



Above : *Pinguicula grandiflora*
George Gordon (From the Virtual Show)

Front Cover – *Trollius europaeus*
Sottoguda, Dolomites



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY
ULSTER GROUP



Newsletter No 20, August 2021

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Editorial

It is thanks to all of you, especially the members who sent me all these articles, that we have a Newsletter this year as I have found it more and more difficult to plan anything with so much uncertainty around me. Not only have we Covid to cope with, but the climate seems to be making it more difficult to grow alpinists.

The Newsletter reflects these changes as our authors tend to share an interest in all plants rather than confine themselves to alpinists only.

There is also an added problem for alpine gardeners in Northern Ireland as the AGS seed exchange is no longer available to us due to the phytosanitary rules coming into effect since Brexit, these same rules applying to plants coming from mainland GB as well. I can only hope that a more influential body like the RHS can find a way to help us feel less ostracised. In the meantime we will all have to follow the example of people like Harold McBride who for years has given plants to members that he propagated by either seed or by cuttings.

In this issue Harold has paid tribute to one of our greatest gardeners and past president, Bob Gordon, who died this year. It seems like the end of an era when many of us enjoyed visits to Bob's garden, feasting on both plants, cakes and laughter. Also Margaret Glynn's wonderful garden at Brocklamont, Ballymena, has been sold as Margaret's health now requires more nursing care. I can think of no other two people who, when able, gave more of their time and generosity to the Ulster Group and I have so many happy memories of days spent in their company. Following Margaret's generous nature, her family invited some AGS members to take some of her plants for the benefit of the Ulster Group. Covid permitting, there will be a plant sale that all members can attend, and from money raised, a donation will be made to the Alzheimer Society.

Show Time has been reduced to a virtual show but perhaps gives an opportunity for more members to take part. Our best wishes go to our long serving Show secretary, Pat Crossley, that, after some delay, she now makes a rapid recovery from her injuries sustained in a garden fall.

While 'Zoom' has been excellent in keeping us all in touch and we may still need it for our first meetings, hopefully before this year ends we will all be able to meet in person to share plants and company. I am also grateful to Tom Ennis for his offer to help with the Newsletter and easing me of some of the responsibility. Meantime enjoy your garden and, as Liz Wallace reminds us, all the friends that are remembered in our plants.

Joan McCaughey Ed.

Lockdown at Eskylane - Bill and Moyra McCandless

“You must stay at home !”

Who would ever have imagined having to live under such a strict command ? This came along with a set of other rules, to keep us all safe from the deadly Covid19 virus.

During this terrible time, we, at Eskylane, were very blessed to have our garden.

A few years ago we had planted a lot of daffodils in our woodland and were finding that they were not doing so well. Some of our AGS friends advised us to remove them all and replant elsewhere around the garden ! This we did and found it to be very good advice.

Then the question arose, “What now will we plant in the woodland that will be suitable and do well ?” Having already a collection of Irish Snowdrops in many troughs, we decided to replant them all into the woodland. Not for the faint hearted !

A Galanthophile friend suggested that it would be a good idea to plant the collection in such a way that it told the story of the Irish Snowdrop....of the people, the places and history associated with them. After many phone calls, texts, emails and research, a planting chart was drawn up. The first Snowdrop we planted was *Galanthus* ‘Straffan’ the oldest known Irish Snowdrop. Planting then continued, finishing with the snowdrops acquired after year 2000.

The stories behind many of these Irish Snowdrops gives an added interest to the collection. For example, *Galanthus* ‘Waverley Little Egret’ was a seedling which was found by the renowned plantsman, Harold McBride, in his garden. This seedling was quite small and pristine white. The same year as this Snowdrop flowered, Little Egret, a small heron type bird of the purest white, nested for the first time in Northern Ireland in Co. Down. Harold, then, aptly named his Snowdrop G. ‘Waverley Little Egret’

Another interesting story lies behind *Galanthus* ‘Skyward’ in the Winter of 1997/Spring 1998, the horticulturist, Assumpta Broomfield, was working in the Dillon Garden, Dublin. There was quite a good collection of snowdrops but they were under threat from the larvae of the Swift moth. Helen Dillon was worried that they would not survive so she gave Assumpta over twenty different snowdrops. The most spectacular was an ‘unnamed’ one, much taller than all the others, growing under a shrub. She was given the entire clump.



In January 1999, when Corona North of Altamont was very ill, Assumpta brought her a basket planted up with several different named snowdrops and the ‘unnamed’ tall one. Paul Cutler, the head gardener at Altamont, planted them all in the garden including the tall ‘unnamed’ one and later suggested the name G. ‘Skyward’ which it was given. Helen Dillon cannot remember where she got the original bulbs and so the mystery of its origin remains as does its beauty and awesomeness.

In 2019, before Lockdown, we enjoyed a visit to Harold McBride’s garden where we were introduced to Erythroniums. They were spectacular ! There and then we fell in love with them discovering that they are a great follow-on plant from the snowdrops and suited to the woodland.



