

# Irish Garden Plant Society

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*Newsletter - January 2023*



Issue 157

# Irish Garden Plant Society

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*Copy for the April issue as soon as possible  
please and no later than **28 February**.*

Cover:

**Narcissus ‘New Design’.** Photo courtesy of Esker Farm Daffodils.

Grateful thanks to our horticultural advisers: Stephen Butler and Brendan Sayers.

# Welcome

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**A very happy new year and an especially warm welcome to all the new members who joined in the past year. I hope you will find your membership interesting, worthwhile and, above all, fun. Try to get along to a lecture or a garden visit or the AGM on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May at Ardgillan near Skerries (see page 28 for details) where you will be able to meet other members and make friendships. Often these become deep-rooted and last a lifetime.**

With the days already getting longer, the snowdrop season will soon be upon us and, along with other spring bulbs like daffodils, will lift our spirits. Ireland has a long and distinguished history of daffodil breeding with names such as William Baylor Hartland, Guy Wilson and Brian Duncan to the fore. Our members, Dave and Jules Hardy, are following in their footsteps; read about the rhythm of a bulb farmer's year on page 5.

Daffodils must be one of the easiest ways to incorporate a few Irish plants in your garden. Our cover showcases *Narcissus* 'New Design', a striking mid-season daffodil bred by our honorary member Brian Duncan which is available from the Hardys at Esker Farm. Or try the historic, early-flowering *N.* 'Rip van Winkle'. A double, its origins are unclear but it was marketed by William Hartland before 1880; its unusual, tattered whorls of petals tend to produce a love or loathe reaction.

Five of our members have nominated the special plants they wouldn't be without. What would you choose? Please let me know: I'd love to hear from you.

*Maeve*

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# A Note from the Chair

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**The word ‘conversation’ comes to mind as I recall my recent IGPS activities. There was the buzz of conversation as members and friends assembled in the lecture theatres in the Old Courthouse, Antrim and the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. With the dimming of lights, the audiences fell silent and the lecturers began. Read more about the talks elsewhere in the newsletter.**

Conversations of a different kind took place at the plant sale in Blackrock, Dublin: brief greetings between ‘the staff’ and members as they carried plants from cars to the sales tables, and opportunities to chat with other members as we busily packed bags of bulbs or priced plants. The excitement mounted as the doors open. The conversations switched to gardening queries from the many members of the public who attended. On the Irish Plant table, *Bergenia*, Irish primulas and other sought-after plants were snapped up, amid chat and advice as to how to grow those plants.

In recent weeks I had enjoyable meetings with some honorary members of the Society. Paddy Tobin was elected to honorary membership at the 2022 AGM and a photograph of him with his award appears on page 29. The National Executive Committee decided to give similar awards to honorary members from recent years and reminisces about their years in the IGPS and Irish gardening were to the fore when I met Mary Davies, Ricky Shannon, Mike Snowden and Brian Duncan.

A member wrote to the IGPS c/o the National Botanic Gardens seeking advice about his garden. Being not far from my home in Dublin, I arranged to visit. Over tea we chatted about the seed list, plant sales and his appreciation of the newsletter. Then the phone rang, it was a member volunteering to become more involved in the IGPS. She was developing a new garden and her enthusiasm was infectious — more about this garden in a future newsletter.

Many forms of conversations but all under the umbrella of the IGPS.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mary'.

Mary Forrester, Chairman





# *Bitten by 'Yellow Fever'*

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with Esker Farm Daffodils

**Daffodils started as a hobby but have really taken over our lives since 2012 when Dave tentatively bought a collection from Nial Watson of Ringhaddy Daffodils and hid the receipt as it was £40 for 12 bulbs! Now we have approximately two acres of daffodils on our farm in Tyrone and sell to customers across the island of Ireland and around the world from USA to Japan and New Zealand. We even have quite a few customers in the Netherlands.**

Dave spent a few summers helping Brian Duncan with his seedlings and, having been given bulbs as payment by Brian, he was well and truly bitten by 'Yellow Fever'. Brian tutored and encouraged him to start breeding to create new daffodils. Knowing it takes approximately 10 to 15 years for seed to grow to a show-worthy daffodil of substance, Dave started looking for gaps on the show bench winners' podium and began breeding miniature daffodils with more colour, like the standards and intermediates we already have; he is also looking to increase the health of the newer, white-flowered Division 1 and 2 daffodils.

Daffodil farming is a year round job with January and February dedicated to the new catalogue and website updates. Then the main flower and show season begins, it runs from February through to May with competitive shows held on most weekends. Some weekends have two or more shows!

Work on the farm does not stop and Dave is busy hybridising and collecting pollen from early daffodils to use later on other blooms that would not have the chance to

pollinate each other naturally due to their flowering times. The crosses are logged, noting the date, pollen parent (father) and seed parent (mother). More information is added if pollination is successful. If seed gets to the stage of being sown, it gets a cross number which has progress notes written alongside it until it is good enough to receive a name. If it doesn't grow or is not good enough for the show bench, it can be sold as a garden variety to someone looking for a beautiful new flower which can be named for a person or something special to them.



EF006: Will it make the grade?

Once the show season is over, orders start coming in and Jules begins the paperwork making up the passport cards that are included with each variety, so each order has a pack of passports ready to go come posting time. Having been put in date order and separated into those requiring phytosanitary certificates and specific geographical destinations, the orders await the time for posting.

The bulbs, approximately 80,000, are hand-dug in July, washed and dried/cured until the end of August when the bulbs needed for our own stock

and for orders are counted and set aside. The bulbs are put into purpose-built pigeonholes in the packing area of the shed. Surplus bulbs are then bagged for selling at specialist plant fairs, talks we will be giving in September/October, and bulk bags for the contractors we supply.



In September we begin to put orders together, Dave concentrating on the bulbs and Jules making sure paperwork is in order. Each order gets a note and a *gratis* bulb, is boxed and off it goes. When the majority of the orders have been posted, we start planting bulbs; these have already been hot-water treated to 44.2°C for two to three hours to kill off any narcissus fly larvae and fungus that may be dormant in the bulb. By this time the field has been ploughed, de-stoned, ridges formed and the paths laid with woodchip to make walking on the bare earth more manageable if it rains. We live in County Tyrone after all!

Once the planting is finished, we pot daffodils for showing and for controlled breeding and mulch the

beds with well-rotted mushroom compost to add organic matter and to reduce weeds as naturally as possible. Then the cycle begins again.

