



ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

Dublin Group

www.alpinegardensociety.ie



NEWSLETTER NO. 68 – SUMMER 2017



Roscoea cauleoides, See p. 5. (Photo: Billy Moore)

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Front cover illustration is of Paddy Smith’s *Cyclamen persicum* at the 2017 Dublin Show. (Photo: Billy Moore)

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EDITORIAL

Water has become a toxic subject for politicians and a controversial one for many citizens, with a tendency to raise passions to a surprising degree on the part of those who believe that a fair regime of water charges to redress the scandalous under-investment in our water infrastructure over the years makes sense, and on the part of those who are vehemently opposed to charges in any form. I think everyone would agree that the State's handling of the issue to date has been extraordinarily incompetent. The Dáil has decided that by and large Irish people do not waste water, and that having to pay for it would not make any difference to the amount that they use – a very strange conclusion to my mind. They consider, however, that some citizens are excessive users and while water charges are to be abolished excessive use is to be penalized. 'Excessive' use has not been defined, nor have we been told how it will be measured in the case of the many households who are not metred. This has to be a worry for us gardeners. Most of us are responsible in our use of water in the garden, only watering where absolutely necessary, not, for example, watering the lawn. Obviously plants in pots must be watered irrespective of the weather, but, in a very dry year such as the one we're having at present, some plants in the ground will need a little watering from time to time. This summer so far has been a good one, but soil moisture has been very low and remains so as I write (in early August). I don't know what the solution is and I have no faith that the politicians will do the right thing. Treated water is an expensive product and has to be paid for; it should not be wasted. I don't regard responsible watering of the garden as wasteful, but many people would. I have a real fear that we gardeners will be treated as 'wasters' and penalized to such an extent that watering the garden will no longer be feasible in years to come. Everything hangs on the definition of 'excessive' and we can only hope that moderate, essential watering of the garden will continue to be possible, but the sooner we get clarity the better.

ALPINE MISCELLANY

As usual the summer issue of the newsletter includes reports on the two shows which I hope will be of interest to both exhibitors and non-exhibitors alike.

My thanks to Liam Byrne for his article on the popular 'Wharfedale' primulas which, as he points out make excellent show plants. As a contributor Liam is an editor's dream: I phone him today asking for an article and tomorrow I find it in my letter box. Thanks also to everyone who provided reports on our various fixtures, especially to George Sevastopulo for his comprehensive account of our visit to Dr Willie Reardon's garden. These reports are always worth reading as they often include tips on cultivation from the expert speakers.

Speaking of fixtures, it was with great regret that the Committee had to cancel the proposed trip to Cork gardens in May. There was no choice as only a handful of members sent in the booking form. The cancellation resulted in some embarrassment for us as tentative bookings had been made with a hotel, and with the owners of some eight gardens. We have been wondering why there was such a lack of interest in the trip, and would appreciate feedback from members as to whether it was too expensive, or if the itinerary was unappealing or if there was some other reason. We are planning a trip to the Burren next May, details of which will be included in the next newsletter, and any comments members may have on Cork might be helpful.

Opposite and on the back page there are some photos taken in my garden this year. The roscoea is an easy, beautiful plant which you all should be growing; the hepatica is a particularly fine cultivar and it makes an excellent show plant; the rhodohypoxis is an easy and most attractive alpine with the flowers lasting as long as six weeks.

I have to confess that I included these three images as 'fillers', but I would much prefer to use photos from other members. So, what about a little competition? Send me your best alpine related photo and I will publish the winning image on the back page of the next newsletter. Ideally the photo should be in portrait format. The winner will receive a free year's membership.

Facebook page and website from Fionnuala Broughan

Are you one of those gardeners who believes that Windows should simply be something through which we gaze fondly at our own slice of garden heaven; that Facebook is only for teenagers? Whether we like or loathe new technologies, most of us probably grudgingly accept that it's handy to be able to take a quick picture of a new covetable plant on our phone and then 'Google' it later to find out more.

At our final couple of meetings of last season, the Committee discussed whether we should pay more attention to how we might make better use of the web to increase general awareness of what it is that we do. As you know, we're always eager to spread the word about alpine and woodland plants and we're also keen to welcome new members to the society. Facebook can be a very useful way to reach far more people than using only our talks and shows, wonderful though they are. We hope that by generating interest *via* Facebook and our website, we will pique the interest of gardeners and others to come to the events we provide throughout the year. Those of you who 'like' and follow our Facebook page will have noticed that Billy has been posting beautiful photos of his plants and garden over the last several months and it is partly through this activity that our popularity online has increased to over 1600 likes as of mid-August! Facebook is also a very handy way to remind people of upcoming events, or to provide other news and interesting information about alpines. And here's the thing: Facebook operates on the basis of activity – the more active a site is (the more 'likes' and comments one of our photos receives, for example), the more Facebook pushes it to other people online. So, if you're already on Facebook, do search out our site (@AGSIreland) and like/follow us. If you're not on Facebook and would like to be, ask either Jamie or me at our next meeting how to join, or ask a friend or relative to give you a hand. It's a nice way to keep up to date and a great way to make 'virtual' visits to all sorts of places, from beautiful gardens in Dublin to mountainsides in Sikkim.

As well as committing to using Facebook more, we on the Committee decided that it would be a good idea to update our website. The site we have has served the Society well for many years now, but is becoming

less usable mainly because it doesn't work on mobile phones or tablets, for example. We've decided to work with someone to help us design a new site that will work on all sorts of devices and will also, we hope, be easier for members and others to navigate and for us on the committee to update. Work on this will begin in the Autumn and we hope it will be ready by the new year.

(This update comes from Fionnuala as she is now working with Jamie on the management of our Web and Facebook pages. Ed.)

