



HPS
HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

Worcestershire Group

Gardening with hardy perennials



Newsletter

Spring 2017 - No. 45

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WANTED

I have not been notified of any 'wants' for inclusion in this issue of the newsletter at the time of going to press. So far this column has enjoyed a high success rate with a number of members being able to source plants from within the group while making a nominal contribution to group funds. So do please take advantage of this opportunity.

Editor

Front cover: *Leucanthemum*, variety *unknown*

Saturday meetings

These are held at Crowle Parish Hall, Church Road, Crowle WR7 4AZ, starting at 2.00pm on the second Saturday of the month. Entrance is free to Group members; visitors' entrance charge is £3 for any of the talks.

Refunds - As a general rule for outside trips no refunds will be given later than two weeks before the event. Individual organisers of outings may differ from this policy and it is important to check the information given at the time of booking.

FROM THE CHAIR...

By the time you read this I will have handed over the Chair to my successor having enjoyed a wonderful three years as Chairman. Many of you will know that I had not long re-joined the Worcestershire Group after a time when family and work took priority on Saturdays, when I tumbled headfirst into the position. It has been a lot of fun, a wonderful way of reconnecting with the Group and my old friends, making many new friends, and being involved in the various activities. Of course all this is only possible with a strong committee, and I have been supported by a brilliant group of committee members who are full of enthusiasm and ideas. We are lucky in Worcestershire, for around the country, many local groups are finding it difficult to recruit new volunteers and I hope others will be inspired, as I was, to step forward.

There have been few sunny days this winter; my impression is one of misty, dank days with low light levels, and a lot of rain. There have been some frosts too and I am wondering how some plants will have coped with even modest frosts whilst their roots are in wet soil. Definitely not a good year for leaving the stems and seed heads, although some have weathered it all, particularly a small *Miscanthus* at the far end of the garden that has caught any late rays of sun, and the bronze fennel and teasels have stood firm. My intention had been to do a lot more tidying up, but again autumn flowers seemed to persist until it became too wet to do much, so the race is on now to finish that task, weed and mulch before the spring plants advance too far. In some ways it is a good time to do this as it is so encouraging to see new shoots emerging all around while the bees are out on warm days visiting the winter flowers.

The RBS (bank of shame) is still a sorry sight as there was much to distract me, but work has started - there are a lot more plants on there, and I need to build on those first steps. I will continue to show my progress on the website 'Spotlight'. Meanwhile I have had two computer-based projects on the go: an illustrated list of the plants that will appear on the Chelsea display and work on the Conservation pages for the new National HPS website.

Chelsea is probably the biggest project Worcestershire HPS has ever taken on and you will hear much more about it as the weeks roll by -

follow the progress of the team on Twitter, Facebook and our website. By the time you read this we will be into the final stages of preparation with many members involved in growing and tending the plants. We hope that we will get the stand and plants there and assembled according to plan and that the public will like what they see, find out more about the HPS and want to join the Society.

You will find many more dates for your calendar when you read through this Newsletter, but I can safely say that the Group holiday in June and the Celebrity Lecture Day in September will be highlights.

Jan

and from the Editor's desk

A big Thank You is owed to all those who have contributed in different ways to this issue. Your support is greatly appreciated. I am particularly keen to hear also from one or two of our newer members, of whom there are quite a few. Please use these pages to satisfy our curiosity and introduce yourself. Have you recently moved to the area and what sort of a garden do you have? Tell us about your plans for it and what led you to join the Group. Do you specialise in any particular genus or have any favorite plants? We would love to get to know you.

David

STOP PRESS...

Lyn Maile has kindly offered to host this year's Summer Garden Party which will be held on Tuesday 6th June beginning at 6.30 p.m. Details will be sent out by email.

CORNUCOPIA

Cornucopia, the twice-yearly digest of the best of writing from the HPS local and specialist groups, is available to members for just £3 per annum. To subscribe, send your cheque, payable to 'The Hardy Plant Society' to: HPS Administrator, The Hardy Plant Society, 15 Basepoint Business Centre, Crab Apple Way, Evesham, Worcs WR11 1GP. Existing subscribers renew with their

HPS WORCESTERSHIRE GROUP COMMITTEE

AT MARCH 2017

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Mick Dunstan	chair@worcs-hardy-plant.org.uk	01905 360102	Chairman 2017
Lyn Maile	sec@worcs-hardy-plant.org.uk	01905 820267	Secretary 2015
Richard King	treas@hardy-plant.org.uk	01386 300819	Treasurer 2017
Jayne Savage	Jaynesavag@aol.com	01386 792924	Publicity 2016
Stephanie Reader	sjr4@hotmail.co.uk	01299 851655	Speaker Secretary 2017
David Pollitt	davidpollitt@john-lewis.com	01905 381739	Newsletter Editor 2015
Tricia King		01386 300819	