Erythronium cliftonii

Eskylane Fritillaries

Wood anemones

In addition, over the past eighteen months we have planted Hepaticas, Trilliums, Wood Anemones, Corydalis and other woodland plants. Removing the daffodils to other parts of the garden was excellent advice. They are doing very well and we can now enjoy the new woodland plants.

Having a garden during Lockdown has been a tremendous help for so many people with all the sadness and isolation of the pandemic. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, we will all be able to get back to meeting up at our AGS and to all the activities and friendships associated with it.



In Praise of *Bergenias* Kay Dunlop

Some time ago I was asked by a friend what she could plant at the base of her privet hedge. When I suggested *Bergenias* a look of disgust crossed her face and she snapped 'Elephant Ears'? I was dismissed!

In March of this year *Bergenia cordifolia* was in glorious bloom along the base of our hedge interspersed with the shiny bronze-edged leaves of *B.* 'Ballawley'. Of all the large leaved *bergenias*, *B.* 'Ballawley' is by far the most outstanding.

It was raised in the now extinct Ballawley Nursery near Dublin. The large leaves are glossy and green for most of the year but come winter they turn a brilliant plum red. With warm spring weather they revert to green and a large drooping heads of crimson flowers appear.

Another excellent large leaved *Bergenia*, second only to Ballawley is *B. ciliata*. A species originating in Nepal/Kashmir, it has large hairy leaves, tooth- edged, very handsome clear blueish flowers with rich pink calyces. Possibly tender, it has never bloomed for me, but having seen it on in flower in Jimi Blake's long border I live in hope! A hybrid of *B. ciliata* was bred by Alan Furness and named after his wife Pamela. It is a fine plant and very floriferous.

Amongst the smaller leaved *Bergenias*, *B.* 'Abendglut' is a good grower, leaves are almost prostrate with good autumn colour, flowers deep magenta crimson on

short stems and very prolific in bloom. A favourite of mine is *B.* 'Rosi Klose', compact grower with magnificent deep pink flowers. Also *B.* 'Helen Dillon' (I forget its other name) with very narrow leaves and crimson flowers.(Ed:- synonyms *B.* 'Helen Dillon', *B. purpurascens* 'Glasnevin', *B.* 'Irish Crimson'.)

To me *B. emeiensis* is the loveliest of all the species. It was first collected in Sichuan in 1935, and has taken many years to reach our gardens. The pure white flowers in loose sprays are bell shaped and lift to open wide into starshaped blooms. To date I have grown it in a large container and kept it in a sheltered place over winter but this year I shall plant it out into open ground.

Some "experts" state that *bergenias* require humus rich soil. I do not agree. I think that they are indifferent to soil and position but weather, at times, may have an effect. They are easy to propagate and easy to cull and easy to grow. They are frequently referred to as 'groundcover plants'. This is rubbish! This denigrates them and devalues them. Grass is groundcover! From the crimson and mahogany red of their leaves from late autumn to winter. into the flower power of spring there is a *bergenia* for every garden. For the alpine purist, try *B.* 'Dragonfly Sakura'.

Ed:- illustration of *Bergenia purpurascens* photographed growing wild at ~4000m on the Baima Shan, Yunnan, China – definitely an alpine!



Moving House - Liz Wallace

Having last moved house over 36 years ago, I now find myself in a whole new predicament with lots of thoughts running through my mind...

When Richard and I moved to Holywood from a small semi-detached house and garden, it was simply a matter of moving furniture, ourselves and a small child.

What, you may be wondering, is my problem?

Well, having thought I would never leave here (unless for the inevitable of course), I have spent a lot of time, energy and not to mention money, transforming a very old-fashioned garden into our current 'sanctuary'.

My current dilemma, now that we are in the process of building a new house 10 minutes walk away, with no garden around it, is probably becoming clear.

I have huge memories of family, friends, special gifts and places visited all growing in my current garden.

How do I decide which I can and do I take with me?

How can I leave our purchasers a garden that I would like to receive myself if I were buying here?

After a lot of thought I decided to commune with my plants, try to prioritise and make the inevitable list. I have had to be realistic and accept that I cannot take any of the 5 acers that now stand more than 25 feet tall, nor the roses that clamber over the pergola wafting their beautiful scent, nor the hydrangeas that put on such stunning late summer colour and especially not the silver birch that adds such character to the garden.

Instead I have listed my 'specials'...

- my palest of pale paeony transplanted from Richard's parents' garden many years ago.
- Myrtle, grown from a slip from my parents' garden in Fermanagh.



- 'The Countryman' rose planted in my late brother's memory.
- A sapphire blue delphinium which grows as tall as those of Prince Charles at Highgrove, where my sister treated me to the Garden Tour and Champagne afternoon tea for my 60th.
- Exochorda 'The Bride' from a dear friend to mark a special wedding anniversary.
- Plus lots of divisions of loved perennials that have been grown from slips or cuttings from friends.

I have spent many happy hours, particularly during lockdown, perusing gardening



books and websites, dreaming about new plants that I could buy to mix and mingle with my old friends. That's another list or two!

And then did I mention that I'm getting a greenhouse to have fun in - a whole new adventure is about to begin!

All in all, it's a very exciting (and daunting) time and hopefully we will have lots of enjoyable times putting

our new garden together for years to come.

