



*The
Irish Garden Plant Society*



Newsletter No. 128

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Above photo courtesy Dr E.C. Nelson *Erica mackayana* 'Plena' ©

There is only one species of *Erica* known to have double flowers like those of *Calluna* 'County Wicklow'. This is Mackay's heath, *Erica mackaiana*, which was discovered simultaneously in Ireland and Spain in 1835, and even today has not been found in any other region.

The cultivated double-flowered one "*Erica mackaiana* 'Plena' was collected in August 1901 near Roundstone in Connemara by Dr. F.C. Crawford. At first it was thought to be a new species and was named *Erica crawfordii*, but later it was realised that it was an aberrant form of Mackay's heath.

In "Plena" the stamens are replaced by numerous petal-like segments that fill the very plump little bells – some flowers are so fat they burst along the petal seams.

This is another marvellous garden plant, producing vast numbers of bright pink, barrel-shaped flowers, which are usually white beneath where the petals are shaded from the sun."

From *An Irish Flower Garden Replanted*

Front cover photo: Courtesy Dr E.C. Nelson *Erica cinerea* 'Ted Oliver' ©
from a bank in Lettergesh, Connemara.



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Editorial

What a great gardening year 2013 was and much appreciated after a number of wet summers. With the possibility of a repeat performance this year why not consider growing something from the 2014 IGPS seed list compiled and organised by Stephen Butler. If you do not already send seed to Stephen why not collect some this year and get involved, you may grow plants that other members would enjoy too. The seed list and order form are included with the newsletter. Mary Montaut of Bray exemplifies the appreciation of members for the work Stephen does: "I should just like to send in an appreciation of the IGPS Seed Distribution service. Over the years, I have had one or two delightful successes, notably the lovely *Veltheimia brachteata* which has flowered so faithfully once it had settled in, as well as an awful lot of puzzled failures - why can't I germinate *Myosotidium hortensia*? But every year I benefit hugely from looking up all the entries on the list. It is quite amazing the varied and unusual plants which can be grown successfully in Ireland. I regard the list as an education." So let's get sowing!

Wishing you a happy and successful gardening year in 2014.

Mary

**Please send material for the Newsletter to: igpseditor@gmail.com or
Mary Rowe 29 Bantry Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9**

Copy date for the May 2014 Newsletter is 28th March

Correction:

On page 8 of the September newsletter it was stated that John Boland was the Minister for the Environment in 1975. The Minister for the Environment in 1975 was in fact James Tully.



A Note from the Chairman

The Roman god Janus is generally depicted with two faces as he looks to the past and to the future just as we do in January, the month named in his honour. Looking back over the past year I am very impressed with the work of the three regional committees each of which has organised an excellent programme of events. Of particular note were the outstandingly successful Leinster Plant Sale and the Nigel Dunnett talk while the Northern Committee have forged particularly good links with local agencies and continue to develop the gardens at the Lismacloskey Rectory and the Munster Committee have continued to attract more people to the winter talks and introduce new members to the society.

Looking to the future I would like to see more long-term planning for events and the provision as soon as possible of a programme for a full year rather than several piecemeal programmes as the year goes by. Of course, the major event of the immediate future is the Annual General Meeting of the Society which will be held in Sutton this year and is being organised by the Leinster Committee. Further information on this event is provided in the newsletter and it would be wonderful to have a good attendance for the occasion and I look forward to meeting many of you there. You might also consider taking an active part in one of the society's committees. There is always a need for further participation and all committees need new members both to share the workload of organising and running events and to ensure the future wellbeing of the society. As I write, a month in advance of publication of the newsletter, I am not sure if the society's journal, *Moorea*, will have been to the printers already or is just about to do so. Whichever, it is a particular delight that a volume is being published after a lapse of several years. The last volume was in 2006! Writers have been generous with their time and contributions; editors, Mary Forrest, Mary Davies and Mary Bradshaw have refined the material and great thanks is due to each of them but I wish to give particular thanks to and acknowledge the hard work of Anne James who is the person who took on this project, sought contributors, organised editors and prepared the volume for printing. It has been a challenging project for her and she has my compliments and admiration. I hope you enjoy the result of all this hard work. Finally, to all members, a Very Happy New Year!
Paddy Tobin



Re-vamp required by Maeve Bell

A few years ago a fellow boat owner called at the house; looking out of the window he remarked: “mm, not a sailor’s garden.” Since then, it has expanded but sailing and gardening remain uneasy bedfellows. Last summer I was on our boat for seven weeks between mid-June and the beginning of September – no weeding, no watering, no dead-heading and, perhaps most crucially, no resident umpire to prevent pet plants from being over-powered by thuggish neighbours.

Time for a dose of realism. But while the horticultural equivalent of down-sizing may make sense, it has the emotional appeal of exchanging the keys of the car for a bus pass. Reluctantly, I decided that the end of the garden which can’t be seen from the house needed to be able to look after itself. Here there is a small woodland area dominated by three large beech trees which suck every scrap of moisture and goodness out of the ground.



Photo Mary Davies

Facing them and rather less dry is my tribute to the late Christopher Lloyd; it is the closest I've got to a riot of colour – lemon, purple, crimson and scarlet – thanks to dahlias, *Thalictrum*, *Crocasmia* and *Penstemon*.

The way forward seemed to lie with a mixture of choice shrubs and bomb-proof herbaceous planting, especially those which had already proved themselves under the beech trees. I hunted out and re-read some of my favourite gardening books, including Helen Dillon's *On Gardening* which contains succinct advice on coping with dry shade. Then I sought the opinion of a professional to confirm that I was on the right track, suggest first class plants suited to northern conditions, and ensure my resolve didn't falter.

Tackling a small patch to begin with, the key plants which would remain were *Rhododendron* 'Joan Slinger', a *R. yakusimanum* hybrid raised at the famous Slieve Donard Nursery, a *Skimmia* and *Magnolia* 'Susan'. Out went an under-performing hydrangea, wrongly labelled in the garden centre as 'Annabelle', which loathed the lack of moisture, some day lilies which should never have been planted there in the first place, *Selinum wallichianum* whose seedlings were starting to run amok, as well as various *Aquilega* which already had. By this time there were just some hostas and ferns remaining, the latter being *Polystichum setiferum* varieties; both had done splendidly in the dry shade so it made sense to capitalise on their qualities and have more of the same.

My replacement shrub was *Euonymus planipes*, a tough decision as the 'wish list' was so extensive. Had I been overly swayed by its flamboyant red and orange seed pods on a grey October afternoon? Doubts were assuaged when Mike Snowdon, ex-head gardener at Rowallane and long-time stalwart of the Society, described it as "a cracking good plant".

Various large-leaved hostas from other parts of the garden were dug up, split and planted between the ferns for contrast. Then, to give an Irish plant pride of place, I moved my largest clump of Mrs Frizell's fern, *Anthyrium filix-femina* 'Frizelliae', towards the front of the bed. A Victorian lady who lived in County Wicklow, Mrs Frizell found this tatted fern, so called because the fronds are thought to resemble the knots and loops of tatted lace, in 1857. She lived to be 95 so fern hunting, gardening and needlework may contribute to longevity.

By now enthusiasm and energy had replaced the earlier despondency; I was even wondering why I hadn't made the changes long ago. In went some bulbs: daffodils including 'Jenny' for early spring and old pheasant's eye for later, together with some blue *Camassia* which needed a new home in any event.

No self seeders was a key part of the advice I had received. But I love them, partly because I'm not very successful at growing from seed and partly because of the air of informality they bring to a town garden, so the next step was to transplant white foxgloves seedlings from around the borders and pop them in between the hostas to give a bit of height and spontaneity.



Photo Mary Davies

Finally, having a soft spot for eponymous plants commemorating people, I decided to include the new *Hosta* 'Reverend Mac'. Introduced last year, it celebrates the 80th birthday of the Rev. William McMillan who not only looks after his congregation in Dunmurry near Belfast but is a doyen amongst flower arrangers with a world-wide reputation. It is available from Bali-hai Nursery in Carnlough run by Ian Scroggy, an IGPS member, with profits going to the Northern Ireland Group of Flower Arrangement Societies to help raise money for their exhibit at Chelsea this May. Last summer the Rev. Mac very kindly came to the Ulster Folk Museum and planted one in Lismacloskey Rectory garden which volunteers from the Society help to look after; apparently, on seeing it, his wife had remarked: "Oh darling, it is just like you – small, grey and wrinkled"! I think Mrs Frizell will enjoy his company.



NEWS FROM LEINSTER

The Leinster Committee of the IGPS has been doing great work and is in the process of planning the 2014 AGM to be held in Sutton, among our other up-and-coming events. Having been on the committee for almost one year I have learned a lot, met exceptional people and greatly enjoyed the experience. Finding out about all the support and preparation that goes into each event was an eye-opener and I have a renewed appreciation for the calendar of events put on by each regional committee.