Daffodils are the most giving and forgiving of flowers. To get the best from your bulbs, do not put fertiliser in the hole as this burns the roots and kills them. If you plant a bulb upside down, it will right itself with time and bulk up to give you two flowers the following year; they keep doing that until they run out of space or you dig them up. Don't cut the stems or foliage before it's had time to feed the bulb for the following year's flower so, if you like a tidy lawn, it's not a good idea to plant it with daffodils. If you feel they need a feed, maybe potash when they're growing but really they should be fine.

Esker Farm Nursery is always looking to the future — creating new daffodils, making a new garden to welcome visitors, and looking to 2024 with great excitement as we will be hosting the World Daffodil Convention.





# Jan Ravensberg: his contribution to Irish Heritage Plants

by Brendan Sayers



*Crinodendron 'Alf Robbins'* photo courtesy of Seamus O'Brien

Some of the highlights of my horticultural career are the visits to Ravensberg Nurseries and the hospitality of Jan and Siena Ravensberg. These visits, accompanied by colleagues from the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, were occasions where we saw the operations of a well-run commercial nursery, got to see some very rare plants and also received useful tips from the life experiences of Jan. Last year Jan celebrated 50 years in the Irish horticultural industry having arrived in the early 1970s from the Netherlands. After a start with SAP Landscapes, Jan set up his wholesale nursery, Ravensberg

Nurseries at Ashmount, Clara, Co Offaly, which is now a haven of good plants for garden designers, garden centres and horticulturists.

Jan is a man with an eye for exceptional plants. Some of his selections carry the Ashmount name while others are associated with their origin or their exceptional quality.

The oldest of the cultivars named by Jan is *Taxus baccata* 'Summergold' which originated at his father's nursery in the Netherlands. It is a horizontal, spreading form of yew with needles edged in yellow. It has been trialled in Holland and received





*Taxus baccata* 'Summergold'

a certificate of merit. It is a cultivar that is more valued for its evergreen and hardy nature on the continent than here in Ireland. A selection of the native *Ilex aquifolium* carries the name 'Ashmount' and is valued for its very prickly nature. It is a male clone so obviously does not produce berries.

Many of the selections named by Jan are ericaceous plants including two forms of *Crinodendron hookerianum* named from the same batch of seedlings. *Crinodendron* 'Alf Robbins', with a white flower rather than the typical red, is named for the donor of the seed. The other is a pale pink-flowered form named for the nursery, *Crinodendron* 'Ashmount'. *Rhododendron* 'Ashmount' originated at the Mount Congreve estate in Co Waterford from the pollinating hand of Garden Curator, Michael White. Michael crossed

*Rhododendron* 'Actress' with 'Beatrix Anderson' in 2010 and it was named by Jan, again for the nursery.

*Euonymus fortunei* 'Ashmount' was named by Hans, Jan's son, who now manages the nursery. It is a distinctly more yellow form of the species. Another selection based on its pale yellow leaves and originating from seed is *Nyssa sylvatica* 'Ashmount Gold', which also has the advantage of tolerating full sun, a quality that many yellow-leaved forms of green-leaved plants do not possess. The latest of Jan's named cultivars are grafted plants of *Zelkova carpinifolia*. The source of the scion wood was the specimen at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin and the cultivar suitably holds that Garden's name, *Zelkova carpinifolia* 'Glasnevin'.



*Zelkova carpinifolia*  
photo courtesy of Marie Hourigan

Jan's tenacity and propagation skills have also given some very rare plants a new lease of life. An example is *Glyptostrobus pensilis*, listed as growing in only three major gardens in *Trees and Shrubs Cultivated in Ireland*, compiled in 1985 by our current Chair, Mary Forrest. Nowadays there are many more specimens of this plant cultivated due to the material offered by Ravensberg Nurseries. Another is *Daphne aurantiaca*, with yellow flowers now more widely grown due to Jan's propagation.

For those of us with access to the wholesale nursery catalogue, it is clear that many Irish Heritage Plants, in addition to those named for or by Jan and Hans, are available through Ravensberg Nurseries. A few choice cultivars on offer to garden centres and landscapers in recent months are *Cornus capitata* 'Kilmacurragh Rose', *Pittosporum* 'Dunloe Castle' and *Potentilla* 'Longacre Variety'.

A chat with your local nursery asking them to stock some of the excellent plants on offer, especially those of Irish origin, will assist with the Society's efforts to preserve the plants of our horticultural heritage.



*Cornus capitata* 'Kilmacurragh Rose' photo courtesy of Seamus O'Brien

# *Erica x stuartii*

## ‘Mysterious Colleen’

by E. Charles Nelson

*Erica x stuartii* or Praeger’s heath occurs in western counties of Ireland where the parent species — *E. tetralix* (cross-leaved heath) and *E. mackayana* (Mackay’s heath) — grow wild; it can be found in counties Kerry, Galway, Mayo and Donegal. In the wild, the hybrid always has pink-purple flowers. A notable characteristic of most clumps of Praeger’s heath, even in the wild, is that in late spring and early summer the young shoot tips are usually **not** green but yellow with tinges of red — this was exploited in well-known cultivars such as ‘Irish Lemon’ which has yellow tips and ‘Irish Orange’ with orange tips.

White-blossomed heathers are not uncommon, although there was only one white-flowered clone of *Erica x stuartii* known until a few years ago, a Dutch plant called ‘Bolster’ but it appears to have been lost. It was not a wilding but resulted from breeding work by J. Baron using the white clones *E. tetralix* ‘Alba’ and *E. mackayana* ‘Shining Light’. ‘Shining Light’ is a very fine heather from Spain introduced through the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, in 1983.

*Erica x stuartii* ‘Mysterious Colleen’ is a new cultivar and the mystery relates to its origins. Susie Kay of Lettergesh, Connemara, who grows



*Erica x stuartii* ‘Mysterious Colleen’



a wonderful collection of heathers, gave me a rooted cutting, but she did not raise it nor did she find it in the wild and all attempts to discover its origin have failed.

‘Mysterious Colleen’ (reg. no. DME 2018-04) blooms in summer through into autumn. The flower buds have a faint pink flush that soon bleaches, so the corolla is white. It forms a bushy, low-growing heather with a pronounced tendency to produce “discoloured” (pale yellow) young shoots that gradually turn green. Careful pruning including removal of old, faded flower-heads promotes a second flush of flowers and, in spring, additional new, yellow-tipped shoots providing a very long season of interest. This heather is not

lime-tolerant, but is hardy and will tolerate cultivation in a container. Propagation by cuttings is easy.