2018 Show Update, from Gavin Moore

We had another very successful show in 2017, both in terms of the financial results, and the quality and quantity of exhibits. Next year we have the later Irish show, which in most normal seasons is the larger show with a broader range of plants being at their best towards the end of April. In 2018, we could well have one or two exhibitors from the UK so it really could be an excellent show. Whereas our friends from the UK will add to the numbers and interest in the Open Section, we really need more exhibitors in the Novice and Intermediate Sections. Now is the time to start planning so here are three things to do right now to get ready for next year:

1. If you have never exhibited at a show before, this is the best possible time of year to plan your first ever entry. Now is the perfect time to buy some bulbs in your local garden centre. There are many good places to buy bulbs, including Murphy & Wood Garden Centre in Cabinteely. Planting some bulbs in a 19cm pot is the easiest possible way to present a plant ready for showing. You simply put the bulbs in the pot, leave it in the open garden and ignore it until you see growth in the spring. It really is that simple.
2. Whether you are new to showing or not, go out to your local garden centre (or even some hardware shops) and look for plants to show next year. There are many simple alpines that make great show plants and that are readily available in many locations.
3. The key to preparing a plant for the show bench in April is to give it the best possible treatment the summer before. If you have a plant that you think could be show worthy next year, check to see

if it needs a new pot. It most likely does if you haven't potted it on already this summer. Even if the plant has not physically outgrown its current pot, it is worthwhile knocking it out, carefully removing some of the spent compost and putting it back in the same pot with fresh compost.

As always, if you are thinking about showing next year, whether it is your first time or not, please contact one of the many experienced exhibitors in the group for advice.

Could I remind you as well that in order to exhibit you must be a member of the parent body. Leaving showing aside, this is an excellent idea anyway as membership entitles you to a copy of each of the superb quarterly journals, and gives you almost free access to the thousands of rare alpine seeds in the annual seed exchange.

Honorary Membership

Earlier this year the Committee decided to award Honorary Life Membership to three of our most distinguished members: Liam Byrne; Bob Gordon; and Harold McBride.

Liam has been a very active member since 1984 and has been a great contributor to the Group. He attends all our meetings; did a stint on the Committee; was Chairman for several years and is still Chairman of the Show Committee; writes regularly for the newsletter; presents workshops on cultivation and showing; is always willing to mentor new members; shares plants with other members; but his history as an exhibitor sets him apart. Liam has been an inveterate



exhibitor, winning many Farrer Medals and an amazing eleven Gold Bars. Without Liam's contribution the shows in Dublin and in Antrim would have been significantly poorer. He has been an exemplary member and I have no doubt will continue to contribute to the affairs of our Group.



Bob Gordon has been a true friend of the Dublin Group since it was formed. His support has been invaluable. Bob has an encyclopaedic knowledge of many genera of plants and has been generous over the years in sharing his knowledge and indeed his plants. He developed an amazing garden in Portglenone which most of our members have visited at least once. The sheer scale and diversity of planting in his garden puts it into competition with many public gardens, some of which would come second best by comparison. Bob is also a top class exhibitor and with his great friend, the late and much lamented John McWhirter did much plant exploring in Europe and North America. He is an outstanding plantsman and we must be proud to have him as an Honorary Member.

Harold McBride has to be the doyen of Irish alpine growers. His skill as a plantsman could hardly be bettered. As well as growing a huge range of difficult plants to perfection he has also successfully bred new varieties of such plants as primulas, oxalis, galanthus and others, cultivars that regularly appear in the catalogues of various top nurseries. We have enjoyed many of his top class lectures over the years. His generosity with plants and advice is legendary and most of our members have enjoyed visits to his immaculate garden as well as the gifts of plants that Harold provides to visitors. He has supported the Dublin Group

unstintingly since its inception and is a most worthy recipient of this honour.

Harold and Bob have been members of our Group for almost ten years.

Congratulations to our three new Honorary Life Members and we hope they will enjoy their membership for many years.

(My thanks to Liam McCaughey for the photos of Bob and Harold).



Northumberland Show 2017



As has been our practice in recent years Liam Byrne, George Sevastopulo, Paddy Smith and myself again visited one of the shows across the water. This year we went to Northumberland, a much bigger show than either of the Irish shows, and were impressed by the range of plants on the benches. The Farrer Medal went to a flawless specimen of *Sebaea thomasi* 'Bychan' exhibited by our good friends from Aberconwy Nursery, Keith and Rachel Lever, to whom we send our warm congratulations. This form of *S. thomasi* is smaller in all its parts than the usual form and is considerably more difficult, so getting it to this size and condition was quite an achievement. Paddy Smith got two red stickers for his two pots of *Cyclamen persicum* exhibited in different classes and I picked up a first and a Certificate of Merit for *Trillium chloropetalum* 'Bob Gordon'. All in all a worthwhile, educational and enjoyable trip. It was great that George was able to come after his recent serious illness.

Fixtures

Our first autumn lecture is on 19 October in the NBG, Glasnevin. Our speaker is **Julian Sutton** of Desirable Plants (desirableplants.com), a mail order operation run by Julian and his wife, Sarah. Their selection of plants is mouthwatering. Julian has a particular interest and expertise in the *Iris* family and the title of his talk is; 'Making sense of the Iridaceae'. He is an experienced lecturer who is much in demand. This is a joint lecture with the IGPS and should be fascinating.

On 9 November in Stillorgan, **Neil Huntley** will talk on 'Alpines with altitude'. Neil, with his wife Sue is the proprietor of Hartside Nursery in Cumbria (plantswithaltitude.co.uk). He has an extensive catalogue, will be bringing plants and will take advance orders from members. The nursery has won many awards, the most recent being a Gold Medal at the RHS Tatton Show last July. He brings plants for sale to all the major AGS shows in the UK. He lectures widely to AGS and other groups and you should not miss this talk.

On 17 to 19 November we're off to Termonfeckin for our 34th Alpine Weekend. Another great lineup of speakers this year with **Kenneth Cox**, proprietor of the famous Glendoick Nursery in Scotland; **Tim Lever** of Aberconwy; and last, but by no means least, another return visit from

the ever popular **Ian & Maggi Young**. Full details of the programme as well as a booking form are included in your mailout.