Many of the current Leinster Committee have served for many years and the time has come to request new (or old) members to come forward. We have all enjoyed our time on the committee (however long or brief), but ideally we would aim to have a committee of twelve people. A fuller committee would share the workload and allow members to have busy periods in their lives secure in the knowledge that the other committee members will keep things running smoothly. If anyone has a glimmer of interest please contact anyone you know on the committee for your rubber arm to be twisted! Alternatively, please feel free to find out information about what the Leinster Committee get up to by emailing igps.leinster@gmail.com

PLANT SALE 2013

The Leinster Committee would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all who volunteered at the annual plant sale, donating time, plants and knowledge. I feel it is also only right and proper to send a special note of gratitude to Lorna and all who kindly donated baked goods (they went down a treat). A great day was had by all and we were delighted to see such a strong turnout. The day went brilliantly and the support shown by those who visited is what makes the annual event continue.

I don't know where to put in a good word for such good weather next year but hopefully we can expect as rewarding a day in 2014. If anyone is interested in volunteering time or plants (or cakes) please feel free to contact any of us directly or the Leinster Committee at igps.leinster@gmail.com

Cliodhna Ni Bhroin



Gardening? Just moving plants around by Rae McIntyre

Thirty-five years ago when I was seriously bitten by the gardening bug I had the unfortunate habit of treating the garden like I did rooms in the house. In the house I would push round sofas, furniture, rugs, paintings, ornaments and books to create the effect I wanted. In the garden this involved digging out young trees and shrubs, that were perfectly happy, and moving them because I thought the colour of the flowers or leaves didn't match those of their neighbours. Stupid or what? After the spade the most used piece of equipment was the wheelbarrow. It was some time before I realised that all this plant-shifting was being viewed by our new neighbours who had moved into our previous house that sat at a right angle to our present one. Our newly refurbished garden was plainly visible from their landing window.

Many plants were moved with impunity. Rhododendrons and conifers were easy because they don't have deep root systems and we have plenty of rainfall to stop them from drying out. I also moved magnolias taking care not to damage the delicate roots and lifting plenty of soil along with them.

Plants that promptly died after a ride in the wheelbarrow, were *Daphne mezereum*, ceanothus, brooms and *Eleagnus pungens* 'Maculata'. The family who moved into our former house were English and they went in for herbaceous perennials much more than for shrubs and trees. During their fourteen years sojourn in the house they didn't add to the shrubs we had left but had beds and borders closely planted with perennials that gave solid ground cover in the style advocated by Graham Stuart Thomas in his book *Plants for ground cover*. This was a selling point when they came to sell the house; they claimed that very little maintenance of the garden was needed - something like a tidy-up about four times a year. I must admit that their garden looked very well - much better than it did when we lived there. The woman of the house said to me one day, "What you do isn't gardening. It's just moving plants around". This had such a strong element of truth in it that I couldn't deny it. At the same time I regretted not transporting some of the shrubs from our former garden before they moved in.

Plants like *Camellia* 'Donation' (a 25th birthday present), *Magnolia soulangiana*, *Rhododendron* 'Sappho', *Eucryphia* x *nymansensis* 'Nymansay' and *Crinodendron hookerianum*. The magnolia had been there for eleven years but still hadn't flowered and I was filled with wicked glee when I just happened to see, from an upstairs window of our house, the magnolia being pushed in the wheelbarrow. The eucryphia had the same fate although I missed actually seeing it being transported. The magnolia survived eventually yet never flowered in their time. It's in our garden now, simply because I offered their successor in the house a new flowering magnolia in exchange. He was happy to swap the sulky one for one in full flower. You may well ask, dear reader, why I didn't just keep the new one for myself and forget about the non-bloomer. I was sentimental about it, that's why. It was one of a collection of shrubs I bought from Daisy Hill Nursery in Newry a couple of years after I got married. The others stayed in the first garden but I wanted to give a good home to it and nurture it as one would a stray starving cat. It took a very long time to settle in here and is still very undersized for a 48 year old but I cherish it. Each year - and I hope I am not tempting fate - it has an increased number of flowers from the previous year. The moved eucryphia didn't survive. Later I discovered, just by chance, that our neighbours had heard from some guru that recalcitrant magnolias can be induced to flower by being transplanted. They presumed that the same principle would apply to eucryphias and hadn't realised that eucryphias take quite a long time to settle down to flowering. Eucryphias do not like being moved so I'm glad I had left it in their garden and that I wasn't responsible for killing it.

I still move plants around. Over the years the rhododendrons have been shifted around so often that the labels have been lost and I only know the names of half of them. Two greedy, prolifically seeding big sycamores were felled at the west side of the main garden. As soon as the soil was improved Andy and I moved ten large pink or white flowering rhododendrons to it. This was on St. Swithin's Day, July 15th, when it was the hottest day of the summer. We kept the hosepipe running all day to water them in. Our mains water is hard but that didn't seem to bother the rhododendrons in the slightest.

A few years later I decided I would concentrate on shrubs in the main garden and do away with as many herbaceous perennials as possible. This was because family and non-gardening friends were fed up listening to me moaning about the aches and pains of arthritis, particularly in my knees. I also have an almost chronic sore back. Now I have reached the age at which I have attained grumpy old woman status and felt totally justified in moaning but apparently this wasn't acceptable. Therefore I shut up and half-heartedly dispensed with some perennials and put rhododendrons in their place.

I wasn't happy with this because rhododendrons aren't good mixers with roses and sun-loving perennials. In the main part of the garden the jumble of perennials, rhododendrons, roses and other shrubs and trees stayed until the early autumn of this year while I did nothing about it. But two things had happened that gave me the incentive to change. I had one arthritic knee replaced with a chunk of titanium and that severely curtailed my gardening. Before the operation I regularly tripped over the large stones that surround beds and borders, especially when wearing wellingtons, but afterwards I was terrified of falling and knocking the said chunk of titanium out of place; that could have had serious consequence. So, on warm sunny days I sat at the south side of the house and watched the weeds growing. The convolvulus surpassed itself and twined round everything in sight. On bad days - Northern Ireland had more than many other parts of Britain and Ireland - I viewed the main garden from south-facing upstairs windows of the house. And that was when I realised that it had turned into a wood. All the trees and shrubs which I had greedily acquired over the years had grown enormously, were green and very leafy and so dominating that from some windows I saw only the flash of a crocosmia or the tall stems of something like *Campanula lactiflora*. I love flowers but it is emphatically no longer a flower garden.

So what next? The answer to this just had to be more moving around. I value the trees, shrubs and rhododendrons far too much to get rid of any of them and they've been moved around enough already as well as being far too big. Therefore the perennials would have to go for a series of trips in the wheelbarrow. The 'hot' border was the first to be dismantled in October. For thirty-one years it had been there faithfully imitating the 'hot' colour schemes in Mount Stewart. The exhumed plants were wheeled off to a border in the stackyard and planted in it. One invasive beast that didn't go was *Euphorbia griffithii* and we're doing our best to remove it. I was tempted to spray it with strong weedkiller but Andy, who works here, is going to plant it at the base of a hedge in a semi-wild part of his own garden. The border in the stackyard had twelve deciduous azaleas in it. They are shortly to be moved to the cleared, erstwhile 'hot' border and will have a strong sense of déjà vu because they used to live there. So this border will now be comprised of the existing shrubs like *Hamamelis mollis* 'Pallida', *Azara microphylla*, *Chaenomeles speciosa*, *Cotinus coggyria* 'Royal Purple', *Desfontainea spinosa*, *Physocarpus* 'Le Diablo' and *Acer japonicum* 'Shiraz' along with the twelve azaleas. There are also shrubby roses such as 'Buff Beauty', 'Fred Loads' and 'Westerland' but they're staying put even though they're not very suitable for a garden that's making an attempt to be a woodland; they flower for a long time which is an advantage.

Opposite the 'hot' border there's a cool border with blue, pink and mauve flowering plants - a real cliché and one of which I am definitely tiring. Thirty years is a long time after all. There are larger trees and shrubs in it than there are in the 'hot' border therefore fewer herbaceous plants and these are going to be moved to a bed in the stackyard. The bed has been giving much bother and was flooded for many months in the excessively wet year of 2012. Not surprisingly nearly everything died in it. The three survivors are the rose 'Blanc Double de Coubert', *Philadelphus* 'Virginal' and the 'Scotch Rose' *Rosa pimpinellifolia* which originally came from my friend Nora's garden in Edinburgh. 'Blanc Double de Coubert' will stay put because it's too big to move but the other two survivors will probably go to the 'cool' border. When this bed has been restructured - hopefully before winter really bites hard - the herbaceous plants like aconitums, campanulas, phloxes, pulmonarias, astilbes, acanthus (it moves all right but leaves bits behind to flower another day), *Verbena bonariensis* and a whole host of hostas, among other things, will take up residence.

The dominant shrubs in the former 'cool' border are *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, which is actually a tall tree, *Amelanchier lamarckii*, two dogwoods, *Clethra alnifolia*, two viburnums, *Deutzia* 'Strawberry Fields', three hydrangeas, two fuchsias, *Choisya ternata* and *Clethra barbinervis*. But the main contribution to the 'wood effect' is caused by the magnolias in the garden. One magnolia, in particular, I have referred to many times is *Magnolia Stellata* 'Royal Star'. This has behaved strangely or at least gives an illusion of doing so. Before the destruction of the sycamores this magnolia was right in the 'cool' border at the west side of the garden. Now it appears to be right in the middle of the garden which is weird. It is huge and takes up a lot of space and, because it holds on to the leaves for a long time, it hides the lower part of the garden. Down there, there are five magnolias in what I pretentiously call 'The Magnolia Walk'. See what I mean about greed, acquisitiveness and turning the garden into a wood? There are other shrubs and trees too numerous to mention. Apart from hellebores and paeonies growing alongside them - these resent disturbance - all perennials will go to the stackyard, plant sales or friends.