The intention is to make it available through the IGPS over a period of time.

Does any member have a particular interest in heathers, especially Irish heathers, and grow a number already? Would you be interested in propagating and making them more widely available?

If so, please email Stephen Butler [igps.heritageplants@gmail.com](mailto:igps.heritageplants@gmail.com).



*Erica x stuartii* ‘Mysterious Colleen’ tips



# The Plant I wouldn't be without

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## Tim Guilbride reckons nature does it better.

Which plant wouldn't I be without? Visitors always admire the mimosa, *Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay' and *Hebe rakaiensis*, but they're just part of the overall concept. Then there are those plants which I use over and over again for their scale and reliability such as *Magnolia* 'Wada's Memory', *Rosa* 'Kiftsgate', *Clematis montana* var. *alba* and *Helleborus orientalis*. Key players, but my feelings for them are admiration and gratitude, not love. A sense of filial duty attaches to the forty five year-old salmon and white 'geranium' which I inherited from my mother. She gave it to my sister when she went up to Cambridge who 'returned to sender' upon graduation, and then it came to me when my mother passed. I used to be terrified it would die, but learned to propagate it last year so now my windowsills are thick with young babies.

In truth, only wild violets really touch my soul — for their delicacy, their modesty and their endless variations. Every year I transplant self-seeded violets from up the avenue to soften the joints in the stone paving and add interest at the base of hedges. As they take hold and spread, they bring an air of informality and simplicity to a garden that can look over-designed, and anchor this man-made space in the wider landscape. Ever since my earliest childhood, violets have

held an unchallengeable place in my heart, so imagine my joy to find that violets had begun to seed themselves in my family plot at St Mary's, Bunclody, ready for when I, too, take up residence.



Geraniums at Rush Hill.

## Barbara Kelso praises the hard-working hydrangea.

One of my favourite plants in my garden is *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Unique' which I first encountered at Mount Congreve when the panicle hydrangeas were still relatively unknown. This deciduous, medium sized shrub has a reliable summer display of large, white, broadly conical-shaped flower heads. These are very long-lasting and gradually age to purplish-pink by late autumn; they are composed of both sterile and rather inconspicuous fertile flowers.

Panicle hydrangeas, which are native to China and Japan, are very hardy and, as they are also fairly salt tolerant, they perform well in both coastal and colder inland gardens. They always flower on the current season's wood and are therefore not susceptible to late spring frosts. Pruning is in early to mid-spring. If pruned hard, the shrub will produce fewer but very large flower heads, whereas lighter pruning will result in many more but smaller flowers. They thrive in full sun or partial shade and their flowers are the same colour in all soil pH types.

*H. paniculata* 'Unique' no longer holds a RHS Award of Garden Merit but several new panicle cultivars have been raised and have gained AGM status; some of the outstanding ones which I would recommend are 'Phantom', 'Limelight', 'Pinky Winky' and 'Silver Dollar'.



*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Unique'

**Yvonne Ranelow gardens near the Shannon estuary.**

When I was asked to write an article on my favourite garden plant, I realised what a fickle gardener I am as I change my opinion regularly depending on the seasons.

Today it is echiums and I have had an intense mental debate as to which of either *Echium pininana* or *E. candicans* it would be. Both are an integral part of our garden. However, *E. pininana* has won the battle.

*E. pininana*, or Tower of Jewels as it is aptly referred to, is a dramatic plant native to the Canary Islands but it is hardy here in the wet and windy west of Ireland; I have had it for at least twenty years. In its first year it forms a large rosette with silver, hairy leaves out of which in the second year a ten-foot spike of blue flowers arises to the delight of the hundreds of bees that alight on it.

It is monocarpic and dies after flowering but to ensure the survival of the species it seeds far and wide and, as with all self seeders, this can be a bonus or a curse; to quote a fellow gardener, "If there was mud in your eyebrow, it would grow in it". I keep a watchful eye as once they get established they are impossible to pull out until they have done their thing, although they regularly outfox me as I have even discovered them growing in the gutter of the potting shed.



*Echium pininana* photo courtesy of Rosie Maye

## Áine-Máire Ní Mhurchú votes for the snowdrop.

There are so many plants I wouldn't be without but, in autumn as the days are getting shorter, the light levels lower and the garden is rapidly changing, my very first snowdrop appears. *Galanthus reginae-olgae* 'Blanc De Chine' is an early autumn-flowering, albino snowdrop. The feeling this tiny flower evokes is why I love snowdrops. Instead of focusing on the loss and lifting of the exotic and summer plants, I look forward to the very many snowdrop varieties that are dotted around my garden.

There are the greyish-blue leaved *G. nivalis*, the bright grass-green *G. woronowii* and intermittent *G. ikariae* awakening underneath the lawn and in the hedge verges. Singles and doubles in all their glory. *G. plicatus*, *G. elwesii* and their very many hybrids are planted in dedicated snowdrop beds, plunged



in terracotta pots or in pond baskets around the garden. There are wonderful specials displayed in pots, neatly topped with alpine grit for

my own pleasure. Many snowdrops come with their own stories — their horticultural history, the generosity of gardening friends, loved ones who gifted some special hybrids over the years, and gifts from gardens which have long succumbed to the changes life brings.

## Moira Concannon and Lesley Simpson are friends living in adjacent properties and garden together. They have chosen a rose.

Well, of all the plants in our garden, how do we choose? We would really miss the trees and many of the shrubs, not to mention the roses and daffodils. After much discussion we decided on a form of a species rose, *Rosa pimpinellifolia* (syn. *spinosissima*), the Dunwich Rose: it's early-flowering which means late May here in east County Down; covered in pretty, pale primrose, single flowers; attractive, ferny foliage; a good shape so it always looks well and rarely needs pruning; no bother with pests or diseases; not particular as to soil or conditions; and a sweet scent. What more could you ask? It prepares us for all the roses to come. It's of historic interest too; the original was the 'Pimpernell Rose' mentioned in *Gerard's Herball* of 1597. Everyone admires it even when they think it's a potentilla!



