wood. My favourite was *Salix lanata*. A low growing, rock hugging variety with its blue/grey fluffy leaves. This would make a very attractive rock plant. Since returning I have found that *S.lanata*, which is mentioned in gardening books as a very attractive rockery plant, is found in the wild in parts of Scotland and is listed as vulnerable there.

There is a lot of talk about global warming interfering with our plant life as we know it, and to this end a lot of research is going on in Botanic Gardens around the world. These include Akureyri and our own National Botanic Gardens here in Dublin where Colin Kelleher is investigating rare Willows in Ireland. When I spoke to Colin recently he explained these species are assumed to have survived through periods of dramatic climate change, so their provenance and history holds valuable information. Many of these species are at the edge of their range in Ireland. Now I know making a new man-made rock garden is totally non P.C. (politically correct) to-day. However, many of our members already have Rock Gardens either naturally or designed many years ago and it would be interesting to know have you got Arctic-Alpine varieties of Salix on your rockery or anywhere in your garden?



The Irish Garden Plant Society



AKUREYRI, Iceland's second largest town

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