So what do I hope to achieve by all this transportation and transplanting of perennials? The answer is a reduction of the workload. Old age has crept up on me. I am a grey-haired, wrinkly, arthritic granny and Davy and I had our fiftieth wedding anniversary in July. Also my other knee is due for replacement. Having just shrubs in the main garden will mean that I can apply a mulch between them to make weeding easier and I can use the hoe or glyphosate on pernicious weeds with no risk of destroying perennials.



The Annual General Meeting 2014

This year the Annual General Meeting weekend of the Society will take place on May 17th and 18th.

The Meeting will be held at 10.00 a.m. on Saturday morning the 17th at the Marine Hotel, Dublin Road, Sutton Cross, Dublin 13

Gardens visits planned for the weekend:

The gardens to be visited include firstly, the garden of two enthusiasts rather than experts, its design gradually reveals itself as you move through its variously themed spaces. The central lawn is flanked by hot and cool herbaceous borders and a rock outcrop planted with alpines.

The second garden is a large private garden looking out on Dublin Bay. The plants here benefit from a favourable micro-climate.

A visit to the allotment gardens of Lorna and David Hopkins is also planned.

We will close the weekend with a guided tour of The Talbot Botanic Gardens, Malahide Castle

See the enclosed booking form for the AGM

If further information is required please contact either the

Leinster Committee at igps.leinster@gmail.com

Or telephone 8480625.



The Society's Annual General Meeting 2014

This is both an indication of the likely agenda and a call for members to think about joining the Committee; the formal notice of the AGM to be held on the morning of Saturday 17 May 2014 will be carried in the May Newsletter.

- 1 Apologies
- 2 Minutes of the 2013 AGM
- 3 Matters arising
- 4 Chairman's report
- 5 Treasurer's report and adoption of accounts
- 6 Election of Officers and Committee
- 7 Any other business

The constitution allows for the election of 10 committee members and at the time of writing there is at least one vacancy. Currently the Committee meets every second month at the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin, in the evenings. If you would like to be involved in any way, please put your name forward or have a chat to any of the officers or committee members whose contact details are listed elsewhere. You must be nominated by two members of the Society and give your written consent to stand.

Nominations should reach Maeve Bell as Honorary Secretary by either post or email at least two weeks before the event: 1 The Drive, Richmond Park, Belfast BT9 5EG

maeve.bell@btopenworld.com

or telephone +44 28 9066 8435 or +44 7713 739 482



Yew Cloisters at Gormanston by John Joe Costin

Extracts from *A Little Kept 1954* written by **Eileen Gormanston**, the last Lady of the Manor

She wrote: - “One day in the First World War (1914-18) while sitting on her favourite perch, under the giant cedar in the yew cloisters courtyard and feeling this, our own life very exempt indeed from public haunt, I had this idea of writing *Tongues in Trees*.”¹

She wrote, “in the autumn of 1911, she married the fifteenth Viscount of Gormanston Castle Co. Meath, but he died at a comparatively young age in 1925”²

“The Manor was acquired in 1361 when Sir Robert de Preston, Lord of Preston in Lancashire having set sail from that town landed on the Irish coast opposite, saw the Manor and bought it. There are no records to show how long it had stood there beforehand. He was later created the first Lord Gormanston. It stood unaltered until its demolition in 1800 when it was replaced with the present 'Castle'. It remained in the same family, staunch adherents to the Catholic faith, though this meant much loss of land and property during the Penal times until 1946 when it was sold. It is now owned by Franciscan monks who run a well-known boy's boarding school there and given the appropriateness of a Yew cloister, looks after this precious landscape feature very well indeed”.³

She writes, “The Little Chapel is all that remains of the old buildings and that by some extraordinary favour or influence Mass was allowed there all through the time of the Penal Laws, even when the parish chapel was closed”.⁴

She wrote, “Although the castle has not the fascination of antiquity, the trees of Gormanston have. They are taller, wider of girth, and altogether nobler than any other trees I have anywhere seen”. Giant **Ilexes** and **Beeches**, **Cork trees**, **Maidenhair fern trees**, **Cedars**, **Yews** all contribute to make applicable the phrase in the abode of ancient peace”⁵. The Tree Council of Ireland adds measurement to her observations. It lists *Acer pseudoplatanus* @ 7.83 @ 0.6 x 25.5m as the Irish girth Champions for Sycamore.

She continues, “Its chief feature is the Yew cloister which was planned and planted several generations back by a father for a daughter who had told him of her wish to be a nun. “Do not go into a convent, he is reported to have urged. I shall make you a cloister here”

She continued, “He does not seem to have thought that, did the daughter repent, she would have become grandmother before these slow growing trees had begun to take the shape intended for them. Take care of the cloister my mother-in-law said to me shortly after I married. Anyone can have flowering shrubs and rose gardens, **no one else** can have a three hundred year old Yew cloister. And every autumn it received the careful clipping, necessitating scaffolding and ladders which kept its symmetry intact. One can only hope that the good Franciscan monks who now own Gormanston realise the appropriateness of a cloister in their midst, and will continue the necessary care”.⁵

If the mother in law's recall is correct in 1911, then the Yew cloister is now over 400 years old, which implies it was planted in the late 1500's or the early 1600's. In the political and religious turmoil of those times it seems either a provocative or a very confident action.

- I. Why would a prominent landlord lay out a yew cloister, a quintessential emblem of a monastic life when the King of England Henry V¹¹ had dissolved the monasteries in the Kingdom between 1536-1540 and appropriated their vast wealth to the crown?
- II. Cromwell paid for his ruthless campaign in Ireland in 1549 by confiscating properties of the Catholic aristocracy to reward his officers
- III. A recusancy law was introduced in 1584 which imposed penalties on Catholics who refused to attend services of the Church of England.
- IV. The Penal Laws were passed against Catholics in Ireland and Britain that penalised those who practice their religion. The penalties included disqualifications from voting, owing land or a horse, or holding a state office or employment.

No wonder, Eileen Gormanston would wonder how by some extraordinary favour or influence Mass was allowed to be celebrated in their chapel all through the time of the Penal Laws, even when the Parish Chapel was closed.⁴

There are plausible, possible explanations.

Firstly, the planting of the yew cloister would have been no more than an intriguing pattern on the ground for the first 100 years or so and could be explained away, imaginatively as symbolising something else entirely.

Secondly, although the Penal Laws were on the Statute Books, their power lay in their potential as a threat and were used sporadically but could be applied with devastating effects.

Thirdly, a recusant Catholic is used in the British press today, as a term of approbation. The British establishment place men who adhered to their principles, in high regard even if they were in breach of the law. The Duke of Norfolk, an advisor to the Queen, is the best known recusant Catholic public figure in the UK today. The highest concentration of recusant families are in Yorkshire and Lancashire, so perhaps Eileen Gormanston could have explained it all 'as it was in the genes'.



A Little Kept Gormanston, Eileen Butler Preston 1953, Sheed and Ward

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Regional Reports

MUNSTER

October Tuesday 1st “June Blake’s Garden”. A lecture by June Blake.

June Blake opened our Autumn/Winter season with a talk, illustrated with over 100 photographs, on the development of her garden begun in 2003. Some of the appreciative audience had visited the garden at Tinode, Blessington, Co. Wicklow.

June began with a description and images of the original garden, of nearly 4 acres, with many overpowering umbrageous sycamore trees, an uninteresting car park area and barn outbuildings.

The trees were removed and progress in the transformation of the garden was clearly shown with photographs, some taken high up in a cherry picker which provided good overall views! June followed a rectangular grid pattern and transformed the car park with raised beds formed with dry stone walls, the beds containing ballerina and burgundy tulips. Especially useful was *Tulip turkestanica*, with its hardiness, interesting shape and colour and resistance to rabbits.

She recommended wide paths (2 metres) and showed interesting shapes; a large bed has a “wobbly hedge through its centre and other shapes included elm seats, steel sculptures and an oblong rectangular reflecting pool (4 inches deep) edged in steel. This reflected a dead elm erected upside down. A courtyard was bordered with hornbeams. With photographs from different seasons, including the garden covered in deep snow, the importance of shape and colour was well illustrated. June stated her golden rule to always be ready to change; any feature you are unhappy with is not working and you should readily remove it.

The development and transformation over 10 years, with bold trials and changes were well described; an inspiration for us to create gardens of interest throughout the year.

Graham Manson.