# *Sir Joseph Paxton and his Vinery*

by Paddy Tobin

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The old glasshouse against a high wall in a corner of the Upper Garden at Lismore Castle had been in a derelict condition for many years. Because it was a Paxton-designed vinery, it carried with it the burden of historical significance, which dissuaded the owners from undertaking a ‘patch-up’ job as that would run the risk of losing important original material and design features, but a full restoration was dauntingly expensive. Thankfully, the Devonshire family made the decision that a full and authentic restoration was the only acceptable route forward and placed the work in the hands of Queenstown Restoration, whose

craftspeople were to salvage as much of the original material as possible from the existing eight bays, restore it, and reuse it in the reconstruction which included the rebuilding of four missing bays. Work began in October 2020, but delays due to the Covid pandemic meant that it was only completed in 2022.

The vinery was designed by Sir Joseph Paxton and was built in 1853. It was of timber construction with twelve bays in the famous Paxton ridge and furrow design which allows maximum light into the house. Vines were planted — and are now planted again — on the



Paxton Vinery Lismore Castle before restoration



raised bed outside, with each vine brought in through an opening in the plinth wall and trained up each ridge. The vines will take some years to mature and fill the house and, in the meantime, there is a selection of plants to give interest to visitors. I have watched the progress of the project from a pitiable sight of near dereliction, through the various stages of restoration, to the outstanding building we have today. It is certainly a building of enormous historic significance for no other similar Paxton design exists, and it will continue as a treasure for visitors to the gardens and as a continuing testimony to the work of the Devonshire family and the genius of Sir Joseph Paxton.

Joseph Paxton was born to a Bedfordshire farming family in 1803 and an early gardening job led him to a position in Chiswick Gardens, leased by the Horticultural Society (later the Royal Horticultural Society)

from the Duke of Devonshire. Paxton became head gardener at the Duke's Chatsworth House in 1826, a case of being in the right place at the right time.

Paxton's own account of coming to Chatsworth recounts his arrival at half past four in the morning, exploring the gardens, climbing over the kitchen garden wall, setting the gardeners to work, eating breakfast with the housekeeper, and meeting his future wife, the housekeeper's niece, Sarah Bown, all before nine o'clock! He went on to redesign the gardens, construct fountains, develop a rock garden, design and erect the famous lily house for the newly-introduced *Victoria amazonica* and also a conservatory, the Great Conservatory, build a model village, and plant an arboretum. The Emperor Fountain was built in 1844, was twice the height of Nelson's Column and was fed by a newly-constructed feeder



Paxton Vinery Lismore Castle. New vines planted



Paxton Vinery Lismore Castle Restoration complete

lake in the hill above the garden which required the excavation of 75,000 cubic metres of soil.

Paxton's greatest success came with the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. An international competition to design a building for the Exhibition had resulted in 245 designs but all would take too long to construct and were of too permanent a nature; there had been a public outcry that it would ruin Hyde Park so it had to be removed after the Exhibition. Paxton was aware of the difficulties and produced a revolutionary design within nine days which was, in effect, an extended version of the lily house at Chatsworth. Because of the extensive use of glass in the construction, it became known as 'The Crystal Palace' and was more than 500 metres long and nearly 140 metres wide. Were it to be constructed today, it

would be considered a marvel of engineering and design. After the Great Exhibition, Hyde Park was restored and the Crystal Palace was dismantled and moved to Sydenham Hill in south-east London.

Sir Joseph Paxton will be remembered for many things including his work at Chatsworth, the Cavendish banana, his several publications including the *Magazine of Botany*, the *Pocket Botanical Dictionary*, *The Flower Garden*, and the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, his work on public parks in Liverpool, Birkenhead, Glasgow and Halifax among others, his organisation of plant-hunting expeditions, his involvement in the railway industry, and as a member of Parliament. Thanks to the Devonshire family we have an example of his work here in Ireland.

# Death in the Garden

by Finola Reid

These past few years have been challenging for all of us because of Covid and its associated ailments. Those who were blessed in having gardens or who loved gardening probably focussed on the positivity of their gardening endeavours in the face of the awful reality of the pandemic. It was also a time of great opportunity for new gardeners to discover the pleasures, pains and rewards of gardening. For me it was a doubly difficult time, but I made good use of it with some long overdue strategic planning.

I should explain. For two years, due to a pelvic fracture during lockdown, I was unable to do any physical gardening but, to keep my little remaining bit of sanity, I hobbled and wobbled around the safer parts of the garden, carefully picking my way through the greatly overgrown plantings and planning a big clear-out when normal life resumed. I gazed lovingly at my 'best' plants

and became more appreciative of them, even talked to them for want of human conversation, and they responded. I gave fiercely hard stares at the thuggish ones which were, I felt, laughing at my infirmity and I swore that, when I could, I would put manners on them — and I did! With a brilliant helper, we've been battling these thugs and slowly winning the war.

No matter how many species I grow, regardless of whether they are common or rare, easy or difficult, exotic or native, I cherish all of them, not equally but I think pretty fairly, with a few exceptions due entirely to my recent enforced neglect. Three-cornered leek, bindweed, perennial sweet pea and a veritable thicket of winter heliotrope had colonised large swathes of precious ground. Death to all of them I said. But nature can wreak revenge and it has, so I've lost lovely plants too, but happily I am now back in action,





sort of, and itching to plant new trees — knowing I'll never see them come to full maturity, I can disregard that awful question of 'how big will it grow?'.

Shiver me timbers, I've recently had to engage a highly-skilled tree surgery company to demolish several large trees, either dead or alive. I can only blame myself for planting these trees when I knew in my heart they were going to grow enormously; yes, they would be disasters someday but I would 'probably be dead by then'. However, I didn't die but several trees did, and others became huge, fearful monsters and had to go. And so it came to pass that the decidedly dead *Robinia* 'Frisia', the pink-flowered *Robinia hispida*; a very tall, sad *Picea omorika* (Serbian Spruce), a huge *Phellodendron japonicum* (very rare and now even rarer!), a beech, two birches, a dead elm (that rapidly died over three weeks due

to Dutch Elm beetle), a *Liquidambar styraciflua* and a few others are no more.

Worst of all, I lost my beautiful, beloved old pear tree, a venerable specimen which was at least 150 years old — it was recorded on the 1882 OS map — and a true friend since my childhood. It died slowly and painfully. It was magnificent in flower, bountiful every year, its fruit was delicious when poached and the windfalls were relished by my mother's hens and every blackbird, thrush and magpie that feasted on it. What variety was it? I never found out, but in the end it didn't matter; it will always be the tree I loved best and now, almost cannibalistically, I am enjoying burning its seasoned logs, while saving some large rings of wood for some wood-turner, as yet unfound. I've left a substantial length of its lower trunk as a totem pole to remember it by. 'Cast a cold eye ...'