PS If you're driving up My Lady's Mile and you see me pushing my wheelbarrow full of plants on the move, do toot your horn and give me a wave!

Ed: Liz has just moved to her new garden several weeks ago.

Best Wishes in your home & garden.



Avoiding the use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers in our gardens and greenhouses - Peter Munro

In 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote at the end of a letter, “In this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”

He might have added, for us gardeners, “**and slugs**”!

I write as an Organic gardener with a 1.8 acres garden and an adjacent 5.3-acre deciduous woodland, both established in 1993. Apart from some early mistakes, through ignorance, my wife Sandra and I have never used chemical pesticides or fertilisers. Our two early errors were using Roundup (glyphosate) on the rough weeds surrounding our new-build bungalow (a biologist teacher friend told us it was organic....as in “organic chemistry” but not Organic as we now know the word). Also, we got several loads of horse-manure only to later realise that the horses had probably been given anti-worming medication, thus killing our own earthworms.

We now know that glyphosate may adversely affect earthworm activity and may increase the risk of human Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma (though the jury seems to go in and out on that one).

Alpine gardeners usually have two main areas of activity: (1.) The Garden/Rockery and (2.) The Greenhouse/Alpine House. What we might use in those areas may differ a lot. Caring for your soil and potting material is essential to get the best result.

The Garden/Rockery

As Alpine gardeners, we know that good drainage is essential and therefore often use a lot of grit. To fend off slugs and snails, we should use Organic Slug Pellets (based on iron phosphate) but definitely **NOT metaldehyde**, which is toxic to children, pets and, in the beneficial predator connection, thrushes, blackbirds, frogs and hedgehogs that may eat the poisoned slugs. Most smaller birds are very definitely our gardening friends and need to be encouraged at all costs, for their own sake as well as our own. I know that pigeons and crows are a “pain-in-the-neck” but can be chased away – more a problem maybe for vegetable growers rather than Alpine Gardeners.

Regarding slugs, some folks use beer traps but others say it’s a waste of good beer! However, the end results can be put in the compost heap. Unfortunately beneficial beetles may also drown in the trap.

A study on snails, several years ago, advised that, if you go out at night with a torch and pick up as many as you can find, you must leave them a considerable distance away from your own garden or they will return!

Another study of the use of egg-shells around plants to deter slugs, revealed that, although all nicely crushed-up, they were a minimal deterrent. However, well crushed-up and put in your compost heap they will provide a slow-release source of calcium.

In your garden, you should do everything possible to encourage beneficial insects (bees, butterflies, etc.) with a wide range of nectar-bearing and thus colourful plants. This will be most valuable to your Alpines as well.

One Organic “chemical” that you can use safely for tap-root weeds such as Dandelions in paths is vinegar (diluted with water) for “spot-weeding”. Safe and effective.

Two other methods of deterring pests are by using a home-made garlic spray and chilli spray. Instructions for making and their use can be found on-line.

We do not import any compost into our garden. We make all our own in a series of 4 compost bins, the contents turned over at regular intervals. We use uncooked kitchen vegetable waste and non-tap root weeds without seeds. What we call rough garden waste and weeds with seeds go into a series of large (6x6x6ft) open bins, each filled for up to 2 years, then covered and not used for 4-5 years with brilliant results. The contents are used to re-soil our two greenhouses on a rotational 4-year cycle. Chemical fertilisers are never used in any shape or form.

To protect the soil structure in our vegetable beds, we use a modified no-dig method and use cover crops over Winter.

The Greenhouse/Alpine House

Potentially, control of pests should be easier in the glasshouse.....but not necessarily! Slugs and snails will generally be less of a problem or at least more controllable manually!

If there is a problem, something that can be done with pots, both indoors and outdoors is the use of copper tape, rings or collars which will deter slugs and snails from getting into the containers.

Nematode worms are a very good defence against pests in the glasshouse and to a lesser extent in the garden. They are relatively expensive to buy but are most effective. There are different species for different pests so that you need to select the appropriate ones for your situation. I give a useful website below with all the details:

www.gardenorganic.org.uk/nematodes

Don't forget that you can use companion planting within your glasshouse, adjacent to or on the shelving. Marigold (Tagetes) against Whitefly and Mint (against Ants) are both extremely effective.

Old-fashioned fly-paper should not be used as it will kill beneficial insects as well.