NORTHERN

August 10th A rare treat at Bessbrook:

We gathered on a sunny Saturday at one of the linen mill cottages in Bessbrook, home of William and Hilary McKelvey. As soon as we stepped through the gate into a small rectangle of front garden, it was apparent that we were in for a treat. Central to the space, a natural granite outcrop, excavated by William from a former lawn, provides a hint of the inspiration at work here. Narrow borders show off well-spaced shrubs and herbaceous material such as a thriving *Codonopsis* along with rare clematis, with more of these in tubs, 'Fascination' and 'Anoushka' among them. A series of convincing old stone troughs full of alpine treasures are made of hypotufa, each built on a base of a polystyrene fish or broccoli box, William confided. We counted around a dozen of these, and there are more awaiting construction.

By the side of the house a splendid deep apricot *Isoplexis canariensis* set the tone, beside it a spreading *Plectranthus* with silvery blue spurred flowers. Near the back door a lovely glaucous *Plectranthus argentatus* heralded more treasures: a bed of salvias including scarlet *S. fulgens* drawing in the bees, and trailing over the sides of an elevated pot, a charming evergreen *Clematis repens* covered with graceful bright yellow nodding blooms. The petals of this are robust in texture, like many of the texensis and integrifolia groups that we were to see, excellent for our climate and like all the features in this relatively small garden of around a quarter of an acre, perfectly in scale. Brick paving provides a pleasing background to the first 'room', the boundaries a sympathetic mix of wall or green trellis. A lovely blue clematis complements the clustered dainty white flowers of *Clematis fargesia*, and between them a black flowerpot is sunk to enable efficient watering, an idea

worth copying. A long crevice bed will delight alpine gardeners and gems here include *Merendera*, *Eucomis*, *Leucojum autumnale* and the tiny brilliant annual *Gentiana syringae* from the Himalayas that Hilary plans to propagate from seed.

The wow factor continues to a comfortable bench at which a potted *Codonopsis lanceolata* leans close enough for the visitor to view the bells from below, enchanting. And a small table displays two varieties of *Tulbaghia*, society garlic, one with silvery variegated leaves and masses of flowers yet to open.

It is only possible to give a taster of the planting in the next herbaceous section with its winding grass path: *Dierama*, *Romneya coulteri*, bergamots in shades

of purple and deep crimson, and my favourite, pale pink ‘Beauty of Cobham’; *Lobelia tupa*, tall purple-stemmed *Thalictrum* ‘Elin’. On archways and walls, we saw lovely *Clematis* ‘Huldine’, ‘Prince Charles’ – a great blue with not-too-large flowers, many seed-grown herbaceous *Clematis integrifolia*, extra tall it seemed to me, neatly contained within the attractive metal supports, and continuing the *Clematis texensis* theme, after lovely ‘Etoile Rose’ and ‘Princess Diana’, we saw the very new ‘Princess Kate’ deep pink fluted bells, light inside.

A circular scree bed takes advantage of another natural rock outcrop, the light stones showing *Berkeya purpurea* off to perfection with rare *Clematis coacatilis*, or Virginia Whitehair Leather flower, with pale cream tiny bells, just 30 cm high.

We passed through an archway with *Clematis triternata* ‘Rubra Marginata’, (what a mouthful for a tiny flower), very pretty with a clovey scent, emerging to a bijou oval lawn edged with box and with richly planted borders. At this point we turned to wend our way back, in many cases several times.

I cannot think of a better garden to catch the quintessential quality that the model village of Bessbrook exudes: ideal lay-out, small and perfectly in scale, highly individual reflecting its origins, and beautiful.

Barbara Pilcher

August 24th A workshop “Plants for Free” at Ballyrobert

In late August, a group of 16 keen gardeners, IGPS members in the main, met at Maurice and Joy Parkinson’s Cottage Garden and Nursery for a workshop on plant propagation. After coffee and chat, we gathered in the potting shed where Maurice outlined the principles of propagation.

He described first, the principles of seed sowing in a controlled environment, whether it is a greenhouse or a windowsill inside the house. We discussed compost and its constituents; the containers for sowing; when to sow and how to sow; pricking out and potting up.

For those of us who are “seedaholics”, as I am, and who feel that the gardening year is meaningless unless we browse the catalogues and seed lists for that special packet of seeds, it seemed unnecessary and superfluous.....after all we’ve been doing this for years! It was however a good exercise in re-assessing our own techniques and taking on board not only Maurice’s immense professional experience but also the hints and tips from our fellow classmates.

And the same observations can be made for the other types of propagation described by Maurice.....that of plant division and the minefield of plant cuttings, whether softwood, semi-ripe, hardwood or root.

The highlight of the day was the session on collecting propagating material when we headed into the Parkinson's beautiful garden, armed with plastic bags to hold cuttings and brown "pay packet" envelopes for seeds... and we could take home any collected material. What a joy! We were like children in a sweet shop.

Eventually Maurice prised us from the garden back to the potting shed where he demonstrated the preparation of cuttings, the sowing of seeds and the highly technical method of plant division by wielding a sharp knife.

And what of the success rate with my spoils from the day? I have a forest of *Cyclamen hederifolium* seedlings, 3 little seedlings of *Lupinus* "Tequila Flame" and some seed trays which I keep under close observation, hopeful that spring will bring results. I have to confess the cardinal sin that I delayed dealing with the material from cuttings, so no success there, but the specimens taken from plant division are alive and well.

Yvonne Penpraze

October 10th "The Landscape Evolution of the Phoenix Park through the Ages" - a talk by John McCullen at Clotworthy House.

John Mc Cullen is a Landscape Horticulturalist and Landscape Historian. He is a highly regarded lecturer and guided us through the development of the Phoenix Park. He was awarded a PhD from The History of Art Department at Trinity for his book "Illustrated History of the Landscape and Management of Phoenix Park to 1880.

Phoenix Park, situated on the West side of Dublin, has a total area of 1752 acres. It has had various evolutions since it was a Royal Deer Park in 1662 until it became a National Historical Park in 1986. John's entertaining and informative talk covered its political, social and landscape history.

Áras an Uachtaráin, situated in the Park, is the residence of the President of Ireland. It dates from 1750 and before that served as a Vice Regal Lodge from 1782 to 1922. There is also the United States Ambassador's residence, built in 1774, which was formerly the Hibernian Military School.

The tree planted in 1861 by Queen Victoria is still in situ, but the one planted by Prince Albert died. Queen Victoria had paid four visits and, of course, when Queen Elizabeth II was there another tree was planted, in this case a *Wellingtonia gigantea*. President Obama also planted a tree to mark the anniversary of the Peace Process.

The fallow deer herd which dates from 1667 has one of the healthiest gene pools. The number of deer is maintained at 450. A wide range of wildlife habitats is to be found in the Park.

Important people connected with the Park were Charles II, the Duke of Ormonde, Lord Chesterfield, Decimus Burton and Nathaniel Clements.

As Viceroy, the Earl of Chesterfield got on well in Ireland. He helped to relax the Penal Laws and began the landscaping of the Park. The Phoenix Monument was erected in 1747 and forms the focal point of a tree lined avenue.

In 1903, the then Viceroy, the Earl of Dudley, involved Daisy Hill Nurseries with some of the landscaping. The oldest map of the Park was found 10 years ago. It dates back to 1775 and was found in the American Ambassador's residence.

Decimus Burton (1800-81) played an important part in the landscaping of the Park. He came to Phoenix Park 1830/32 and was still there in the 1850s. He had also been responsible for landscaping in Hyde Park and Bushey Park in London.

The Wellington testimonial was designed as a memorial to Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, who is reputed to have been born in Dublin. It was completed in 1861 and is the tallest obelisk in Europe. There are four bronze plaques cast from cannons from Waterloo.

The Phoenix Park Cricket Club is the oldest in Ireland, having been formed in 1830, and is still in existence. The All Ireland Polo Club was founded in 1873 which makes it the oldest Polo club in Europe. A wide range of recreational activities still take place in the Park

The People's Garden was laid out by the Earl of Carlisle in 1840. In the 1860s there was a school of Horticulture in the Park. No flowers were grown during World War I. Many of the Park's trees were cut down for fuel during the war but about 30% of the area is still covered by trees.

The walled garden and glasshouses near Áras anUachtaráin have been restored. A lot of bedding plants and herbaceous material has been added. Dutch breeders named a tulip after President Mary McAleese and she helped to ceremonially plant the first bulbs.

Army HQ was in the Park for a time, and the greenhouses had to be moved as they were in the way of soldiers' target practice. The Royal Hibernian Military School became a military Hospital. Plants were sold to raise funds for the hospital. Dublin Zoo, founded in 1830, is in the grounds of the Park. There is also a bandstand where concerts are held during the summer, and a tea room is open with an outdoor picnic area.

Events which have been held in the Park include the Catholic Emancipation Centenary celebrations in 1929, the Eucharistic Congress in 1932 (which Count John McCormack attended) and the Papal visit to Ireland in 1979. 2003 brought a very different event, when 137,000 people went to see Robbie Williams in concert. There is now a Phoenix Park Visitors Centre with an audio-visual presentation of the Park through the Ages. As well as the Victorian Tea Kiosk there is the Phoenix cafe.

Horticultural development continues. A lot of wild flowers have been planted in grass and there is a programme of grassland management in place. The national garden show "Bloom" is now held each year in the grounds. Phoenix Park is definitely a place to visit when in Dublin.