As always we finish the year with our **Christmas Miscellany** in Stillorgan on 7 December, a jolly, social evening with a range of diverse presentations, all plant related, from a selection of members. Jamie will be looking for contributors well before the day.

John Quin

It was sad to note the tragically early death of John on Easter Sunday last. Although only a member for a few years John had made his mark with the Group. He was a great enthusiast, attended most of our events and was also a very active and prominent member of the RHSI. Our sincere condolences to his family and friends.

Billy Moore

The 'Wharfedale' primulas

Most of my friends know that my favourite plants come from the family Primulaceae and in particular from the genus, *Primula*. About three years ago I got some of the well-known 'Wharfedale' primula hybrids. These lovely plants were bred by the late Alec Stubbs of Grassington in Wharfedale in the Yorkshire Dales. To the best of my knowledge the hybrids available at present are: *P.* 'Wharfedale Gem'; *P.* 'Wharfedale Bluebell'; *P.* 'Wharfedale Village'; *P.* 'Wharfedale Buttercup'; *P.* 'Wharfedale Sunshine'; and *P.* 'Wharfedale Ling'. There seems to be no authoritative information available on the parentage of these hybrids but it's likely that *P. marginata* and *P. auricula* were involved.



I grow three: 'Bluebell'; 'Village'; and 'Gem' and have my eye out for the others. Potterton's Nursery in Lincolnshire is a good source as are Peninsula Primulas and, of course, Aberconwy Nursery. *P.* 'Wharfedale Bluebell' is a prolific bloomer of a deep rich, blue colour; *P.* 'Wharfedale Village' (above) will fill a pot with pure white flowers and has good

farina on the foliage; and *P.* 'Wharfedale 'Gem' has lovely, bright pink flowers. If you're interested in showing they all make good and easy show plants.

The compost I use in the pots is made up of one part good loam, one part Brown Gold and one part fine grit. The plants should be placed quite firmly in the pot. During the growing and flowering period water regularly but keep the plants just moist in winter. Keep them in light shade during the summer. I give three feeds of tomato fertilizer during the growing season starting when the flowers are over. Keep an eye out for aphids and take action immediately if any are seen. I remove the dead flowers and any dead foliage from the plants.

Grow these hybrids; they are wonderful and you will get great enjoyment from them. Better still put them on the show bench and you will get plenty of red stickers.

Liam Byrne

THE SHOWS

Dublin, 8 April

As the longest serving Show Secretary in the AGS, it gives me great joy to write the 32nd Dublin Show Report for perhaps the youngest Show Secretary on the occasion of his third Show in this role. Gavin Moore, I suppose, had the advantage of learning about alpines from his expert grower and shower father Billy Moore, who this year won his sixth Farrer Medal.

Under Gavin's leadership the Dublin Show is calm and welcoming, from the greetings at the school entrance hall by members sorting plants at the members' plant stall, to exhibitors from North and South quite obviously glad to see each other after a year's absence (all at the same time casting a watchful eye as plants were wheeled in and put on the show benches). 'Be The Best You Can Be', a wall-hanging motto at the head of the hall, is obviously intended for the pupils of Cabinteely Community School, but also applies to AGS exhibitors!

An eye-catching photographic display of 'Flowers of Turkey' by Joan and Liam McCaughey gave a focus to a wall adjacent to the show benches, gaining a well-deserved Gold Medal. A quiet harmony was orchestrated by Director of Shows Martin Rogerson, who led the judges in a firm but relaxed manner! Another facet worth noting is the efficiency of the stewards, who had been trained to stay at an appropriate distance behind the judges. The Dublin ladies supplied most welcome coffee and first class home baking to judges and helpers, later also enjoyed by the general public. Gwenda Wratt had an excellent stall of hand-crafted cards, book marks etc., all adding to show's income.

During the afternoon, quiet live piano was played, adding to the buzz of visitors as they viewed the plants on display. Large pots of trilliums were very much in evidence, beautifully grown and perfectly presented.

Trillium chloropetalum 'Bob Gordon', below, its golden petals glistening in the sunshine, won a sixth Farrer for Billy Moore, as well as the Margaret Orsi Bowl for best plant from North America.



Another species, Gordon Toner's *T. albidum*, above, received a Certificate of Merit; of the four trilliums he brought to Dublin, three gained first prizes. He grows them in pots until they are too large, whereupon they are planted out in his Limavady garden. They thrive in a mixture of leaf-mould and garden soil, fed with blood, fish and bone, and while kept in

the open most of the year, they are sheltered under glass shortly before exhibition. One of Gordon's trilliums won a Farrer four years ago, and it is worth pointing out that a red-coloured *T. chloropetalum*, similar to one he had on the bench, is over 25 years old, sporting over 100 flowers! Trilliums appreciate the north-west climate and Gordon's meticulous care.

Pat and George Gordon's *Cassiope hycopodioides* 'Beatrice Lilley', eight years old and beautifully grown, was awarded won a Certificate of Merit and the Jacki Troughton-Smith Trophy. Kept outdoors in a raised ericaceous bed without protection, it is top dressed and fed occasionally, then lifted for showing.



Two other Certificates of Merit were awarded, one to Susan Tindall's beautifully grown, immaculate *Anemonella thalictroides* f. *rosea* 'Oscar Shoaf', below, which is very happy outside on her rock garden in damp, heavy clay, though she also has a clump some 30 years old in a trough. The second Certificate went to Gavin Moore's *Veronica bombycina* var. *bolcardaghensis*, page 19, a plant he saw at an Ulster Show some time ago (owned by Bob Gordon) and fell in love with. He grows it in the open but protected from heavy rain since it is prone to rotting at the centre.