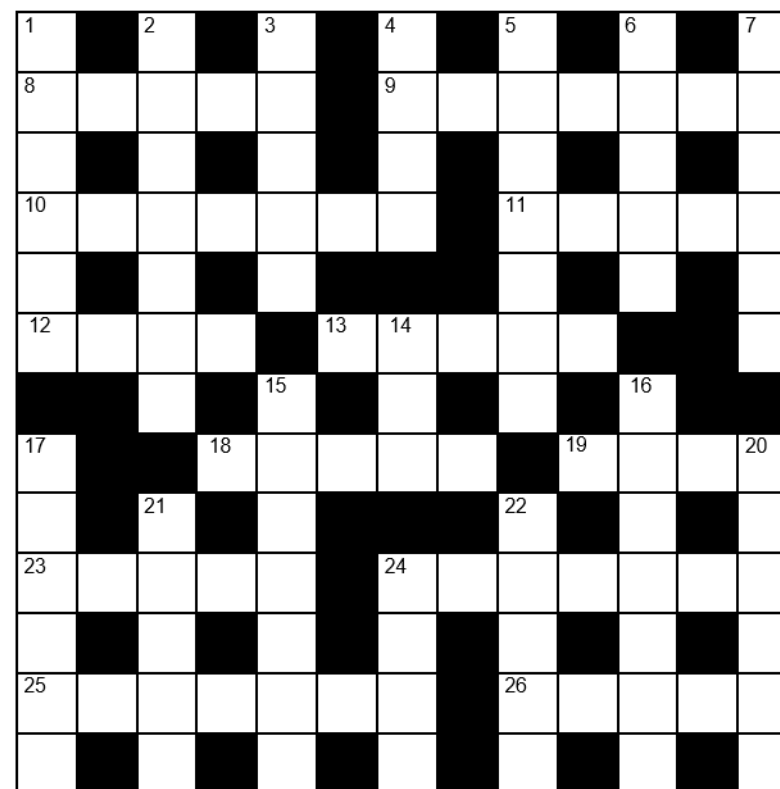
In summary

What I've written above is not complete but it's a start. I am not the Lead Alpine Gardener in our partnership but I am the enthusiastic assistant to my wife, Sandra. However, what I've been saying is, I hope, very important to us all. Doubtless you know it already and are trying to put some of it into practice! If not, please give these thoughts and ideas due consideration for the sake of our Planet and the future of our families.....and, of course, our continued enjoyment of our Alpine plants.

Ed:- in similar vein see an article in Scientific American, Aug 2021 –“Pesticides are Killing Our Soils’ – They harm worms, beetles and thousands of other vital subterranean species”.



Alpine Crossword – Heather Smith



ACROSS

8. Tilled earth (5)
9. Type of 7 down (7)
10. Usually blue trailing or edging flower (7)
11. Modified leaf (5)
12. Container for alpinists etc. (4)
13. Yellow daisy-like flowered herbaceous plant (5)
18. Tracts of land (5)
19. Form of limestone loved by alpinists (4)
23. Swamp (5)
24. Yellow flowered shrub (7)
25. Leaves (7)
26. Lustre (5)

DOWN

1. Stems (5)
2. Common name of *Lychnis viscaria* (7)
3. Pepper (5)
4. Genus of scented flowers (4)
5. These form in leaf axils (7)
6. Cereal stems (5)
7. Fleshy-leaved desert plant (6)
14. Fruit protection (3)
15. Valerian officinal – to herbalists (7)
16. Enriches the soil (7)
17. To compost (6)
20. Tree seeds (6)
21. Rut, trench (5)
22. Herb with aromatic seeds (5)
24. Garden storage building (4)

Three Hydrangeas

Anne McCaughan

As you all know Anne has the most beautiful garden filled with the loveliest Hydrangeas and our President, Kay, invited her to write on her favourite three. Ed.

Three Hydrangeas only !! - a difficult choice ! It is so hard to choose just 3 hydrangeas to enthuse about. On another day, the list would be entirely different.

H. villosa 'Anthony Bullivant'



This is a large shrub, mine is 7ft with bristly pointed leaves. The young stems are pink, as is the central leaf vein, so nice even when not in flower. The flower heads are slightly domed, with prominent fertile flowers, which are lilac and the ray flowers are a rosy pink. The pollinating insects love it.

H. serrata 'Beni gaku'

Serratas have daintier leaves than the more familiar macrophyllas. The reason I particularly like this one is that the ray flowers start off pure white and, as the season progresses, they turn pink round the edges and thence to red. The colour change is brought about by sunlight and is not dependent on soil acidity. It makes a well-behaved bush, about 5 ft tall.

H. serrata 'Beni gaku'



H. macrophylla 'Geoffrey Chadbund'



'Geoffrey Chadbund' is a lovely well shaped shrub, about 5 ft tall and over 6ft wide. It is a lacecap, with rounded flower heads and often has a double ring of ray flowers, which almost obscure the fertile flowers. On my slightly acid soil, it is like a bouquet in shades of shades of mauve and pink and it has a particularly long flowering time. Also, its leaves are not as coarse as some macrophyllas.

Ulster Group lecture programme 2020 – 2021 - a season of disruption

Liam McCaughey

We were hardly into 2020, when, with St Patrick's Day, Covid 19 was upon us, Kevin Hughes' talk was cancelled, and then all the shows went and we settled into Lockdown. Over the summer, we heard of 'Zoom', and so we began to contact the speakers booked for the winter talks programme, to ask if they would speak virtually. Zoe Devlin had been to talk to us in September, but calling her brought us harshly to the reality of Covid – Zoe had cancelled any speaking after her healthy son had died of Covid in London.

For those who couldn't use Zoom – and for those who did, here is a summary of the talks which informed and entertained us through the winter and spring.