Hilary Glenn

December 4th "It's a Jungle out there" Conrad McCormack

Trevor Edwards summed it up in his thanks when he said "Conrad's garden was like the Tardis. It is amazing how many plants you can get in such a small space". The evening started off with in excess of forty people feeling in a Wintery mood, but we were very soon transported to the tropics with a wonderful array of exotic plants.

Conrad explained his garden is 55 degrees North in Ballycastle and is very near to the sea which has allowed him to experiment with many tender species.

His interest in plants started when he was just 7 or 8 years old, and continued through his teenage years when it was 'not cool' for a boy to be interested in plants and gardening.

Conrad's aim is to have all year round colour and interest in the garden which can be difficult.

Some of my personal favourites were *Erythronium* 'Pagoda' which has a beautiful yellow flower in spring and can also be under planted with smaller bulbs.

My personal love of lilies was stimulated with flowers such as the pink flowering "Holland Beauty" which has a magnificently heady scent and another unusual lily 'Scherezade' which grows to almost 7ft and has dark maroon blooms and one that I can speak about from experience *Lilium lancifolium* 'Splendens' which produces an amazing amount of flowers on each stem. I can thoroughly recommend it and have grown lots from the bulbils which are produced in their hundreds.

Speaking of trying things, I am off to the Asian supermarket to buy tubers of Haldi/Tumeric (*Curcuma longa*) or Taro (*Colocasia*) as Conrad suggests, it's certainly worth a try.

What a fantastic insight into a range of tropical plants we seldom consider, but are well worth trying. My wish list has grown and definitely includes for 2014 many plants from Conrad's one hundred amazing slides.

Roz Henry

LEINSTER

November 28th. A lecture by Professor Nigel Dunnett

A little piece of Sheffield was transplanted to Glasnevin last Thursday when Nigel Dunnett, Professor of Planting Design and Vegetation Technology at the University of Sheffield, Director of the Green Roof Centre and Chelsea gold medal winner, was the guest speaker of the Irish Garden Plant Society's packed out lecture at the National Botanical Gardens.

From an early age Nigel had a love of gardening but it was always the natural world that inspired him the most. Today along with his colleague James Hitchmough they are leading the way into how we treat our urban landscapes, from the challenges of storm water management with the use of rain gardens and green roofs to the creation of pictorial meadows within our parks, along road verges or as pop-up parks in vacant or derelict sites.

Nigel's research has taken him to study plant communities in many countries. This year alone he has visited high altitude wet meadows in China and Tibet. He showed us vibrant fields of candelabra primula, irises, polygonums and euphorbias.

His research has led him to create pictorial meadow seed mixes of native and non-native annuals which flower over a 5 – 6 month period, require little maintenance or resource input making them very popular with city councils (see www.pictorialmeadows.co.uk). One such example created this year was the Rotherham "River of Colour", an 8km pictorial meadow along the grass verges and centre median of a major road way in the city of Sheffield. A shining example of how a forward thinking city council can turn an otherwise dull grass verge into a colourful, biodiverse, pollen and nectar rich habitat that if nothing else would lift anyone's spirit when stuck in rush hour traffic, saving the council money at the same time.

In 2008, Nigel and his colleagues were approached to be part of the development team responsible for the delivery of the open spaces at London's Olympic Park in 2012. The Olympic Park in East London is the largest new urban park in Europe at 250 hectares, with 50 hectares alone being seeded annual pictorial meadows.

He explained how all soils on the site had to be imported due to the high contamination from its former industrial life. However, this worked to their advantage as the soils used were quarried from nearby building sites and was weed free, helping considerably with the establishment of the annual meadows. He went on to explain how many of the techniques had never been used before or certainly not on this scale and right up to the opening week of the Olympics he was not sure if they would work. But work they did and we were shown slides of the most breath-taking swathes and banks of colour, created only months earlier from seed mix.

The "Golden Girl" annual mix with *Coreopsis*, Californian poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) and corn marigold (*Chrysanthemum segetum*) shone out around the Olympic Stadium where many a gold medal was won and the Irish Garden Plant Society certainly struck gold having such a fascinating and inspirational speaker as Professor Dunnett. We look forward to seeing the results of his ongoing research and hopefully more of his ideas and techniques will become evident in our cities and urban environments over the coming years.

Stephen Shanahan.



A wildflower meadow in London's 2012 Olympic Park.

Image © www.gardenvisit.com



*Rotheram's
river of
Flowers.*

Image ©

www.pictorialmeadows.co.uk



The Consequences of Tight (Behavioural Science of Plant Buying) by John Joe Costin

The 80:20 rule of thumb is a ratio that is repeatedly confirmed, no matter what aspect of a business is examined, be it sales, stocks or staff. Proprietors know that 80% of sales are generated in 20% of the hours that their centre is open, namely, at the week-ends, so they minimise costs during the 80% of opening hours, when only 20% of sales are registered. It is equally true that 20% of the plants stocked account for 80% of plant sales, so there is a strong financial incentive for the plant buyer to identify and delist plants that form this figure, the slowest sellers, and to replace duds with winners. The profit incentive is that retailers have **to take** the market price for known products, but can **make** their own price for a new product. Customers expect to pay more for novelty. Public expectations are conditioned by Fashion Houses' seasonal pronouncements on new styles and colours. Garden Centres as retailers imitate the practices pioneered by profitable retailers and so their norms permeate our industry. The first question a journalist or plant buyer asks when they come to a stand at a Plant Trade Show is '**What is new?**' The delisting of slower-selling and lower margin plants, offers an insight on why I.G.P.S members experience difficulties procuring desirable plants that are less popular. It also explains wholesale plant buyers insatiable demand for new plants and the hoped for sales boost.

The popularity of plants depends on buying habits and the time of the year when gardeners view them with purchase in mind. Before we grew plants in pots, we grew them in the soil. Gardeners knew that bare root plants had to be transplanted in the dormant season, so they dressed for the weather and carried on undeterred and regardless. Their season started in October and planting had to be completed by the end of March. That golden rule then obeyed a scientific principle, and it is one that still yields benefit, if only it were observed more regularly. Roots grow first, at lower temperatures, and because of that, plants develop a bigger root system which supports the later flush of growth that shoots make when triggered by higher temperatures.

Retail nursery catalogues in the bare root era highlighted plants with winter appeal.

Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis' flowering during the darkest days of winter on bare wood, seemed like a miracle of nature, was a must-have for gardeners. Nursery visitors saw *Fatsia japonica* that most exotic of evergreens, globular heads, in full flower in October. Confusingly, *Arbutus unedo* could show both white flowers and red fruit together in October-November. Every nursery stocked *Mahonia* for their incredibly large frost-hardy flowers, sitting on top of their magnificent evergreen foliage. In November, *Viburnum bodnantense* 'Dawn' started a three month display of its scented warm pink flowers on bare stems apparently immune to frost. Sarcococcos were popular as shade tolerant dense, compact evergreens, whose beautifully scented flowers suffused the air on frosty, as well as on still days. *Garrya* produced its 30cm long catkins and *Chaenomeles*, like a live Japanese painting, smothered its bare branches, in scarlet flowers from February onwards. A succession of winter flowering cultivars, providing a continuum of colour from October to March, made heathers popular. *Rhododendron praecox*, a dwarf compact species, with conspicuous frost-hardy blue flowers, brought spring to gardens in February. Everyone knew that sweet scent of winter Jasmine, *Jasminum nudiflorum*. It was then a popular plant. *Hamamelis*, bare stems, wreathed in yellow flowers stood out in the weak February sun, defiantly indifferent to the severest frosts. *Daphne mezereum* scented the air in February too and *Skimmia japonica* 'Rubella' with large erect male buds, looked like a fine display of flowers from November.

There was great interest in winter berries and fruits. The specimens growing in the nurseries were living labels of what you too could have in your own garden. Catalogues differentiated between cultivars and genera that bore fruits or berries by size, brightness of their colour and longevity on the bush or tree. *Aucuba japonica* fine foliage was complemented with crops of bright red berries. Dense crops of amber berries made *Viburnum opulus* 'Fructu Luteo' a conspicuous compact winter shrub. Evergreens such as *Pernettya mucronata* laden in glossy pink berries, *Gaultheria procumbens* carpeted in red and *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* covered in small red berries, were stocked by retail nurseries, because these were discoveries that brought unexpected colour to bare gardens in the leafless season. *Cotoneaster* 'Rothschildianus', yellow berries, conspicuous against the dark green foliage made it a choice selection among the many *Cotoneasters* that fruited profusely. The same contrast made *Pyracantha* 'Flava' and 'Soleil d'Or' popular too. *Stranvaesia*, another member of that great fruit bearing family, was sought for its heavy crop of winter berries. There were many *Malus* and *Sorbus* cultivars that produced fruit reliably and profusely, but no one could see then the disfigurement that apple scab caused to the *Malus* foliage in summer. Of the many *Sorbus* selections *S. pohuashanensis* imprinted itself on my memory above others.