Harold McBride was awarded the Ulster Group Trophy for three pans of perfectly grown rock plants from seed. Paddy Smith won the ACC Cup for most aggregate points in the Open Section, as well as the David Shackleton Trophy for the best pan of Primulaceae with *Cyclamen persicum*, which he grows in a fairly lean compost to encourage better flowering; overfeeding produces large leaves and fewer flowers. Paddy also had some ethereal blue gentians on the bench. He's almost the 'Gentian King' with his expertise in producing these plants year after year. He ensures they are part-shaded as soon as they start to flower, to prevent bleaching.

The Waverley Trophy for the best plant in the Intermediate Section was won by Patricia Maguire, who has now been showing for five years, with *Mukdenia rossii*, which she lifted from a cool run in her garden of heavy clay. This plant is now seven years old. She also won the Barney Johnson Trophy for most first class points in the Section, which was well supported, auguring well for the future. The Novice Section only had nineteen entries but what it lacked in numbers, it made up for in quality of plants. This is where the future of shows lies. Sandra Fowler won the Millennium Cup with a well grown and presented *Lewisia tweedyi*, kept in her alpine house. Sandra bought a gardening book and when she came upon the alpine plant chapter she was hooked, and now wants to learn

as much as possible about to grow them. The Termonfeckin Trophy for most first prizes in the Novice Section was won by Jamie Chambers, who also won the Brian Wood Trophy.

In conclusion, well done to everybody in the Dublin Group for an excellent, happy Show. Well done particularly to the Moore family; son and Show Secretary Gavin for leading the Show and for his awards, and to his father Billy for all his support, achieving another Farrer, and most importantly a third generation of this talented family, a daughter of Gavin who was there to see the show, and see her father and grandfather pick up their awards. Gavin tells me that she and her sister assist when he is planting seeds: we must catch them young!



Author: Pat Crossley

Photographer: Billy Moore

Ulster, 22 April

Saturday, 22nd April 2017, dawned cool and dry, ideal conditions for exhibitors to convey their plants into the show hall for staging. The weather in the months leading up to the show, however, had a less benign effect in that it resulted in many plants that should have been at their best in late April being over. In consequence, there were noticeably fewer exhibits than one would expect at the later of the two Irish shows, which is usually the bigger. But, while numbers were down, quality was not, and there were many fine plants on the benches for visitors to admire. In short, the Show was a success and was enjoyed by exhibitors and visitors alike. As always, Pat Crossley, the longest serving Show Secretary in the AGS, and her team must be congratulated for the hard work that ensured that everything ran so smoothly. Martin Rogerson, Director of Shows, supervised the judging firmly and sensitively, ensuring that standards were maintained, while recognizing the issues facing exhibitors who are effectively confined to two shows annually.

As well as the spectacle provided by the plants, visitors also enjoyed the photographic display, 'Flowers of Turkey', staged by Joan and Liam McCaughey. The exhibit earned a well-deserved Gold Award. On the show bench, Joan and Liam's *Iris pumila attica* was judged to be the best bulbous plant in the Intermediate Section.



There was competition for the best plant in both the novice and intermediate sections. In the Novice Section Triona Corcoran's (Dublin) *Silene acaulis* took the honours, and a flawless pot of *Helichrysum pagophilum*, above, shown by Gemma Hayes (Colwyn Bay) was deemed the winner in the Intermediate Section and was also awarded a Certificate of Merit. The trophies for the highest aggregate points in the Open Section went to Paddy Smith (Navan); in the Intermediate to Mac Dunlop (Glenoe, Larne); and to Jamie Chambers (Sandycove) in the Novice Section.



Several plants were also in contention for best in show with the Farrer Medal being awarded to Gavin Moore's (Dublin) large *Primula henrici*, above, originally purchased as *P. bracteata*. I can't help wondering if the last word has been said on the classification of this species given its wide variation in flower and foliage. I have seen little consistency in the use, or omission of subsp. *henrici*, or subsp. *dubardnardiana* on specimens on the show bench.

An unusual feature of the Show was the three entries in the large six pan class, due, I suppose, to the fact that the RHS Sewell Medal would go to the winner. The judges spent quite a long time examining the eighteen plants before declaring your reporter's entry the winner. One plant in my group, *Pulsatilla albana lutea*, was also awarded a Certificate of Merit. Gordon Toner's (Limavady) entry included *Lupinus nootkatensis*, a plant



not often seen on the show bench. It is a true alpine and looked well in a 30cm pot, but probably would not be enthused about in Iceland, where, since its introduction in 1945, it has proved to be extremely invasive and is now a major pest in that country. Gordon grows trilliums very well and was awarded the Frank Walsh Cup for the best bulbous plant in the Open Section for his well-flowered *T. albidum*.

Among the few lewisias at the Show, Raymond Copeland's (Newry) *L. tweedyi* and *L. cotyledon* were both given Certificates of Merit. Unusually for Ulster there were not many plants from Australasia on the benches. The award for the best plant from that region went to George and Pat Gordon's (Bangor) *Myosotis glabrescens*. This New Zealand native is a fairly rare plant and likes cool conditions and so does well in Scotland and Northern Ireland. It makes a nice cushion but the white flowers tend to be sparse. The award for the best Ericaceae also went to George and Pat for *Cassiope* Stormbird Group.

A fine *Cyclamen persicum* from Paddy Smith was the best plant in a 19cm pot. In recent years Paddy has been recognized as an expert grower of gentians (his *Gentiana verna* won the Cowan Trophy), but his cyclamen and fritillarias are outstanding also, an exhibitor to watch.



There seems to be a slight resurgence of interest in the dwarf conifer classes at the Irish shows recently but entries are still way short of the

numbers of some years ago. One interesting entry from Pat Kennedy (Dublin), in the rare in cultivation class, was a specimen of *Phyllocladus trichomanoides* 'Highlander', above, also known as the Alpine Celery Pine, the male form of this New Zealand native. It is a rare and slow-growing conifer bearing small green leaflets and small bundles of reddish cones in summer. It is fully hardy and likes well-drained soil. It grows to about 45cm in ten years and is a member of the Podocarpaceae.