In October, **Razvan Chisu**, 'The Transylvanian Gardener' who trained in horticulture in his native Romania, but now hails from Cheshire, gave us an

intriguing and well-informed talk on the flowers of Transylvania, from the meadows and steppes lower down, to the high Carpathian mountains. Interest was added by pictures and descriptions of traditional ways of life and farming, and the talk concluded with a brief tour of castles, including of course Bran Castle, associated with the mythical Count Dracula. 🌿



In November we were to have heard Ger van den Beuken, but as he wished to speak to us in person and not by Zoom (maybe this will be

possible in 2021), we contacted **Chris Gardner**. We knew Chris as he had been our guide to Yunnan in 2009, and his wife Başak has led us on two Turkish trips. Chris, who is a first-rate photographer, was locked down at home in Turkey, but gave us an outstanding photographic tour of the very floriferous and historic province of Lycia under the title 'Lycia in Lockdown'. 170 species, beautifully photographed

both close-up and in their landscape habitat, and with maps and images of Turkey's long history.



beautifully illustrated presentation, and beautiful volcanic landscapes, which David (a geologist in his working life) explained to the audience. As well as the flora which is magnificent (though often difficult in cultivation), there were glimpses of wildlife including the majestic Andean Condor, and rutting Guanaco. 🌿



In January we were closer to home. **Neil Porteous**, well known to us all, has been engaged for the past 2½ years in the restoration of the gardens at Annes Grove in County Cork. This goes back to the Grove family (from Hendon) in the 17th century, and the name is a combination of Grove with Annesley. Richard Grove Annesley created much of the garden, obtaining many exotic plants from contacts such as Frank Kingdon Ward. In recent years, the gardens had become neglected, and after the current owners passed responsibility to the OPW, they are being restored. This is what Neil then described to us, showing many of the interesting trees and other plants, and the works being undertaken on the river garden along the Awbeg river which flows through the estate. 🌿



In February (Joint with IGPS) **Mike Nelhams**, head gardener for Tresco Abbey in the Isles of Scilly gave us an account of the exotic gardens in his care on the island of Tresco, built in the early 19th century for Augustus Smith. Not an Alpine in sight of course, but a very interesting tour through the semi-tropical vegetation which grows in the mild maritime climate.



In March **Anne Spiegel** (whom we had met on an AGS trip to Argentina) told us about the development of the wonderful garden which she has developed on hard bedrock where she lives in the Hudson Valley, New York. She has gradually developed the massive sandstone outcrops which form her garden, over a lifetime. The climate is very different to Ireland, with hot dry summers and cold winters when snow is deep and deer invade the garden. The pictures above give little idea of the extent of the rock garden and the enormous amount of work she has put into earth-moving and planting. This is certainly one of the great rock gardens of the world.



March again - **Danny McCaughan** had promised a short talk to accompany the Members' Show, but when that had to be cancelled, he expanded this to give a very interesting and detailed introduction to the diversity of insects (and other invertebrates) which inhabit our gardens. He is an enthusiastic and expert wildlife photographer, and the talk was illustrated with a fascinating spread of photographs of bees, dragonflies, butterflies and much more, along with information on how to encourage this diversity. 🌱



April – **Adrian Cooper** had been highly recommended by Gordon Finch, who had heard him give a Zoom talk to one of the English groups, so he was asked to speak to us in April. He is an expert and meticulous grower of alpinines, and gave a talk with a great deal of excellent advice on how to grow difficult alpinines successfully. Living in mid Kent, though, the range of plants which do well there is very different to what we have success with in Northern Ireland (or Scotland). 🌱

Peonies in a small garden **Tom Ennis**

Paeonia officinalis rubra plena was the first peony I ever came across. Known to this day by my friend Pat as “My Mammy’s Peony”, because that’s how I referred to it when I gave her a plant grown from one of the many root sections I have taken from my plant (which came from the original which grew in my mother’s tiny garden). Of course, my mother, named Rosina, never knew the botanical name for this splendid plant. It was known to her and to many people of her generation, as the “Peony Rose”. It is wonderful, fully hardy plant which needs very little attention. Yet the gardener is rewarded every year in early summer with a great show of large, deep rich red, fully double flowers.

Very soon after Evie and I moved into our first house, I obtained a root section of Rosina’s peony from my sister and the peony has flourished for each of us over the last 45 years or more. Indeed, it was dug up and brought to our present home when we moved house some years later. The sections were taken by slicing into the living plant with a sharp spade in exactly the same way it was given long ago to Rosina: none of your waiting till the autumn, carefully digging up the whole dormant root and then painstakingly slicing off a section with two or three good “eyes”, which is the approved method for propagating herbaceous peonies by today’s knowledgeable gardener. This procedure is then followed up with another year or two of pot culture coupled with a careful feeding routine. In the case of “My Mammy’s Peony”, on each occasion when it was planted, a hole was dug for it in a nice spot in the garden and there it has remained. quite happily flowering beautifully, ever since. This is a peony which is easy to care for by the most inexperienced of gardeners and just keeps on giving.