Callicarpa bodinieri var. *giraldii* 'Profusion' was imported from a warmer climate, its branches irresistibly laden with distinctive lilac violet coloured berries but it disappointed. We do not have the necessary heat that it enjoys in Germany and the Netherlands to produce a crop here annually or even sporadically. I collected *Gaultheria miqueliana* C+L 134, at 1600m at Shiburkawa above Nagano in Honshu Japan. The crop of white berries sitting on a 30cm high carpet of dense green foliage was conspicuous on the forest floor amidst a riot of rich autumn reds, orange and yellows. I believed that it would be a winner. It is a plant of considerable merit, but like all other autumnals listed above, the demand for once considered indispensable plants, disappeared by the time I had built up commercial quantities. This sea change occurred when buying patterns altered as a result of a switch in production from bare root to container and when retail nurseries were displaced by garden centres. Converting from a retail nursery where production knowledge was a necessity, to a garden centre where retailing knowledge was essential in order to survive, was a journey that many tried, but some did not succeed. That change of emphasis was crucial.

As soon as gardeners were no longer restricted by planting time, they became fine weather enthusiasts and instead of planting skeletal plants in the frost in February they now choose to plant their purchases in flower, in sunshine and the good 'science of dormant season planting' was discarded. It was also the welcome demise of another ill-advised fashion, the combination of plants grown for the vivid colour of their winter bark. These look dramatic in a parkland if planted in large groups and if well managed, but are too coarse and too vigorous for modern gardens. Then, every savvy retail nurseryman heeled-in bundles of plants with conspicuously coloured bark, in a prominent location, harmoniously arranged in adjacent lines. This ploy may have been the precursor or possibly the inspiration for 'designers' to arrange plants by pictures.

Best sellers included:

<i>Cornus alba</i> 'Siberia'	Scarlet bark
<i>Cornus alba</i> 'Sanguinea'	Dull Red
<i>Cornus stolonifera</i> 'Flaviramea'	Green
<i>Salix daphnoides</i>	Purple
<i>Kerria japonica</i>	Green
<i>Leycesteria formosa</i>	Green

The countryside should be ablaze in winter, with the scarlet stems of *Cornus alba* 'Siberica'. Hundreds of thousands were imported and planted, but they receded back into the ground over a few years, as spring frosts repeatedly burnt their emerging buds.

It is a plant of the Arctic Circle that needs definite seasons. It thrives in continental climates but is killed here by late spring frosts. Nevertheless, the image still inspires. Writers still publish the pictures and still recommend these plants for winter colour in gardens, even as they get smaller in size. The yield of the annual pruning recommended to maximise the display, would fuel a wood burner stove for a good part of a winter. Winter was the best time for the nurseryman to display and for the gardener to marvel at the freakish growth habit or the corkscrew contortions of *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta', *Salix matsudana* 'Tortuosa' and the flattened fasciated stems of *Salix sachalinensis* 'Sekka'. Collections were created. A Scot invited me to see his 'winter garden', while a Yorkshire gardener's invitation was to his 'lunatic asylum' which was then the acceptable term, for what later became a Psychiatric Hospital.

The change from field to container production was accompanied by an equally remarkable war of words, between traditionalists who waxed passionately about the naturalness of growing plants in the ground, the spiritual satisfaction of preparing the perfect seed bed, the unfettered freedom of roots to search deep for water and nutrients and the superiority which 'free range' conferred on plants growing in the field. Others propounded on the damage for life that would be inflicted upon a plant whose roots were unnaturally confined in a pot. In reality, they were baulking at the consequences of change which were both daunting and unquantifiable. They vented their fears of the unknown by defending the old. Arguments were political, moral, strategic and bluster laden. Nursery conferences were hijacked by the doomsayers. Some feared for the loss of a real advantage that they enjoyed in field production, namely an ideal friable soil. Some were paralysed by the staggering costs of pot production facilities and infrastructure. For others, it was the immorality of covering highly productive land with plastic and gravel and for yet more, a mask to hide a vulnerability of changing to a new production system, that they would have to master and might not.

Container grown plants liberated gardeners from seasonal schedules. Now 80% of plant sales are made in the spring over bank holiday weekends, namely between St. Patrick's Day and the June week end. Sales are weather responsive, as gardeners are deterred by rain and are prompted by sunshine. Formerly, plant purchases were based on perusing catalogues by the fire place, selecting by description, then posting an order to be reserved, which was lifted and collected in the dormant season. Recommendations on growing and placement were provided and keen gardeners could develop a good knowledge of each plants requirement. They gardened!

To understand the true scale and enormous size of ornamental horticulture in Europe, it is instructive to visit the 11 Ha, (27 acre) Flower Auction Hall in Aalsmeer (NL) or to attend one of the week-long trade shows held in the winter months in gargantuan complexes in Italy, Germany or France. At these shows, when you sit down at night with fellow nurserymen behind tall glasses they became philosophers who visualise the future and articulate policy. In essence, houseplant growers were to be envied, admired and should be emulated. They were to be admired as the first to master pot production protocols for ornamental crops that produced uniform crops in flower or in berry. They then created a mass market by distributing through retail outlets. They were to be envied because they repositioned house plants as a consumer product, to be bought, displayed, enjoyed and then disposed. The aura of delicacy or difficulty was eliminated by distributing through supermarkets rather than specialised plant outlets. Guilt free, disposal was important. It encouraged repeat purchases. There was no sense of failure, it was not killed and it did not die. Its life cycle was completed.

Consumers who repeatedly purchased the same plants would be ideal. Nursery producers had to emulate the pot plant growers. The problem they saw with garden plants is that you have to find new customers, each year, for your product. The one who bought your plant last year is looking for a different plant this year and that may not be amongst the range you grow. Container production made change possible and garden centres changed everything by displaying plants that were in leaf and in flower, so gardeners now selected what they liked. Plant marketing label copy writers rewrote the label script, stressing positives and eliminating negatives. Consumers were enabled and empowered. Cautions and warnings were deleted. The ultimate height was changed lest it might deter a sale to a height in metres at 10 years of age which would not arouse alarm. Emphasis changed from the work instructions of **cultivation** to the pleasures and benefits of **consumption**. There was no advice on pruning, dead heading, tying in, insect invasions, disease susceptibility or need for spraying. **Trouble-free** is a liberating phrase, that accessed the pleasures and bypassed the pains of having to acquire the archaic knowledge and technical terms used by fusty know all gardeners.

The question of “had you the right soil for a plant” was made redundant. Copy writers invented a classic, '**plant in ordinary soil**', a new type, the most unassuming and enabling of all soils. This modest soil does not feature among the 31 soil types, shown on An Foras Taluntais Soil Map of Ireland. Each of those described has its own unique characteristics whose properties are determined by the base rock type from which each was derived. Soil maps have been produced for many of our counties and these come with a matching crop

suitability map. Farmers use these suitability maps like investment manuals for guidance on which enterprise to pursue and which ones that could not be profitable. Back to the 'plant in ordinary soil' recommendation. This sublime bit of nonsense now appears on labels, in gardening talks and in books written by 'experts'. Everyone could feel assured that such **“easy to grow plants”** would grow in the most innocuous of places and are led to think that you can grow any plant everywhere. 80% of plant purchases in garden centres are made by women. Marketers targeted them with information themes from the world of fashion and interior design that is familiar and that they have a command of. The emphasis is on colour and on an expectation of a continuity of display, the normality of wanting and the ease of achieving that. Now the three questions asked about any plant are: **a) Does it flower? b) What colour is it? c) Is it evergreen?** Labels are silent on frost hardiness too. Hybrids bred from 5 species of *Zantedeschia* produce startlingly beautiful spathes in shades of pink, mauve, green and yellow for the cut flower and pot plant sectors. These are bought and planted as garden plants in the belief that they extend the range of colour of the well-known Arum lily, *Z. aetheiopica*. These hybrids should come with a warning but do not. They are plants for conservatories, as their frost tolerance is not more than -4°C.

80% of all plants bought cost less than €10 and in confirming that point the horticultural advisor to a nation-wide chain of garden centres added that if they looked at that figure, 85% of those purchases cost €5 or less, the vast majority of which are of half hardy bedding plants. These no longer come with the warning, **“plant before May 20th at your peril,”** the likely date of the last frost. Bedding plants are available in stores from February and if you suffer a wipe out, you are consoled with the comforting “weren't you unfortunate”. *Petunia* Surfinia, the product of diligent research, is protected by Plant Breeders Rights. It is sold subject to a royalty on every plant and is owned by a major international pharmaceutical company. It is the best-selling plant in Europe. Sales now exceed 500m per year. The revenue stream from the Royalties finance further research, create new variations, develop a better distribution network and enlist retailers dependent on this revenue stream to enhance their own earnings by promoting the use of the plant locally. Consequently, whether I drive through Kelso on the Scottish border, Moira in Co. Down or Leighlinbridge Co. Carlow, I see the same hanging cascades. It appears that the National competitions whether “Britain in Bloom” or our Tidy Towns Competition have been hijacked, lock, stock and barrel by local Surfinia petunia suppliers, as vehicles to promote even greater ubiquity for this admittedly good half hardy plant. We now face the real prospect of a visual homogeneity from Enniskillen to Istanbul and a corresponding erosion of local identity.