A few statistics: there were eighteen entries in the Novice Section from four exhibitors; thirty-two in the Intermediate, eight exhibitors; and 132 in the Open, fourteen exhibitors.

The close of the late April Show marks the end of the show season for Irish alpine growers and is always tinged with a little sadness. As well as being an opportunity to see wonderful plants grown by other exhibitors the shows have a strong social element enabling members of the two groups to share experiences and gossip. For now, the medium term future of the two Irish shows seems assured, but the fact that the average age of the exhibitors is rising year by year is worrying. We must continue to make every effort to encourage more members to exhibit and to attract new, younger members.

Author: Billy Moore

Photographer: Heather Smith

REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

‘Seeing the woodlanders from the trees: rare and interesting plants shaded by a choice canopy’, Miriam Cotter, 19 January

Our first lecture of 2017 was a lovely account by Miriam of her damp woodland garden on $\frac{3}{4}$ acre in Co. Cork, a garden that is clearly lovingly tended and well curated, with an equal mix of knowledge, plantsmanship and design sensibility, by her. I was glad that she provided us with her plant list (as so many of our speakers do) as she covered a very wide and comprehensive range of beautiful, interesting and sometimes rare woodland and shade plants. I’d imagine many of us in the audience, gardening as we do in relatively dry Dublin gardens, were envious of the conditions in Miriam’s garden: a deep glacial soil that receives steady moisture throughout the whole year, including right through the summer. Not best for people perhaps, but these conditions make for happy plants, as evidenced by Miriam’s photos and descriptions.

Miriam is a busy person and takes a practical as well as an informed approach to her gardening. She makes sure that plants are placed where they will do well, that they earn their keep (if they don’t, they’re out!), and that a bark and leaf mould mulch keep the weeds suppressed in the few areas where plant cover isn’t sufficient: one of Miriam’s tenets is to ensure there are enough plants that she wants in her garden so that there’s little room for weeds to get a hold.

I’ll pick out just a few of the many lovely plants that Miriam mentioned; some of them are her own favourites, some of them are ones that caught my eye.

Miriam did say that one of her favourite plants of all is *Cypripedium reginae*, the aptly named Showy Lady’s Slipper, a North American native that has clearly settled well into the Cork region. It’s happily joined by



other orchids such as *Dactylorhiza x grandis* 'Blackthorn Strain', which grows to over 70cm in Miriam's garden; *D. fuchsii* 'Bressingham Bonus', another tall beauty; *D. foliosa* (from Jenny Archibald), which has inflorescences of up to 30cm; and the long-flowering pure white *Dactylorhiza* 'Eskimo Nell'.

Miriam's is a woodland garden so naturally trees and shrubs are a major feature. I particularly liked the grace of *Pinus patula* (Mexican weeping pine) and the small-leaved *Acer palmatum* 'Chisio Improved' which has beautiful crimson spring foliage. Miriam recommended *Daphne bholua* 'Ghurka', preferring it to 'Jacqueline Postil', and *Magnolia wilsonii*, which flowers from the end of May sometimes right into August. She uses *Ceanothus thyrsiflorus* 'Zanzibar' as a canopy plant and remarked that it flowers for up to two months and is very easy to grow. *Syringa vulgaris* 'Sensation' looked amazing, with each dark purple petal edged in white, but Miriam warned that it gets a bit leggy and some judicious planting to hide this is called for.

There were lots more: Trilliums, Lilies (*L. pardalinum* 'Giganteum'!), Podophyllums ('Spotty Dotty'), Fritillaries, and of course happy *Meconopsis spp.*, loving the moisture. I came home to my dry Dublin garden longing for more space and perhaps more rain (!?) and resolved to at least getting some *Lilium martagon var. cattaniae*, a gorgeous dark variety, and just one of the many beauties grown in Miriam's woodland.

Fionnuala Broughan

Annual Lunch. 'The Making of the Bay Garden', Frances McDonald, 28 January

Frances gave us a fascinating and humorous description of setting up their famous Bay Garden in Co. Wexford – from having to climb in through a window to view the old house as there was no key, and advice from everyone not to buy it - including her husband - but the soil was excellent! She trained at the NBG and worked at Kew where she met Iain. They came to Ireland, Iain designs and landscapes gardens, and after a few years they wanted to do their own.

Baylands had been a farm house with an orchard and some old roofless sheds. They made the house habitable, cleared the old apple trees and laid a lawn for the family. The garden was made in sections over the years, spending three years in preparation before planting to ensure no perennial weeds. Each bed was double dug, compost was incorporated and the beds left to be planted up the following April, mostly with plants propagated by Iain. The last garden they made was filled with 650 plants also propagated by Iain. Each bed had a tree with herbaceous underplanting, one a beautiful *Cornus kousa* 'China Girl', some rhododendrons, and an *Aralia elata* 'Variegata'.



We saw lovely photos of their roses, beautifully grown, including 'Bantry Bay', 'Zepherine Drouhin', 'Phyllis Bide' and her favourite, 'Vidal Sassoon'. We heard how after giving a talk with Mr Middleton she asked to be paid in tulips. They now have a tulip extravaganza in April and are watching to see which varieties persist.

Frances and Iain both lead garden trips abroad and Frances is the Director of Garden Trips for the Travel Department. As she says – she is the organizer in their lives and Iain the doer.

Frances' entire talk was beautifully punctuated with her own unique brand of self-deprecating humour, which in no way took from the obvious expertise of herself and Iain in creating a really wonderful garden. When asked what she would change if she could start all over again she replied that she would marry a millionaire and have Iain as the head gardener!!

If you have not been to the Bay Garden in Camolin – do make it this year.