My next peony, *Paeonia obovata* var *alba*, came as a gift from plantsman Gary Dunlop. Indeed, a great many of the plants in our garden are there due to Gary’s generosity. This peony comes from far eastern Asia, China and Japan where it is a plant of the forests and was introduced to Europe by Ernest Henry “Chinese” Wilson in 1900. It is particularly attractive with its delicate white petals and showy central boss of yellow anthers and red stamens. Over the years, due to carelessness, I thought I had lost it but a bit of buckling down and a careful search found it still surviving but not flowering in under some taller growth. A careful bit



of excavation and even greater care taken in replanting has seen it well recovered and its lovely white flowers shining out once more in our Spring garden.

By now the “Peony Bug” had bitten hard. I began to take an interest in the Peony seed in the AGS Seed Exchange Lists and I started the long procedure of raising Peonies from seed. My efforts in growing Peonies from seed are too tedious to relate in any detail but I can say that I did learn as I went along, quite often by my mistakes. Suffice to say it is a lengthy business and quite often it is a long number of years before the seedling becomes a flowering plant. My successes include various forms of *P. veitchii*, *P. peregrina* and *P. cambessidesii*. The latter grows wild on Mallorca and I still recall with pleasure seeing it in full flower, growing on North facing cliff ledges on the island many years ago.

By far the easiest way to get your garden peonies is to buy them as flowering plants. They are on sale from many nurseries and occasionally from supermarkets; I have bought some very decent plants from Lidl. These are usually popular garden hybrids but quite often the very lovely *suffruticosa* tree peony hybrids are also on sale.



P. 'Bowl of Beauty'



P. 'Moon of Nippon'

Along with the herbaceous garden peonies already mentioned, the peonies we grow include *P. 'Bowl of Beauty'*, *P. 'Moon of Nippon'*, several of the Coral series, three or four attractive but unnamed specimens given to me by other gardeners

and a number of others. More recently I have been impressed by a really lovely, nicely scented, semidouble, named *P. 'Paula Fay'*, which I bought from Lidl. They are not difficult to look after and for most of the time can be left to look after themselves. The larger cultivars do need staking or some form of support and a short clip over after flowering (deadheading) is beneficial. Our peonies are given some feeding two or three times during the growing season either in the form of fish, blood and bone or pelleted chicken manure. Care must be taken to see the root is not buried too deeply and some growers ensure that it is just below surface level. Although peonies will live in pots my experience is that they “get along” rather than flourish. They do so much better in the garden.



P. 'Paula Fay'

Our earliest flowering peony is *Paeonia mascula triterna*, one of my seedlings. It flowered this year on 23rd April followed, a fortnight or more later, by Gary's *P. obovata* var *alba* along with the famous *P. mlokosewitschii* aka “Molly the Witch”.

Some time in the mid 1970's I encountered my first tree peony. It was during an AGS garden visit to the wonderful woodland garden in Plas Merdyn, Holywood, owned by Drs Bill and Greta Lennon. There, under the trees, was a striking plant of *Paeonia delavayi*, covered in deep red flowers and under it were hundreds of seeds and seedlings in various stages of growth. Tree peonies have received a lot of attention



P. mascula triterna

from Chinese taxonomists in recent years and are now classified in the Section *Moutan* of the Genus *Paeonia*. Within *Moutan* all *P. suffruticosa* are regarded as belonging in a separate Sub-section to *P. delavayi* and its close relative *P. ludlowi*. A word of warning here. In my experience all *P. suffruticosa* and all red-flowered *P. delavayi* make excellent small to medium sized shrubs well-suited to the smaller garden. Yellow-flowered *P. ludlowi* and *P. delavayi* however, can develop into much larger plants 3-4 metres high. In the past I have had to dig these out but I had no trouble finding a home for them with friends who owned larger gardens.

About 10 years ago, I met Dr Phil Havercroft of Leamore Nursery in Ashford, Co. Wicklow. Until the present restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Phil appeared each year at the Tulip Festival at Glenarm Castle and this gave gardeners here the opportunity to see and examine the many cultivars of Herbaceous and Itoh Peonies he has on sale. Needless to say, I have become a regular customer and, I suppose inevitably, I have been captivated by the Itoh Peonies. These are sometimes referred to as intersectional hybrids but as many of the herbaceous and *suffruticosa* peonies are hybrids, I prefer to call them Itohs in tribute to the lifework of Dr Tiochi Itoh. Dr Itoh devoted his time in attempting to perfect hybrids

between herbaceous peonies and tree peonies. Success came very late in his life and although, eventually, he obtained seed, sad to say he did not live long enough, to see his plants in flower. Itoh peonies are rare and very difficult to breed. Raising from seed can take a further 15 years and for these reasons they are much more



P. itoh 'Bartzella'

expensive than other peonies. My first Itoh, which was *P. 'Bartzella'*, I bought from Phil at Glenarm, costing me £35:00. *P. 'Bartzella'* is a wonderful showy peony; covered in beautiful double, bright lemon-yellow flowers with delicate red flares. A plant in full flower really makes its presence felt in any garden. I see that in

Leamore's present list it is priced at a bargain €25:00 but the remaining Itohs remain expensive. Another word of caution: Itohs must not be cut hard back in late autumn as the tidy gardener will do with herbaceous peonies. Instead, they should be left to overwinter unpruned in the same way as a tree peony.