Lifting the Spirits is invariably listed as a nice reason to visit such towns. For our mental health, we know that need is greatest in the darkest months. We also hear a lot of guff about sustainability invariably offered without illustration or illumination. Perhaps if we planted bulbs once, instead of Surfinia annually, and had our towns judged in spring not in summer, our mental health might be better and our costs considerable lower. We have world famous daffodil breeders and a range of cultivars from past and present Irish breeders that provide a continuous river of colour from December until May. Add Snowdrops, ideal in our heavy soils and plant bands of *Muscari armeniacum* and we could lift chins and turn Tidy Town judges' minds, if they changed their judging visits from summer to spring.

When I started a wholesale nursery in 1972, I asked Michael Hannon, manager of Powers Seeds and Nursery in Waterford for his advice. He said it was a great business entirely, that he sold items mainly to dowagers, that it would be an advantage to be able to take sherry whilst discussing selections at table, and that there was never a complaint because they bought for the long term, items like *Davidia involucrata* and *Magnolia campbelli*, plants that took 20 years or more before they first flowered. Alas the dowagers must have dwindled because Powers Nursery closed a few years later. They failed to cross the bridge to container production. Powers Seeds ran an advertisement in the Farmers Journal for many years offering to supply 12 flowering shrubs that would provide year long colour, anywhere in Ireland for (30/- bob) €1.50. That sum, I earned in one night in 1957. Meat was still rationed in England after the war and there was a market for rabbit, both for its meat and for its pelts as fur for lining ladies gloves. At dusk, I set up 60 snares and next morning had the arduous task of carrying 57 carcasses uphill across 5 fields to the farmyard, to where a poultry and game merchant called weekly to purchase @ 2.5p per carcass.

The plants advertised in 1957 share two characteristics with the plants that garden centres have to stock to sell for under the €10 crucial price point, these are: ease of propagation by the least expensive means and speed of growth. In a systematic investigation of plant propagation by 5 different means under 5 different treatments, Keith Lamb and Jim Kelly established that the most economic methods to propagate woody plants were outdoor and cold frame propagation, a traditional method which afforded the easier to propagate subjects the protection they needed over a greater period of time. The least technical propagation method is hardwood cuttings 15-20cm long, inserted in sheltered prepared ground out door in autumn. They root by the following spring and will be 40-50cm in height by the following autumn. This was the plant size that Powers Seeds supplied.

Common place plants successfully propagated by these means included *Aucuba japonica* 'Variegata', *Berberis x ottawensis* 'Superba', *Caryopteris x clandonensis*, *Choisya ternata*, *Cytisus* cultivars, *Deutzia* 'Pride of Rochester', *Escallonia* species and cultivars, *Forsythia intermedia* 'Spectabilis', *Kerria japonica*, *Ligustrum ovalifolium* 'Aureum' *Lonicera nitida*, *Olearia macrodonta*, *Philadelphus* in variety, *Potentilla fruticosa* cultivars, *Ribes sanguineum*, *Spiraea* 'Anthony Waterer', *Symphoricarpos orbiculatus* 'Variegatus' and *Weigela*.

An individual who inherited the care of 144 specimens planted by his predecessors in a 1Ha (2.5) acre space wanted to cull some, but was perplexed by what to his untutored eye ranged from the indifferent to the beautiful. Immobilised by fear of error, he asked how the ornamental value of the specimen could be rated. This collection (as those in many gardens do) chronicled the purchase of the ephemera of plant fashions of the 20th century. Evidence from old gardens suggests that a fascination with the new produce few classics. Among the once fashionable but awful were two examples of what the advertising industry call weasel words, that infer a value of a superior product to a clearly inferior one by association. Neither has any redemptive merit. *Lonicera nitida* was introduced as the 'Poor Man's Box' and *Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra' as the 'Poor Man's Copper Beech', because it roots readily from hardwood cuttings unlike the exacting grafting skills required to propagate the best coloured Copper beech.

I ascribed stars from 1-5 to the ornamental value and rarity to each plant. The easy to propagate shrubs (per Kinsealy's listing) were rated 1-3 stars. These included the most admired in gardens, those that fill us with pride and amazement that "I propagated that myself". All of these may grow readily, flower profusely but the flowers are largely unremarkable and their growth habits are inelegant. It was recommended that all 84 plants rated below 4 should be vapourised. Removals included *Abelia*, *Aucuba*, *Berberis*, *Cortaderia*, *Cordyline australis*, *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple' *Cotoneaster franchetti*, *Deutzia*, *Fuchsia riccartonii*, *Hypericum*, *Olearia*, *Ligustrum ovalifolium* 'Aureum', *Lonicera nitida*, *Prunus cerasifera* 'Nigra', *Philadelphus*, *Potentilla*, *Spiraea* and *Weigela*.

I had assumed that some might look nobler in the wild, but none impressed except *Kerria japonica*, its elegant growth habit standing out whenever I encountered it. I thought that the zig-zag elegance and the arching graceful branches of *Neillia thibetica* had merit and perhaps that Neill gave it an Irish association, but it does not. It too disappointed when seen in thickets in Sichuan. In short, these popular shrubs after they flower have little ornamental virtue.

These are the amorphous constituents of the mixed shrub border that is nearly always an abomination of design, a non display devoid of purpose except for screening the unsightly and incapable of inspiration because the planting is never structured. Allowing them to revert to the anonymity that they are worthy of seems the most appropriate action. When I first encountered these shrubs in the grounds of the Botanic Gardens as a student I could see no beauty in them as plants in their non-flowering state and none at all in their bareness during winter. I assumed that I would in time. I attributed my lack of appreciation to the underdeveloped aesthetics of a farm boy's eye and mind. I read the Pruning Manuals and the experts precise instructions elevated their invisible preciousness. Then redemption followed. I felt privileged that Dominic Temple, the grounds foreman, asked me to assist him in winter pruning. Dominic did not practice the effete delicacies that pruning manuals recommended. His swashbuckling hack them down technique, done with a seemingly vengeful delight accorded with my own instincts. He was a good tutor. Four and five star plants retained included:

Arbutus unedo

Cercis siliquastrum

Davidia involucrata

Ginkgo biloba

Hamamelis mollis

Ilex aquifolium 'Amber'

Laburnocytisus 'Adamii'

Liquidamber styraciflua

Magnolia x soulangeana

Metasequoia glyptostroboides

Parrotia persica

Phyllostachys aurea

Pyrus salicifolia 'Pendula'

Salix x chryrsocoma

Taxus bacatta 'Dovastonia Aurea'

Tsuga canadensis 'Pendula'

Viburnum plicatum 'Mariesii'

Good plants, such as these should be perceived as elegant pieces of garden furniture that raise your esteem as their beauty appreciates with age.

None of these plants can be purchased for €10 or less. Methods of propagation and slow rate of growth preclude that. The many poor plants we popularise and the many good plants we ignore is a consequence of being tight and forgetting the wisdom from our ancestors not to be "penny wise and pound foolish". Your garden maybe revealing traits you would prefer concealed.

The selecting criterion for I.G.P.S. members by definition is ornamental desirability. The passionate have a high price point barrier. If the society was to evangelise and make its passions contagious, the potential harvest is great – 80%. The result would be a cure for sore eyes.

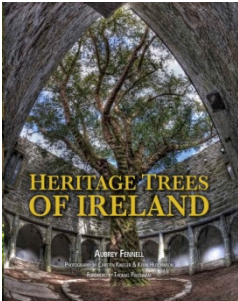


Worth A Read by Paddy Tobin

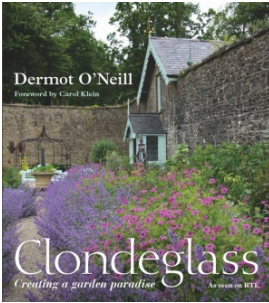
The author of the Garden Expert books, Dr. David G. Hessayon, has announced his retirement at the age of 85. During his career over 50 million of his books have been printed but he says that the rise in use of the internet has led to a decline in demand for his books as people are more likely to use Google to check for gardening advice than to look to a book. He has also announced that he won't write his autobiography "because I'm bored of hearing about myself so God knows what everybody else feels." It certainly is a challenging time for authors and publishers and only material which is new, innovative and generally not available elsewhere will attract a readership. Fortunately, there are still many worthwhile and interesting books being published and, thankfully, there are also people who enjoy and treasure the pleasures of reading.

Christmas is always a great time for book sales and publishers launch them to meet this demand. This season has a good selection and here are some I have to hand.

I will start at home with a book written in Ireland, by an Irish author, on an Irish subject, with photographs taken in Ireland and published by an Irish company. *Heritage Trees of Ireland* by Aubrey Fennell with photographs by Carsten Krieger and Kevin Hutchinson is the book that the Irish gardener will want this Christmas. Aubrey spent about 15 years tracking down the most remarkable trees in the country, researching the interesting stories which invariably go with these wonders and recording them in a sense as one would record any wonders of our Irish heritage. Some are included for their age, others for their size, others for their social significance and many simply for their beauty. One hundred and fifty are recorded in total and each is a joy to read. Above all others, this is the book for the fireside this Christmas. Available online from The Collins Press in Cork €30.



Dermot O Neill has written a book to accompany the television series on *Clondeglass* the walled garden he purchased and is restoring. In the manner of his television presentation, Dermot writes in a very pleasant and easily read style.