Finola's pear tree as a totem pole



# Discovering the Old Deanery

by Janet and Martin Edwardes

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Over 27 years ago, we bought The Old Deanery in Cloyne, County Cork, but we were unaware at the time that we had also acquired a beautiful walled garden. When we first viewed the house, which was in an appalling state, we were immediately sold when we saw the magnificent rhododendron covered in glorious red blooms. It is probably *Rhododendron* 'Altaclarensis' of the same vintage as similar specimens in Fota and Blarney Castle. We have monitored the flowering season in the 27 years that we have been here and it can flower as early as November and can continue until as late as June. On the day of our first viewing, there was a swathe of

daffodils interspersed with *Crocus tomasinianus* — a beautiful spring picture to gladden our hearts.

The walled garden was discovered only when our intrepid daughter, then aged about eight, had gone exploring and had come back to tell me she had found a secret garden. The same daughter was an avid reader and tended to live the stories that she read, so I have to admit to my shame that initially I did not take a whole lot of notice of her. However she persisted and brought me to the place she had discovered and, to my great amazement and joy, it was indeed a walled garden whose entrance was completely overgrown



with massive laurel and briars. The doorway was barred by a piece of corrugated iron, so she had pushed her way through. Inside it was so overgrown that even then I did not realise that it was a completely enclosed space, but after more adventuring that's exactly what it turned out to be. Joy and excitement in overload! So this is where the great adventure began.



My philosophy in dealing with such a massive project was little and often. You could easily be overawed by the enormity of it and, bearing in mind we were also restoring the house and bringing up our youngish family, the garden was always going to be secondary at the very least in terms of time and money available. I had huge help and encouragement from my grandmother, who had managed a fully productive walled garden up in Cavan. She sketched out rough plans of what she had growing in her walled garden and had loads of anecdotes and advice which helped hugely.

We initially started clearing small areas but were disheartened as the weeds and rough grass grew back so quickly, then we decided to get innovative and put in two goats named George and Mildred! I was able to do this as by then we had

established there was very little of any use growing there, so we were happy to let them have free rein. Goats are the ultimate eating machines! They got the rough vegetation down to such a degree that we could see some outlines of where paths might have been. I used a garden fork to discover where there was hardcore which indicated a path and where there was soft earth. In some places, I found the remains of stone edging. So little by little, I uncovered quite a large number of pathways and then made a roughly symmetrical design using my grandmother's sketches. So that is how the basic layout of the garden was done. Our overall aim was to restore it as sensitively to its era as possible, but to have a fully productive kitchen garden which would supply us with vegetables, fruit and flowers. Over time, we did.



# Grow an Irish Plant

by Nicola and Peter Milligan and Brendan Sayers

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## ***Galanthus* 'Kildare'**

While the snowdrop seems to exert a special fascination on many members of the gardening public and there are plenty of books about snowdrops, comparatively little coverage is given to those snowdrops that have been found, or bred, and named in the gardens and nurseries of Ireland.

One of the choice Irish snowdrops that we grow is *Galanthus* 'Kildare'; it is a really good virescent (Ed. an overall greenish appearance so has green on the outer segments) snowdrop and frequently produces two scapes from one bulb. This cultivar is considered to be a *G. nivalis* x *G. plicatus* cross and was found by the

well-known British galanthophiles, David and Ruby Baker, when they were in County Kildare. The good news is that this cultivar is available from various sources in the horticultural trade.

Snowdrops will be happy in most situations. Our plants can be found under trees and shrubs, in borders, in shade, part-shade, or sun and, for some of the 'specials', in pots. The bulbs are grown in normal garden soil while the pot-based cultivars are re-potted every year to try to avoid problems. After flowering we add a little top dressing of a general-purpose fertilizer. Finally, if clumps become congested, they can be lifted and split to increase your colonies.

**P&NM**



*Galanthus* 'Kildare'





*Taxus baccata* 'Lutea'

### ***Taxus baccata* 'Lutea'**

The first Irish Heritage Plant (IHP) to be recorded is a variation of our native yew. The upright form with vertical branches which was found growing on a hillside close to Florencecourt, County Fermanagh, is known worldwide as the Irish yew. It is not the only unique variation of the native yew, but its poisonous foliage and berries saw it mostly grown in churchyards and cemeteries, its tall columnar form like sentinels for those laid to rest.

Yew is a dioecious species meaning male and female flowers are produced on different plants. *Taxus baccata* 'Lutea' is, like the Irish yew, a female of the species and the fruits of this particular tree are yellow, distinct from the

usual red fruits of most yew trees. According to *A Heritage of Beauty*, yellow-fruited varieties were first documented as occurring in two places in Ireland, both on the north side of Dublin city, and have been in cultivation for more than two centuries.

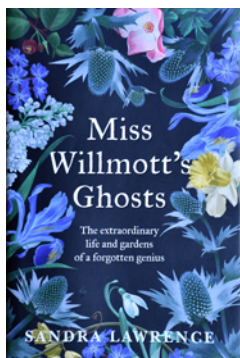
A challenge for Society members is to find a place for what could eventually be a large tree. Yew has the advantage of responding well to clipping, and a topiary or hedged specimen may be easier to accommodate than a tree. Another approach would be to find a local public space which has room for an IHP like the yellow-fruited yew so that we can continue to enjoy this colour variant of one of our native trees. On further thoughts, the local cemetery might be a good bet! **BS**



## **Miss Willmott's Ghosts**

by Sandra Lawrence

Ellen Willmott was one of the greatest horticulturalists of her day. She inherited the home property, Warley Place in Essex, and developed a garden of international significance with a range of plants to rival that in any other private or indeed botanic garden around the world. She created two other gardens in France and Italy, supported the great plant hunters of the day, and corresponded with the great and the good of the gardening world. She was truly an exceptional person, gifted beyond imagination. Ellen's sister married into the Berkeley family of Spetchley Park and Sandra Lawrence was given access to the archives there which contained much unseen material concerning Miss Willmott's life. Ellen Willmott has suffered a poor reputation but this book balances our view of this exceptional person. It's the best book I've read in ages.



