

The Scottish Rock Garden Club Alpine Garden Society Farrer Medal - Hexham 2017 *Sebaea thomasii* 'Bychan' Shown by Keith & Rachel Lever Transported by Tim Lever



It is fair to assume that it takes a long time to grow a Farrer Medal winning plant. This is even truer if the plant is small, difficult to grow, demands attention and is in great big clay pot. Hence Keith and Rachel Lever had the good sense to let their son Tim transport their magnificent *Sebaea thomasii* 'Bychan' from North Wales to Hexham in the north of England. The most difficult and demanding parts of the journey as far as Tim was concerned were first carrying the pot into the car in Graig, near Colwyn Bay and on arriving at Hexham moving it from the car to the show bench. I hope he was able to park near the door! One small redeeming factor was that the plant was in one of the classes nearest to the hall door.

Sebaea thomasii is native to the Drakensberg mountains of South Africa and Lesotho, where it grows in peaty turf. That it is a member of the Gentianaceae is apparent as its flowers resemble bright chrome yellow clusters of *Gentian verna*. It is this vivid shade which ensures that a panful will always stand out on the show bench. For those of you who don't speak Welsh I can tell you that 'Bychan' translates as 'Small'. In the case of the Farrer medal winner this is to distinguish it from the more commonly available form with slightly larger flowers. Cyril Lafong won a Forrest medal with the larger flowered form at the SRGC Perth show in 2004.





Mary & Hugh McAllister wrote the following in his report on winning a Certificate of Merit at the Ulster show in 2012 / 2013, ' a good tip for encouraging growth is to give the plant a "haircut" after flowering has finished. Most publications say that the plant is difficult to grow but I have grown it outside for the most of its life. It enjoys good light at all times, plenty of water during the growing season and an occasional spray of water'. This reads as though Sebaea is a plant which really wants the conditions of its home mountains—peaty turf which sounds quite damp. It might do well in a trough in Scotland. I remember seeing this plant or one like it when I visited Aberconwy Nursery with the RHS Joint Rock Garden Plant Committee at the end of April 2015. The whole nursery is immaculate. The plants bursting with health. Keith, Rachel and Tim are dedicated to growing an enormous range of excellent plants. Rachel is a wonderful propagator. As my grandad might have said 'she could put roots on a stick!'

Above. Keith in the alpine tunnel at Aberconwy Nursery.

Below. *Sebaea thomasii* growing in a raised bed at their nursery in North Wales. Can you see the wee *Gentiana verna* ?

The plant may be *Sebaea thomasii* 'Bychan' but the overall result was GWYCH, ARDDERCHOG and GODIDOG!

Well done Keith, Rachel and Tim!