I hope readers will agree that any garden will benefit from a peony or two. It need not be anything madly exotic or super expensive. Just a reliable old favourite which will bring you joy every late spring. My friend Pat will bear me out in this.



White-tailed bumblebee on Salvia

Photo – Danny McCaughan

In Memoriam

Covid has played a cruel role in these times when we could not be there to pay our last respects in person to friends and colleagues or give a comforting hug to those that have lost dear ones. Along with the tributes below we send our sincere sympathy to all our members and their families who have suffered bereavements and sickness in the past year.

Bob Gordon.



2020 was coming to a close when sadly we learned of the death of our most senior and distinguished member, also a former Group President and Group Chairman. Bob held a leadership role in our Group for many years and his wisdom and wise council was greatly appreciated even after he left office.

Bob gardened on a large scale at Kilrea Road, Portglenone, growing a wide number of distinguished and rare plants, many of them raised from seed obtained from various international seed exchanges. While the Ulster Group made many garden visits to “Tyree”, the garden was highly regarded throughout the world wherever Alpines and Woodland plants are grown. The SRGC came to Bob’s garden on a garden tour of Ulster as did the Meconopsis Group and many English AGS Groups. I know these Groups, packed with distinguished growers, were amazed at the standard and range of plants on view.

Bob was an incredibly generous Gardener; when accompanying a garden visitor, he often carried a garden fork and a supply of plastic bags, which resulted in the visitor leaving with a great number of divisions of rare and valuable plants. In recent years Bob built up a vast collection of Galanthus, and each spring he travelled to England to visit Snowdrop-rich gardens and Snowdrop lunches.

Bob’s wide interest meant he grew a wide range of plants; however one genus he grew outstandingly well was the genus Trillium, providing them with excellent woodland soil and growing conditions. Bob gave a seeding *Trillium chloropetalum* to his friend and distinguished Dublin plantsman Billy Moore. Some years later Billy exhibited this plant which turned out to be a rare yellow form of

this plant. It gained the Best Plant in Show award, the Farrer Medal, and Billy kindly named it Trillium “Bob Gordon”, so Bob will be remembered by a very fine plant.

I once heard it said that it was much better to be remembered as a “Generous Gardener” rather than a “Great Gardener”. This quiet and most modest gentleman qualifies fully for both descriptions.

Harold McBride

Sam McDowell



Sam was someone I had known since we were pupils at Ballymena Academy, and we renewed our friendship many years later when he and Kay joined the Ulster Group. He had a quiet efficiency, and at times a dry sense of humour. Alpines became a shared passion, and they grew and tended them most carefully in their garden in Limavady, with an element of competition, and with frequent success at the AGS shows. He served on the Ulster Group Committee, where his experience in industry was very useful in guiding advice on issues such as insurance which come up from time to time.

Sam died just a year ago, after fighting his illness to the end. He is greatly missed.

Liam McCaughey

Colin Tindall

It was with great sadness that I heard of the death of Colin Tindall in January this year. While Susan was busy running the only dedicated Alpine nursery in Northern Ireland, Colin, former Senior Lecturer Electrical Engineering, QUB, was there for her quietly helping in the background. Together they developed not only the nursery but an Arboretum at the Spa in Ballynahinch. From conversations with him, Colin’s main interest in growing trees, including unusual species, showed great foresight as we all have come to recognise the importance of woodlands in protecting our environment. Our thoughts and sympathy are with Susan and her family on their loss.

Joan McCaughey

Postscript

It is also with great sadness that I note the deaths of two people well known in the world of gardening. - Henry Taylor, long standing member of the SRGC and one of the greatest plantsmen and who, along with his wife Margaret, introduced us to many alpinists - and Angela Jupe, an inspired Irish garden designer, who gave many of our members such a pleasurable tour of her garden and Birr in June 2018.

Information (or even Non Information)

Once again information is still rather vague as your committee, like similar societies, try to decide when it is safe to ask speakers to make travel arrangements and members to attend without the risk of last minute cancellations. While a programme has been made some of the first lectures still may well have to be by zoom and St. Bride's will have to let us know what regulations they have to follow.

Therefore the information below is given in the expectation of a return to normal life hopefully before the New Year – to keep up with the trend for music in gardening programmes this time I suggest the Three Degrees “When will I see you again, When will we share precious moments.”

Venue St. Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast - 2.30 p.m. Sat.

Dues (not due until we meet) - Local current subscription rates have increased to **£15.00** single, **£20.00** family, due at the A.G.M. or before the end of the current year. Cheques should be made out to '**Alpine Garden Society Ulster Group**'.

**** Please give or send subscriptions this year to the Membership Secretary, Mrs Sandra Munro, who will update the records before forwarding the money to the treasurer, Mrs. Hilary McKelvey.**

This subscription is for the local Group only and subscriptions to The Alpine Garden Society must be sent direct. A limit of one year's grace is given.

With the increasing cost of postage, it is helpful to have as many email addresses as possible and this year, to update our records and have accurate information, we ask everyone to fill in the membership forms (also see below). It is hoped in the future by either emailing or texting to be able to keep members in touch with both events and unexpected news. If you are not receiving emails, please send one to the

secretary (secretary@alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk) so that she is sure of having the correct email address, or let her know your preference for keeping informed.