*Miss Willmott's Ghosts — The Extraordinary Life and Gardens of a Forgotten Genius*, Sandra Lawrence, Blink Publishing, £35

## **Husbandry, Making Gardens with Mr B**

by Isabel Bannerman

Isabel and Julian Bannerman are presently renovating an old manor house in Ashington, Somerset, and developing their fifth garden together. Rather than being the subject matter of this book, Ashington

provides the setting where Isabel explores and discusses her thoughts on gardening. The book tracks “the unlikely processes by which we work, the smiles and frowns, the ups and downs.” It is not an account of the creation of their latest garden, though that is discussed and referenced throughout the book, but rather an insight into their thoughts on gardening, on design, on plants and planting. The Bannermans “do it because we love it and we love to do it” and have come to the conclusion that their “gardening life is about making us happy”. An excellent book, I recommended it.

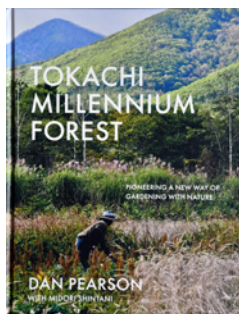


*Husbandry, Making Gardens with Mr B*, Isabel Bannerman, Pimpernel Press, £14.99

## ***Tokachi Millenium Forest***

by Dan Pearson with Midori Shintani

Thirty years ago, a Japanese media entrepreneur, Mitsushige Hayashi, bought 400 hectares of land in the Tokachi region



of Hokkaido, the northernmost island of the Japanese archipelago with the aim of offsetting the carbon footprint of his national newspaper business, Tokachi Mainichi. With sustainability in mind and hopes of safeguarding this area for the future, his vision was to create a garden which would last 1,000 years. Dan Pearson designed one section of the garden, The Earth Garden, an area planted in the naturalistic style bridging the space between the reception areas of the park and the foothills of the mountains. A foreign designer introducing a foreign style might strike one as unlikely to succeed but it did.

*Tokachi Millennium Forest, Pioneering a New Way of Gardening with Nature*, Dan Pearson with Midori Shintani, Filbert Press, £40

## ***A Garden Well Placed***

by Xa Tollemache

The author was the 'amateur' gardener who was awarded a gold medal at the Chelsea Flower Show in 1997: the twenty two years she had gardened at her home, Helmingham

Hall in Suffolk, somehow ignored. The earlier part of the book is about those years at Helmingham Hall and the remainder describes ten of her garden design projects. The properties are grand; her style is one of charm, romance and an overflowing of flowers — great houses, formal bones and exuberant planting make for an enjoyable read.

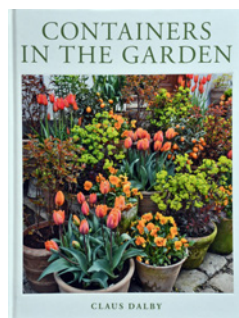


*A Garden Well Placed, The Story of Helmingham and Other Gardens*, Xa Tollemache, Pimpernel Press, £35

## ***Containers in the Garden***

by Claus Dalby

Container in the Garden is a masterclass on growing plants in pots with elements of flower arrangement including suggestions for combinations of colours, textures, form, grouping and spacing; however, it is not only about the creation of individual pots but also about grouping a collection of such creations. Claus Dalby does it in style, lavishly, on the grand scale, and the book matches.



*Containers in the Garden* by Claus Dalby, Cool Springs Press, £22.





# *Inside Track*

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*Tilia europaea* 'Zwarte Linde' at Kilmacurragh  
Photo courtesy of Seamus O'Brien

## Save the Date!

**AGM and tour of Ardgillan  
Demensne Garden on  
Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

**10.30 – 11.00**

Registration, tea & coffee

**11.15 – 12.15**

Annual General Meeting

**12.15 – 13.00**

Talk – details to follow

**13.15 – 14.15**

Lunch

**14.15 – 15.45**

Guided tour of the Gardens at Ardgillan Demesne to include the National Collection of *Potentilla fruticosa* (shrubby potentilla).

In addition to the meeting, lecture and tour of Ardgillan, it is planned to organise an additional programme of garden visits, probably on the Friday afternoon and/or the Sunday morning. Further details will follow.

## National Collection of Hemerocallis

One of our members, Caro Skyrme who gardens in Shropshire, has completed her first year as the holder of the Plant Heritage National Collection of Historic Hemerocallis ie the Brummitt, Coe and Randall cultivars: 1959-1979. Caro has had a long love affair with *Hemerocallis*, more widely known as day lilies, and will tell us more about her collection in a future issue.



*Hemerocallis* 'Fooled Me'

## 11th Annual Snowdrop Gala

The Gala will be held on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February at Ballykealey House, Ballon, Co Carlow. The speakers are Troy Scott Smith (UK), Head Gardener and Sissinghurst Castle Garden and Iris Ney (Germany), Garden Design, Garden Tours and Lecturer. Tickets €100 to include morning and afternoon tea, lunch, lectures and the bulb and plant sales at Altamont Gardens.

## New Primula Group

Thanks to the gift of a number of Irish primula from Brendan Sayers, an informal grouping of interested members has come together in the northern region coordinated by Doreen Wilson. The intention is to better secure their future so the emphasis is not only on giving them a home but labeling, keeping records and propagating them to make them more widely available to members. The need for this is demonstrated by the fact that even some of the Kennedy Irish Primroses, bred by our long-standing and now



honorary member Joe Kennedy, and introduced as recently as a decade ago by Fitzgerald Nurseries (Pat Fitzgerald is also an honorary member), are now hard to come by.

If you have a keen interest in Irish primroses and are willing to help in the conservation effort, please contact Doreen Wilson [doreenwilson123@btinternet.com](mailto:doreenwilson123@btinternet.com).



*Primula 'Lady Greer'*

## **Presentation to honorary members**

Our Chairman Mary Forrest has presented a rose bowl to recently elected honorary members. The photo shows Mary and Paddy Tobin in the beautiful surroundings of Mount Usher in autumn. Paddy was Chairman from 2012 to 2016 and edited the Newsletter for six years from October 2002 until October 2008, an outstanding record.



Mary Forrest and Paddy Tobin

## **Volunteers for Munster please**

Volunteers from Munster are urgently needed to re-form the regional committee. Without a committee there is no programme of lectures or garden visits. Being part of the one of the IGPS committees is a great way of getting to know other keen gardeners. Please come forward and get in touch with Mary Forrest, telephone +353 1298 5099, and have a chat about what's involved.

## **Wanted – back copies of the Newsletter**

Paddy Tobin has an almost complete run of the Society's newsletters but is missing issues 3 and 4. He would be most grateful if someone can help; contact him by email: [paddytobin1953@gmail.com](mailto:paddytobin1953@gmail.com).