After the lunch, Gavin Moore reported on the coming Show looking for help. The Show awards presentation will be at the Local Show. Jamie

then made a special presentation of the Award of Honour from the parent AGS to Billy Moore for his longstanding work for our Group over the years.

Val Keegan

**Visit to the garden of Terry and Pat Levin, Kilquade, Co Wicklow,
5 February**

On a pleasant, bright Sunday afternoon an enthusiastic group of members visited Terry and Pat's one-acre garden to see Terry's snowdrops of which he has a large collection, around 300, 150 named, including many rare and much sought after varieties such as 'South Hayes', 'Big Boy' (my favourite), 'Trym', 'Trymlet', and *G. elwesii* 'Green Tip'. They are ten years in the house but Terry's interest in galanthus goes back twenty years or so. 2017 was a poor year for snowdrops, he told us, largely due to the exceptionally dry autumn and winter to date. It was with some sadness that Terry announced that they planned to sell the house and garden during the year and move to Greystones. Obviously the snowdrops will travel as well.

Apart from the snowdrops the garden was well planted with good trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials and other bulbs. It has an acid soil over gravel. A large *Daphne bholua* 'Jacqueline Postil' was still wafting its fragrance on the still air. Many *Cyclamen coum*, *Eranthis hyemalis*, *Narcissus cyclamineus*, various crocuses and hellebores were a lovely foil to the snowdrops.

Terry had some nice snowdrops and hellebores for sale many of which left the garden with us. I bought a nice pot of *G.* 'Sibbertoft Magnet'.

The visit ended with tea and 'treats' and Jamie thanked Terry and Pat for their generous hospitality and for giving us the opportunity to see their fine garden.

Billy Moore

‘North America – from Alaska to the Mexican border’, Malcolm McGregor, 16 February

Talk cancelled due to illness of speaker.

Local Show, members plant sale and workshop, 4 March

The local show was an early one this year and featured lots of Primulaceae as well as lovely Narcissi, Hepaticas, Cyclamen and a beautiful *Hyacinthioides reverchonii*: very much a spring show. One of my favourites though was Paddy Smith’s *Bolax gummifera* which won a first in the Cushion Plant class and rightly re-appeared, still looking great, at the Main Show a few weeks later.

We had a good turn-out for the show with a lovely variety of plants on the show bench; it was great to see plants from new members or from members showing for the first time. The local show is always a great way to dip your toe in the competitive waters – and more experienced members are always on hand to offer advice and support to first-timers. Congratulations to one of those newcomers, Sandra Fowler, on winning a first with her *Saxifraga x irvingii* ‘Jenkinsiae’. Sandra’s photos featured too as did some lovely entries from Patricia Maguire who was awarded ‘Best photograph’. Many thanks to Gavin Moore, Liam Byrne and George Sevastopulo for judging and to Barbara O’Callaghan who helped me with the stewarding. Billy Moore brought home the Kiltrea Pot and the Margaret Orsi Watering Can.

Unfortunately for me, my stewarding duties meant that I missed most of the workshop on growing alpines from seed, given by Billy Moore, and judging from the attentive audience there was lots to learn! Many thanks to Billy who not only gave an informative and practical workshop, but also provided lovely healthy seedlings at the end of his talk to those who wished to grow them on. There was a lot more gardening generosity on hand on the plant stall, where kind members donated many plants, and where the snowdrops sold like hotcakes. I was delighted to get some lovely *Cyclamen coum* from the many that Paddy Smith kindly donated.

Many thanks to Paddy, Val Keegan and Mary Glennon for ‘manning’ the plant stall on the day.

Tea and biscuits, served up by Tessa Dagge and Triona Noonan, rounded off the day allowing time for chat and socializing. All that remains is to encourage all, but especially those who haven’t shown before, to think ahead to next year’s show: an easy way in if you’re new to it all is pot up some Spring bulbs—with an alpine focus—in the Autumn, or on the day of the show to gather together alpine cut flowers (and dwarf shrubs) for the Cut Flowers class!

Fionnuala Broughan

‘New and exciting perennials’, Jimi Blake, 16 March

In front of a capacity audience in the NBG Jimi delivered a fascinating talk on his current loves in the plant world. The talk was sponsored jointly by the AGS and the IGPS. Jimi’s relaxed, informal style, like a conversation with friends, engaged the audience which responded with enthusiastic, sustained applause at the end. He acknowledged that his talk was not going to be just about ‘new’ plants, but, being excited by the sudden explosion of spring in his garden in recent days, had decided to include a large number of woodland plants, some of which have been around for a while.

Jimi is a consummate plantsman and his passion for his subject was very evident throughout the talk. His unique garden at Hunting Brook, well known to many in the audience, reflects his innovative approach to planting, and has changed and evolved over the years and continues to do so. His current project is to make the extensive woodland valley more accessible. He is constantly on the lookout for new species or cultivars which could enhance his creation. Drone shots gave us a ‘bird’s eye’ view of the garden and its environs, including sister June’s celebrated creation nearby. The excellent photos were mostly Jimi’s own, but included some lovely atmospheric shots by Bernard van Giessen.

Jimi admitted to being a collector of several genera, including galanthus, eranthis, erythroniums, epimediums, corydalis, geraniums and others

with salvias being somewhere at the top of the list. Throughout the talk he told us where some of the rarer subjects could be sourced, and threw in useful cultivation tips from time to time. For example, snowdrops dislike being planted too deeply.

We spent the first half of the talk in the woodland garden, moving into the main garden in the latter half. Jimi discussed more than a hundred plants, each of which deserves a mention in this report, but I can include only some which I found particularly interesting or appealing. *Eranthis hyemalis* 'Noel Ayres', among the ten or so varieties of Winter Aconite that he grows, has unusual yellow and green flowers. *Galanthus* 'Green Tear' is rather special, I just checked on the web: one bulb could cost you £190! Jimi finds the much more affordable, G. 'Trymlet' a very good doer. Among his collection of corydalis, C. 'Fire Bird, with good red flowers stood out. Of the later flowering corydalis, *C. stipulata* is special and the flowers of *C. 'Porcelain Blue'* are an amazing colour. Among primulas, *P. 'June Blake'* is one of his favourites, and not just because it is named after his sister but because it is such an obliging long-flowering plant.