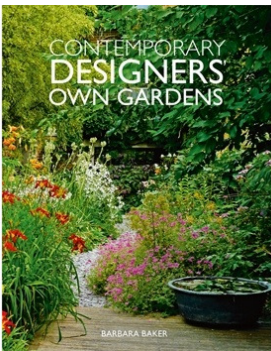


He describes the state of the gardens when he first arrived and his various projects in its restoration with information on his plant selections and plant loves, for he truly does love his plants and has a very special interest in plants of Irish origin. The book reads more as a series of snippets than a cohesive whole leaving me at the end of most chapters wishing more had been written on its topic. Short and sweet? Published by Kyle Books. £25



A recent review in The Telegraph newspaper described **The New English Garden** by Tim Richardson as the most important gardening book printed this century. My own preferences are inclined to be more Irish but I certainly could not deny that this is an excellent book and one I am positive gardeners will read with great pleasure. Twenty five gardens are described and all have been made or remade in this century so the book presents a perfectly current view of the most recent developments and trends in English gardening. The naturalistic style of planting, as might be expected,

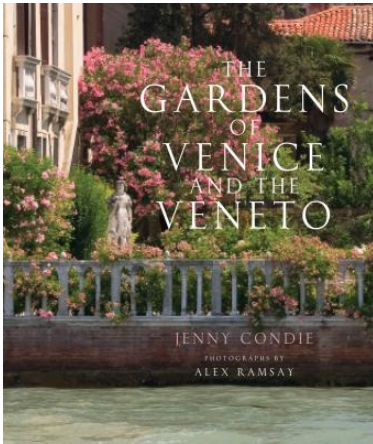
features strongly along with many innovative gardens – Keith Wiley’s “Wildside”, Piet Oudolf’s Bury Court, Tom Stuart-Smith’s Trentham, Arabella Lennox-Boyd’s Gresgarth, Nigel Dunnett’s Olympic Village, Highgrove, Great Dixter and many more. It is a substantial book, packed with excellent photographs and perfect text. A must have! Published by Frances Lincoln, £40.



In **Contemporary Designers' Own Garden** Barbara Baker selects the gardens of well-known contemporary garden designers and gives us a peep behind the garden gate to see what gardens they have designed at home. The photography is simply divine and the text is insightful. I think the fact that the author is a well-known designer herself led to those she interviewed being quite open and candid with her when discussing their gardens. The outcome is an informed, informative and incisive account of 20 interesting gardens from around the world.

To mention a few: Patrick Blanc, Fernando Caruncho, Kate Cullity, Jim Fogarty, Dan Pearson, Shunmyo Masung and Jacques Wirtz – among others equally interesting. Published by Garden Art Press. £35

Over the last number of years Italian gardens have enjoyed a great following and Jenny Condie has written on *The Gardens of Venice and The Veneto*,



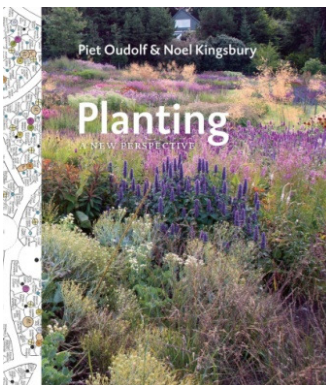
filling a gap in the literature of Italian Gardens. With a glass of Bardolino in hand one could browse this book and be in Venice. It is sumptuously illustrated and each of the 20 gardens is described at length though lacking some details which would have been helpful, given that most are open to the public – directions, opening times etc. Three of the gardens are in Venice itself with others in The Veneto at Verona, Vicenza, Rovigo, Padua and Treviso. Given the wealth and historic significance of Venice it is no surprise that it is home to many outstanding

gardens and this book is an excellent introduction to them.

Published by Frances Lincoln. £35.

Favoloso! Facciamo pianificare una vacanza.

This book, *Planting – A New Perspective* by Piet Oudolf and Noel Kingsbury, prompted great discussion in gardening circles in England much of



which centred on the merits of planting in blocks or by intermingling plants. It was an amusing discussion but I found the book and discussion had little relevance or appeal to the everyday gardener. This is a book for the landscape architect written by the present leaders in the field seeking an approach to planting which will look natural, be sustainable and long-lived and be easily maintained by unskilled labour. Many of the resultant plantings were pleasing to the eye and suited to their situation. As an approach to parkland planting or the reclamation of post-industrial sites it is to be commended but it has little to contribute to the domestic garden.

I laboured my way through reading it. Published by Timber Press. £30



Details of Spring lectures

CORK: FEBRUARY 4th 8.00 pm at the SMA Hall, Wilton "Snowdrops - Harbingers of Spring" by Paddy Tobin

"Snowdrops are the delight of the winter and spring garden" This talk will illustrate their value and attraction in the garden, outline the range and variety that we can grow here in Ireland and introduce the best of our Irish varieties.

DUBLIN: FEBRUARY 27th Thursday at 8.00pm at the NBG

A lecture by Pat Fitzgerald. Many good garden plants are lost to gardening and herbal use in Ireland every year due to the inability of commercial nurseries, gardening associations and private gardeners to sustain these cultivars. In many countries charities and active groups are working on practical and funded programs to reverse this loss to heritage, gardening and science. In Ireland there are initiatives through Seed Savers and the National Botanic Gardens. As a nursery we can contribute to this work and not only conserve but spread Irish cultivars and Irish garden heritage worldwide. Pat's presentation will illustrate how he does that and how he tries to sustain a few non-commercial varieties on the back of that work

CORK: MARCH 4th Tuesday at 8 pm at the SMA Hall,

A talk by Carl Wright "Between a rock and a hard place".

This is the story of Caher Bridge Garden. It describes the making of the garden from the very beginning in 1999. Carl will cover many elements, including the overall design, planning, building, the soil and some of the plants which he grows there.

ANTRIM: MARCH 27th, Thursday at 7:30pm, Clotworthy House, Antrim 'Plants for Enthusiasts' by Averil Milligan.

Averil is head gardener at Rowallane Garden, County Down. The talk will focus on Rowallane and Mount Stewart gardens both created in a similar time in garden history but totally different in character. Highlights will be the plants collected by both garden owners in different ways with emphasis on rarity and ability to thrive in our climate.

CORK: APRIL, 1st Tuesday 8 pm SMA Hall, Wilton.

Bruno Nicolai “Exotic Escapism - Creating another world in your back garden”. For Bruno, gardening is about creating a world of experience using both hardy and tender, the common and rare. He has developed habitat-like planting schemes oozing with exoticism; all within the confines of his Cork city garden. Do join Bruno for a journey from desert to jungle.

DUBLIN: April 10th Thursday at 8p.m. National Botanic Gardens joint with The Alpine Garden Society “Creative Gardening with Containers”
Lecturer: Hester Forde.

Hester will cover the principles behind planting up containers to give a pleasing effect and their placement in the garden to best effect and the use of more unusual plants to give a bold effect such as cannas, grasses, annuals, etc.

Snippets

WANTED

Did you get a copy of a book you have already, or maybe a gardening tool you cannot use? Why not donate it to the IGPS, bring it to our next event and your local committee will be able to Raffle it.

A Floral Odyssey – the 11th World Flower Show will take place at the RDS, Ballsbridge, Dublin from June 18th to 22nd

Floral artists from thirty one member countries will take part. Details of lectures and demonstrations, tours and the social programme are available on the World Association of Flower Arrangers excellent website www.wafaireland.com Tickets for the show are available through the website or from ticketmaster.ie Pre booked 1 day entry is €20, on the day entry €25.

News from Australia of a garden open to the public

Lubra Bend Landscape and Garden
135 Simpsons Lane, Yarra Glen,
55 kilometers from Melbourne
Website: www.lubrabend.com.au



A Happy ending for ‘Mrs Hegarty’

The Spring 2013 issue of our newsletter carried a plea from David and Penny Ross in Devon who hold the national collection of *Hesperantha coccinea* (formerly *Schizostylus*) for material from the cultivar ‘Mrs Hegarty’ to add to their collection. They specifically asked for material which had a clear provenance from a reliable source dating back to 1980 or earlier.

The deep rose-pink cultivar arose in the garden of Mrs Blanche Hegarty in Clonbur, Co Galway, probably in the early years of the last century. In *A Heritage of Beauty*, Charles Nelson states that by 1919 propagation material was held by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin. He goes on to say:

“Mrs Hegarty’ is now very confused in gardens and the trade because there are many newer pink cultivars, some admittedly better.”

The photograph opposite demonstrates the point. Taken recently in a large garden centre, it shows one plant with very pale pink blooms while the other has much deeper coloured flowers. Arranged side by side, both were labelled ‘Mrs Hegarty’.

Poor lady, she is clearly suffering from that modern malaise: identity fraud. There is, however, a happy ending. Penny Ross has confirmed that they have now received some plants from an unimpeachable source – one of Mrs Hegarty’s great grandsons who lives in London.

Material from his plants will be included in a programme of genetic testing. The September 2013 edition of *The Plantsman* carried a report on the work already carried out to clarify the genetics of this genus. Imposters - your time is up!

Maeve Bell
November 2013



PERENNIAL
Succulent
New England

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Succulent
New England



The Irish Garden Plant Society

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