GDPR

With the introduction of the GDPR (*General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)2017*), organisations, including ourselves, are required to have specific permission from members to hold their information. You will therefore be asked when you renew your membership of the Group, to agree (or not) that this information is held, for the purpose of informing you of Group and related events.

A fuller statement on the Group and GDPR was included in last year's Newsletter. If you do not wish your personal information to be held by the Society please inform the Honorary Secretary or our Data Protection Lead member of the Committee, who will arrange for it to be removed from our administration files.

Web

Programmes and Newsletters can all be found on the website where 'Plant of the Month' is also archived since 2006 - Contributions are always needed, so if you have a plant and a picture - in the garden or in the wild, please send it in. The website is visited from all over the world, so you can be assured of an appreciative audience. To visit the site, go to www.alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk

We do not currently have a Facebook page, so if any of our members have expertise in Social Media please share your opinion and advice on its use with the committee. (William and Hilary McKelvey's garden is on Facebook as “The Model Garden”)



Crossword Answers

ACROSS
8. Tith 9. Opuntia 10. Lobelia 11. Bract 12. Sink
13. Inula 18. Plois 19. Tufa 23. Marsh 24. Senecio
25. Foliage 26. Sheen
DOWN
1. Stalks 2. Flybane 3. Chili 4. Rosa 5. Bulbils 6. Straw
7. Cactus 14. Net 15. Flybane 16. Mulches 17. Humify
20. Acorns 21. Drill 22. Anise 24. Shed

Programme 2021 – 2022

Our programme last year, as you are aware, was entirely of virtual talks, using ‘Zoom’. For those who were able to join from their computer or tablet, this worked well, and we had speakers from distant parts of the globe as well as closer to home. Some talks (marked 📺 in the article above) were recorded with the permission of the speaker, and can be viewed on YouTube – ask the Secretary for the link.

This season, as this newsletter is being printed, we still do not know when or if we will be able to meet in person this year, so at least the first talk in September – by John Anderson who is ‘Keeper of the Gardens’ at Windsor Great Park will be by ‘Zoom’.

In October, Ger van den Beuken, who grows dionysias and other choice Alpines is scheduled, and we hope to have him speak in St Brides, but if we are unable to have him come in person, Liz Knowles will give us a ‘Zoom’ talk from her home in Ontario on that date. (You will have read her article about Japan in the most recent AGS Bulletin.) If Ger can come to speak, then Liz will slot in as an extra ‘Zoom’ talk on 30th October.

This arrangement may be something that we use in the future, when our traditional meetings in Belfast will sometimes be supplemented by a virtual speaker from a far-away place where travel costs would be prohibitive.

After that, ‘Watch this space’ – you will be kept informed.

Future Speakers

An appeal to all the members – we would appreciate help in finding interesting speakers, so please if you are able to recommend someone you have heard or have been recommended, as a good speaker, especially on an ‘Alpines’ subject, please let the Secretary or any Committee member know.

AGS Shows 2022

Again there is uncertainty – as we go to print the AGS had not set dates for shows in 2022, and Greenmount do not know when they will be able to open to outside bodies.

Programme 2021 – 2022 (Provisional)

- September 18 **John Anderson** (Savill Gardens)
“Alpines in a woodland - The Savill Garden way” (Zoom)
- Annual General meeting**
- October 16 **Liz Knowles** (Mono, Ontario)
“Echoes of Wild Places” (Zoom)
- November 13 **Stan da Prato** (Tranent, East Lothian)
“Stan’s Erratic Journey through the worlds of
Plants and Wildlife”
- November 19-21 **Termonfeckin**
(Dublin Group)
- December 11 **Fionnuala Broughan** (Dublin)
Adventures of a Tour Guide in Kilmacurragh
- January 15 **Ray Drew** (Essex)
“Cypripediums”
- February 12 **Kurt Vickery** (Winscombe, Somerset)
“Highlights of a decade Tour Guiding”
- February 26 **Ulster Group ‘Snowdrop Day’**
- March 26 **Kevin Hughes** (Cally Gardens, Gatehouse of Fleet)
“Spring Garden and Cally Plants”

A selection from the Virtual Show – see more on the website



Meconopsis – Harold McBride



Erythronium 'Joanna' – George Gordon



Bergenia velutina – Cilla Dodd



Pulsatilla vulgaris v. rubra – Peter Lyons



Salvia argentea – Moyra McCandless



Trillium chloropetalum –
Joan McCaughey



Lewisia – Montalto Estate



Gentiana acaulis – Pat Crossley



Hepatica maxima x pubescens – Paddy Smith



Primula elatior – Liam McCaughey



Eranthis hyemalis – John Lambe



Sanicula (syn Hacquetia) – Sandra Munro



Sanguinaria canadensis – Vicky Lapsley



Hepatica nobilis – Gordon Finch



Pulsatilla vulgaris v. rubra – Peter Lyons



Ipheion 'Rolf Fiedler' – Mac Dunlop