Jimi loves erythroniums, *E. hendersonii* being one of the best. It is important to keep these plants going as long as possible. They can be divided when the leaves turn yellow. His favourite trillium is *T. kurabashyui*, but *T. 'Green Frost'* with extraordinary silver blue foliage is firmly on his wish list. Among epimediums, *E. 'Domaine de Saint-Jean de Beauregard'* is long-flowering and *E. 'Spine Tinger'* has lovely foliage. *Syneilesis tagawa* BSWJ11191 has striking, hairy foliage but is perhaps outdone in terms of presence by the enormous leaf on *Podophyllum 'Big Leaf'*, which likes good soil in dappled shade. *P. hexandrum 'Majus'* is nicer than *P. 'Spotty Dotty'* and carries its flowers on top. Another big-leaved plant is the very desirable *Arisaema fargesii*, which has been on my wish list for some time. His collection of polygonatums includes *P. flexuosum* which is one of the very best. The late flowering lysimachias are worthwhile plants, and *L. paridiformis var. stenophylla* is the one to go for.

The large Chilean fern with a bluish reverse, *Lophosoria quadripinnata*, is indispensable for Jimi as is that super grass, *Chionochloa rubra*. His most recommended geranium is *G. psilostemon* 'Anne Thompson', but *G. p.* 'Mount Venus' is not to be ignored. Nor is the pale blue, *G. wallichianum* 'Havana Blue'. *Geum* 'Totally Tangerine' is widely available and flowers for six to seven months. Thalictrums should be in every garden and among the many that grow in Hunting Brook is Jimi's favourite plant of 2016, *T. delavayi* var. *decorum*. *Dictamnus albus* subsp. *turkestanicus* is quite lovely.

Sanguisorbias are great garden plants, *S. officinalis* being especially good. *Veronicastrum* 'Mammy Blake' came from the garden of Jimi's mother, from whom both he and June inherited their love of gardening. Mrs Blake featured in a number of his slides. I like acteas and I would like to grow *A.* 'Blickfang'. We got a strong recommendation for *Monarda* 'On Parade', a heavy soil is essential. *Phlox paniculata* 'Nirvana' is a "super plant", as is *Aruncus dioicus* 'Zweiweltenkind'. *Rudbeckia triloba* 'Prairie Glow' is nice, thriving in poor soil. *Nipponanthemum nipponicum* produces its lovely white daisies in October.

Jimi grows *Celmisia* 'David Shackleton' to perfection, modestly saying that it's because his soil "just suits it". *Canna* 'Taney' is the best of that genus. *Dahlia* 'Hunting Brook Seedling' was raised by Jimi and is a fine plant.

We finished with salvias, possibly his favourite genus. He looks for those which flower all summer, although to do really well many of them need warm sunny weather. *S. fulgens* is "excellent" and *S. dombeyi* is "divine".

I hope this summary gives a flavour of this superb talk, delivered in style by a gardener at the height of his powers.

Billy Moore

‘The Flora of sub-arctic Canada’, Gary Mentanko, 11 May

On the second last meeting of the season we were taken to the Hudson Bay lowlands in subarctic Canada by Gary Mentanko, who is currently working in the Glasnevin Botanical Gardens. The pictures shown were taken during two incursions around Churchill, Manitoba (pop. 813) on the SW coast of Hudson Bay.

It was indeed a treat. Gary kept us enthralled not just with the diverse flora, but also with the geological, social, cultural and environmental features of the region.

As a background, it was interesting to hear about the importance of the train and the Hudson Bay Company in the 1800s for the development of trade, such as pelt and grain to Churchill town. In a landscape of harsh winters, foxes, bison, polar bears, arctic foxes, caribous, aurora borealis, beluga whales, nuclear shelters, voracious mosquitos and missile tracking stations, plants come into their own in July. Flowers such as *Kalimia procumbens*, *Salix reticulata* and *Pinguicula villosa* appear after the snow. Fields of mustard cover the landscape, serving the needs of most of the market worldwide.

The soil around Churchill features permafrost and ice heave, with cold warp from the bay. Temperatures vary from -27C to +12C. Isostatic rebound is ongoing. This determines a flora consisting of low growing plants such as dryas, spruce, *Rhododendron groenlandicum*, *R. subarcticum*, *R. japonicum* and *Pedicularis lapponica* as examples.

Gary delighted us with a wonderful array of images of plants, often with references to their uses, such as food (*Hedysarum mackenzii*, *Empetrum nigrum* or Crowberry, which also grows in Ireland), medicine (*Stellaria longipes*, *Pyrola grandiflora*) or clothing (*Linum lewisii*, an endemic plant in the region). He also included examples of plants considered weedy, for example, *Senecio congestus* and *Petasites sagittatus*. Some of the flora of Hudson Bay have a radial distribution around the arctic circle, others can be found as far south as Britain and Ireland, such as cloud berries (*Rubus chamaemorus*), rare in Ireland, and *Potentilla multifida*,

Some species, such as the widespread *Dryas integrifolia*, are pioneer species found in calcareous conditions. And last but not least, he mentioned some orchid species, such as *Orchis rotundifolia*, a common plant, and *Cypripedium passenura*.

The lecture was a reflection of the resilience of plants, animals and humans under extreme conditions as well as their fragility in the face of environmental pollution and global warming.