If any member is rationalising or downsizing and has copies pre-dating 2006, I would be happy to give them a good home. Please contact me by email [maeve.bell@btopenworld.com](mailto:maeve.bell@btopenworld.com).

## Mount Congreve Gardens re-open

Having been closed for almost a year, Mount Congreve re-opened at Halloween. Created by the late Ambrose Congreve, the 70 acre garden along with a four acre walled garden overlook the River Suir a few miles from Waterford; it holds a world-renowned collection of woody plants, e.g. magnolia, camellia and rhododendron, the most extensive in Ireland.

## National Garden Scheme (NGS) Northern Ireland

Now in its second year, on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February the NGS will launch a booklet detailing the Northern Ireland gardens which will be open in 2023 as part of the Scheme.

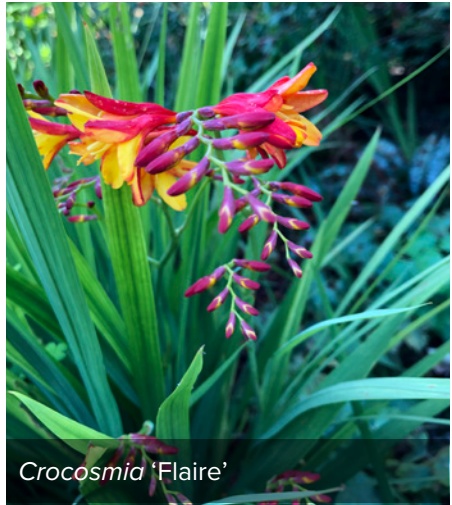
## Conservation in action

Members will know that the unique aspect of the IGPS as a horticultural society is its focus on the plant heritage of the island of Ireland. It is so easy to 'lose' a plant; almost before we notice, it is no longer for sale in any garden centres or nurseries. Does this matter? Yes it does. The outstanding naturalist, Colin Stafford-Johnston, has pointed out, "Every time something disappears, the world is poorer".

A small group of members are working together to conserve and promote some of our endangered garden plants. Conscious of the need to be realistic, they

have decided to concentrate on snowdrops, agapanthus, crocosmia, rodgersia and trees. More information will follow in the next issue.

In the meantime, if you are growing or have a particular interest in these plants, please let us know by emailing [igps.heritageplants@gmail.com](mailto:igps.heritageplants@gmail.com)



## Will be Missed

Philip Jacob (1931-2022) along with his wife Brigid was a foundation member of the IGPS. Whether welcoming members to his own garden or joining the Society's garden visits, Philip freely shared his knowledge of plants and enthusiasm for gardens and gardening. Their tree and shrub-filled garden in Shankill, Dublin, was an ideal setting one year for the Society's summer lunch. Philip died in September 2022. We extend our sympathy to Brigid and the family.

**MF**

# Meet the Committee

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## **Theresa Crothers**

*Chair, Leinster region.*



My love of gardening started when I was a child, working with my grandmother, planting flowers in her garden and going with her to buy plants from a local man who wrapped the plants in wet newspaper and tied the parcel with twine. Today I love it when my grandson comes to visit; I always find something for him to plant and water. Some of my favourite plants are fuchsias and salvias but I like to grow something different each year. Last year I bought two Goji berry plants. Because it was their first year, I only got a few berries but I'm hoping for a bigger crop this year.

Joining the Irish Garden Plant Society has been a great experience because of all the people I have met, the friends I have made, and the gardens I have visited, not forgetting all the different plants I got at our plant sales along with the advice I have been given.

## **Robert Logan**

*Chair, Northern region.*



Reflecting on a lifetime's interest in gardening makes one very grateful for the people along the way that have encouraged and inspired. My earliest days were spent helping in a commodious vegetable garden, the summers required a lot of reluctant fruit picking. Lessons and knowledge filtered down from a green-fingered mother and a maiden aunt with a good grasp of botany and wild flora.

Life was quickly overtaken by the demands of study and career, with any time in the garden given over to frantic mowing, hedge cutting and fire-fighting maintenance. Having reached the sunny uplands of retirement, there still seems little time to put to practical effect all the glorious ideas, visions and gardening brilliance of the horticultural greats. In particular I stand in awe of Beth Chatto, Penelope Hobhouse and Christopher Lloyd. Fortunately, with gardening there is always the joy of being able to dream.

# Around the Regions

## Action at the Plant Sales

If sales and happy customers are anything to go by, the plant sale in Blackrock on October 16th was a roaring success. New and familiar faces abounded and there was lots of enthusiasm from both buyers and sellers. The bulbs sold out completely, closely followed by the unusual shrubs and some delightful perennials with numerous mature, well-rooted cuttings of *Plectranthus*

*argentatus* and *P. ciliatus* flying out the door. I was delighted with my purchase of several *Aster dumosus* 'Pink Topaz' as it's a lower growing variety to add late colour. What a wonderful treat to be back in person! I'm looking forward to next year already. The sale organised by the Leinster region made €2737 and the earlier sale in May organised by the Northern region made £1593.

Rosie Maye



Agnes Peacocke, Billy McCone and Barbara Kelso



Rosie Maye and Kirsten Walker



Helen Dillon and Áine-Máire Ní Mhurchú



Marianne Bickerton hard at work





Nichola Monk and Rick Lawrence



Theresa Crothers and Antoinette Victory

*Photos by Rosie Maye and Maeve Bell*

## The Delights of Gardening

The Leinster region organised their first lecture of the autumn in the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin when we had a real treat listening to Paul Maher and Edel Mc Donald, long time members of the IGPS, bringing us on a journey through their horticultural careers, botanical travels, projects and the personal high points along the way.

Their present garden at Ballinagam in north Wexford had been Edel's Mum and Dad's holiday home where the garden, once productive and loved, fell into dereliction but around 2012 Paul and Edel came up with a plan to create a new garden on the site. Hedges were cut and the area slowly cleared, allowing space and time to see what original plants would resurface; once rediscovered, they were put aside for Edel to propagate. A wonderful series of photos showed the changes through the years to 2022 where they now have a lush and beautiful garden.

Paul and Edel and their garden can be followed on Instagram: @the\_garden\_at\_ballinagam

*Áine-Máire Ní Mhurchú*



Iris 'Katherine Hodgkin' photo courtesy of Paul Maher

## Caher Bridge Re-visited

The first post-Covid lecture for the Northern region in Antrim was indeed a busy evening, catching up with friends and listening to Carl Wright who brought us up to date with developments in his amazing Caher Bridge garden. Carl arrived in The Burren, Co. Clare, over 30 years ago; he was entranced by it, eventually buying a cottage and settling there. It was a remote and difficult place on the limestone pavement but it had the advantage of the Caher River flowing through it. In developing the site he has

imported over 1500 tons of top soil, and sieved it all by hand.