Conchita Nolan

Visit to the garden of Dr Willie Reardon, 13 May

One of life's great pleasures is a visit to a 'good' garden. My anticipation heightened on the approach to Number 29, Waltham Terrace - the home of our host for the afternoon, Dr Willie Reardon - because it could be easily identified by two splendid trees in the front garden. By the gate was *Cercis siliquastrum*, the Mediterranean redbud, its branches wreathed in rose-pink pea flowers, and on the other side of the front garden, *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata', underplanted with lily-of-the-valley that flowers at the same time as the cornus.



The front garden is home to pink herbaceous paeonies that were in bud at the time of our visit, interspersed with *Aquilegia* cultivars, particularly *A.* 'Nora Barlow', arums and lilies. By the edge of the driveway was a large trumpet gentian, which, judging by the number of developing seed capsules, would have been a contender for the Farrer Medal at the time of the Greenmount Show. It had been moved from places where it did not flower well to its present position draped over a granite kerb where it must get well baked.

At the back of the house more than twenty-five of our members and several most welcome guests from the Ulster Group were gathered. The back garden is rectangular, approximately 12m wide and 26m long, with its long axis trending east-north-east, and with a slight fall of the ground from west to east. It has been developed over the last six years from a more or less barren space surrounded by granite walls. The architectural design is by Veronica Adams and Willie is the creator and executor of the planting design. A most interesting feature of the garden, but one that is not visible except in the obvious health of the plants, is an underground storage tank holding 80,000 litres of water that is fed from the roof of the house and in turn supplies the irrigation system and water features.

The part of the garden nearest the house is bisected longitudinally by a wooden framework on which roses have been trained. Access to the borders on its south side is by a sinuous path that leads via steps to a sunken garden with a circular fountain and a splendid summerhouse in the southeast corner. Steps from the sunken garden lead to the path between the paired borders on the north side of the central divide back to the terrace adjoining the house.

I was interested in the materials that had been used in construction of the garden. The paths are variously of gravel, cobbles set in cement, and grass; there are flagstones steps and a pair of granite gateposts (supporting a magnificent gate) complementing the granite of the walls. This variety of materials is contrary to the dictates of books on garden design but works very well here because each material is confined to a particular area, giving an effect rather similar to garden 'rooms' in larger gardens.

An unusual feature of the planting is the much larger number of shrubs and trees than are generally found in a garden of this size. However, they have all been carefully selected to be in scale and positioned to allow room for growth. For example, the small tree *Amelanchier laevis* 'R.J. Hilton' and its neighbour at the top of the garden, the slender, upright *Rhamnus frangulus* 'Fine Line' will take many years to outgrow their allotted space. *Malus* 'Laura', two pairs of which are on either side of the

steps north of the sunken garden, is a small crab apple with good-sized red fruits. Similarly, a pair of *Viburnum plicatum* 'Kilimanjaro Sunrise' has been preferred to the commonly seen subspecies *mariesii*, which is larger (an added bonus of 'Kilimanjaro Sunrise' is the spectacular autumn colour).

The predominant flower colour of the back garden is white. At the time of our visit, the *Amelanchier* was already setting fruit but among the white-flowered shrubs and trees were *Cornus* × *rutgersensis* 'Celestial', *Cornus* × 'Eddie's White Wonder', *Halesia diptera* 'Magniflora' (the snowdrop tree) and the viburnums. I particularly admired *Viburnum sargentii* 'Onondaga' growing in the border bounding the south wall, which is shaded by trees in the adjoining garden. Its first small white



Paeonia 'Moonshine'. (Photo; Jamie Chambers)

flowers were opening on the periphery of the mass of maroon buds which made up the centre of the inflorescence, rather like that of a delicate hydrangea.

The star of the herbaceous plants was *Ranunculus aconitifolius* with masses of simple white flowers set off by lobed, dark green leaves. Most of the

tree paeonies were over, but *Paeonia* 'Mme Marie-Thérèse Hermand' (a spectacular semi-double hybrid with dark central flares derived from its *rockii* parent) and the white-flowered herbaceous *Paeonia emodi* and *Paeonia* 'Moonrise' (above) were beautiful. *Paeonia tenuifolia* 'Plena' (scarlet red flowers), *Astrantia* 'Gill Richardson' (wine red flowers and bracts), *Myosotidium hortensia* (sky blue flowers) and *Iris* 'Art Deco' (blue standards and a blue fringe to the cream falls) provided points of contrast to the overall white theme.

Amongst other favourites, I noted *Anthericum liliago* 'Major', *Deutzia* 'Alpine Magician', *Jovellana violacea* looking splendid in a pot on the terrace, and *Rosa* 'Canary Bird'. However, the plant that I would most like to have taken home was *Sophora davidii* that also was growing in a pot on the terrace. It is a slow growing, deciduous shrub with small, fragrant, pea-like, pale blue and white flowers set off by the small leaflets of the pinnate leaves.

Space does not allow further description of this attractive garden, which has been designed for all seasons, and its most interesting plants (clematis, epimediums, trilliums and many others). These prompted numerous questions from the visitors, not least by the writer of this report. We all enjoyed and were inspired by our visit. A 'good' garden, indeed!

George Sevastopulo

Coach trip to Cork gardens, 19-21 May

Unfortunately the trip had to be cancelled due to lack of demand.

FIXTURES

Thursday, 19 October. Julian Sutton, 'Making sense of the Iridaceae'.
NBG, Glasnevin. Joint with **IGPS**.

Thursday, 9 November, 8 pm. Neil Huntley, 'Alpines with Altitude'.
St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan. Bringing plants.

**17 to 19 November, 34th Alpine Weekend. Kenneth Cox, Tim
Lever, Ian & Maggi Young, An Grianán, Termonfeckin, Co. Louth.**

**Thursday, 7 December, 8 pm, Christmas Miscellany, St. Brigid's
Parish Centre, Stillorgan.**

More details about the fixtures can be found on p. 11.

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Top: *Hepatica x media* 'Millstream Merlin' and, bottom, *Rhodohypoxis baurii* See p. 5.
(Photo: Billy Moore)