The plant list is eye watering, much of it based on native species such as ferns, hawthorn, willow and alder. He has a notable collection of Irish daffodils, but also of hydrangea, astilbe, hosta and crocosmia. The range of planting has brought lots of wild life to the garden — birds, insects, butterflies and moths, and not forgetting his friendly, photogenic fox.

*Yvonne Penpraze*



Fox in the snow at Caher Bridge, photo courtesy of Carl Wright





# *Dates for your Diary*

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Snowdrops at Benvarren, Co Antrim by Barbara Kelso

# Dates for your Diary

**Wednesday 11th January  
at 7.30pm via Zoom**

## **Five Great Northern Irish Gardens — Mount Stewart, Rostrevor, Rowallane, Castlewellan and Brook Hall — past and present**

with **Neil Porteous**

The story of great Irish gardens is often one of highs and lows, the flourishing of a vision coupled with the money to make it happen sometimes followed by decay or almost total erasure. Find out more about Mount Stewart, often acclaimed as one of the best gardens in Britain and Ireland, the significance of Rostrevor now sadly lost, and the exciting new developments planned for both Castlewellan and Brook Hall in Derry.

**Neil Porteous** is a plantsman and historic gardens consultant. He was formerly the National Trust's Gardens Advisor and Head Gardener at Mount Stewart. Recently he has been advising on the restoration of Anne's Grove garden in Co Cork and the development of Brook Hall in Derry.



Mount Stewart

**Tuesday 17th January  
at 7.30pm via Zoom**

## **Gardening in and around the World's Largest Greenhouse**

with **Catherine Cutler**

For the past 22 years Catherine Cutler has worked at the Eden Project in Cornwall in a range of horticultural positions.

Currently she is the manager of the Rainforest and Mediterranean Biomes, one a huge indoor rainforest and the other a massive indoor garden with a Mediterranean climate.

She will introduce the Eden Project, its values, its diverse plant collection and the gardens it contains. She will consider sustainable gardening/ horticulture and the challenges we face, including climate change. Catherine (below) holds *Macropedia fuliginosa* Black Kangaroo Paw, an Australian shrub.





**Saturday 18th February at 2.00pm**

## **A Summer Visit to the Deserts of Ladakh**

with **Seamus O'Brien**

Venue: National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin. DO9 VY63,

**Seamus O'Brien** recounts the adventures of a trip he led in July 2022 to the mountains of Ladakh, where he and his group studied a high altitude desert flora. Ladakh, on the border between India and Tibet, has some of the greatest glaciers in all Asia and these glaciers water the deserts on the mountain slopes and valleys below, giving rise to a rich flora. Hear how climate change is threatening this rare ecosystem.

Seamus O'Brien became the Head Gardener at the National Botanic Gardens, Kilmacurragh in 2006. Since then, developments have included re-planting the garden with rare and unusual trees and shrubs, planting herbaceous borders and five kilometres of shelterbelts and hedgerows, restoration of the wildflower and crocus meadows, and the purchase of the walled garden and deer park.



Ladakh, Warila Pass prayer flags, July 2022

**Tuesday 21st March at 7.30pm**

## **Planting Designs for Award Winning Gardens**

with **Mark Gregory**

Venue: Antrim Old Courthouse, Market Square, Antrim BT41 4AW.

**Mark Gregory** is the Managing Director of Landform Consultants Ltd based in Surrey, a landscaping company comprising landscape architects, garden designers, and a highly skilled landscape workforce. Mark has built 107 gardens at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

In this talk he will highlight some of these projects, giving a behind-the-scenes view of the design and build process along with the key skill of designing successful planting combinations.



Mark Gregory

# Dates for your Diary

**Saturday 25th March from  
10.30am**

## **Propagation workshop at Mullagh Dillon Garden, Slane, County Meath**

A morning workshop led by **Rosie  
Maye**. Further details and booking  
information nearer the time.



Hosta divisions

**Saturday 20th May from  
10.30am**

## **AGM and Guided Tour of Ardgillan Demesne Gardens**

More details to follow.

**Saturday 1st April from  
2.00pm to 4.00pm**

## **Visit to Old Balloo House and Barn**

15 & 17 Comber Road, Killinchy, Co  
Down BT23 6PB

Lesley Simpson and Moira  
Concannon are friends who live in  
adjacent properties, a late Georgian  
house and a converted barn, and  
garden together. Come and enjoy  
the wonderful display of daffodils  
and other bulbs in their romantic  
country garden. Further details will  
be available nearer the time.

Members free, personal guests £5.



Daffodils at Old Balloo

# Thanks to our Contributors

**Janet and Martin Edwardes** served for many years on the Munster regional committee and garden in County Cork.

**Dave and Jules Hardy** own and run Esker Farm Daffodils in County Tyrone [www.eskerfarmdaffodils.com](http://www.eskerfarmdaffodils.com) and are members of the Society.

**Nicola & Peter Milligan** garden at the Mount Stewart estate on the shores of Strangford Lough in Co Down. Both are past members of the Northern Committee.

**Charles Nelson** VMM FLS was the first Chairman (1981–1984) and editor of *Moorea* vols 1-10 (1981–1993). He is an honorary member of the Society.

**Finola Reid** is a landscape consultant specialising in historic gardens and demesnes. Over the years she has held several positions in the Society and was Chair from 1990–1994.

**Brendan Sayers** is Glasshouse Foreman at the National Botanic Gardens and has spent almost 30 years working there; he specialises in orchids, both native and tropical. He is a long standing member and former committee member.

**Paddy Tobin**, a former Chairman of the Society and Editor of the Newsletter, lives in Waterford and writes a column for *The Irish Garden* magazine.

My grateful thanks to Moira Concannon, Tim Guilbride, Marie Hourigan, Barbara Kelso, Paul Maher, Rosie Maye, Áine-Máire Ní Mhurchú, Seamus O'Brien, Yvonne Penpraze, Yvonne Ranelow, Lesley Simpson and Carl Wright for contributing text and/or photographs.

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While every effort is made to ensure that content is correct at the time of printing, views expressed in the articles are those of the author(s) and may not reflect those of the Society.

Any factual errors will be corrected as soon as possible.



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