HPS Conservation Scheme co-ordinator for Worcestershire Group:-

Jenny Constant, 8 Bowling Green Road, Powick, Worcester WR2 4SD,
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HPS COFFEE MORNING – WEDNESDAY 19 JULY 2017

**Mabs Cottage, 8 Trotshill Lane East, Worcester
WR4 0HX**

We will have been at Mabs Cottage for 30 years on 1 June 2017. I wish I could say that over that period the garden has been developed to its full potential, but it is still very much a work in progress. The garden is just under half an acre and the soil is mostly heavy clay, so not the easiest to manage. It is basically a cottage style garden (a polite way of saying anything goes anywhere!), with a large vegetable garden at the back, which was totally overgrown when we first moved here, a very large natural pond at the front of the house, and a pergola leading to a large barbeque area that we inherited.

DIRECTIONS

From M5 Junction 6 – Follow signs for A4440. After 200m, take first exit on roundabout onto Parsonage Way. After 1000m, at top of the hill, take second exit on roundabout onto Plantation Drive. After 800m, take 5th turn on left onto Millwood Drive (Tesco store is at the far end of this road). After 300m, take first left onto Trotshill Lane East. After 700m, at top of hill at the bend carry **straight on across the lane**, after stopping to check for pedestrians, through an open gate (No. 8 on left hand gate post) onto a gravel drive. You cannot see the cottage from the road, only a three-car garage. The drive is about 100m long – stop before the pond at the end! Park on drive and grass verges.

Kathryn Elrick Smith – tel. 01905 616666

FIVE MINUTES WITH ... John Bryant

A life in the Army, serving around the world, came to an end more than 20 years ago for Worcestershire Hardy Plant Society member John Bryant. MICK DUNSTAN has been talking to him about lilies, Idi Amin and a question about the desert from the Queen...

Hello, John. Even in February your Stoulton garden looks interesting. Tell me a bit about it.

It doesn't really show itself off to its best at this time of year. It has structure but not a lot of colour. There are a lot of trees and shrubs though. It was my parents' house – they bought it in the late 50's. We took it on after my mother died and moved here finally in 1988. It's about half an acre and I started redeveloping it when we moved in. I don't think my mother, who was a very keen gardener, would recognise it now.

What are the main changes you've made?

The original garden at the back had been solid with damson trees. My father insisted on picking every single piece of fruit! There are just a few left now, certainly enough for our needs. I gave my mother a magnolia which is now a good size but the big, structural trees you see, Leslie and I have planted. There's a *Chitalpa tashkentensis* that we like a lot – Roy Lancaster said when he visited our garden that it was the largest he had seen in this country. There is also a *Metasequoia* round the back, which grew from a cutting I took at Pershore College. It's now 40ft high or more and will get bigger.

What was your link with Pershore College?

I used to go there to hear Bob Hares' monthly talk on what to do in your garden – it wasn't a formal course. Every time I went, there was something different. He'd have all these plants laid out on the table and told us all about them. At the end of the session, he'd ask if anyone wanted any of the bits and a lot of what's in the garden came from there. I went, not every month but regularly, for about 10 years. I learned a lot but I'm now at the stage where I'm starting to forget it...



Summer Colour at the Tynings

Talk me through the rest of the year.

There's a lot of colour in the garden. I grow a lot of lilies – about 100 plants and about 40-odd different varieties now - which start at the end of June with the martagons in the woodland area. The rest start in July – many of them I bought in the Lily Garden in Washington, which we visited once. They had vast, unbelievable fields of lilies. They're a fairly recent obsession of mine. I was a member of the RHS Lily group for many years. In the spring, there's colour from snowdrops, narcissi and hellebores.

It sounds like a lot of work, John.

I do have help from a Pershore-trained woman who comes in three hours a week but I'm in the garden myself most days from March to October. I'm not a big winter gardener but I have a polytunnel and I do propagate things. I'm out most days for a few hours and I do enjoy gardening. People say I have green fingers. I'm keen on a certain exoticism in plants. I like large, coloured leaves for example, and a variety of shapes, not just colour. There's also an element of trophyism in there somewhere as well, I'm sure. A lot of the trees here were quite difficult to find. There's a Wollemi pine – the one people say shared the earth with the dinosaurs. It'll be 80ft or more by the time it stops growing.

Any inherent problems with the garden?

We have had rabbits but we've wired around the fence – occasionally they still burrow. Our previous

dogs used to catch them but not our latest! They tended to eat the young lily shoots, which is not allowed. They had to go. One of the beauties of the garden is its position. We're virtually in a field here - fields as far as the eye can see. So there's that borrowed view along with the view to the church at the front of the house.

But Stoulton isn't your first garden?

Oh, no. My first horticultural experience was in Plymouth, in the Blitz. My mother had a prize plot of strawberries and I picked her a bunch of flowers from them. We all live and learn. We've had gardens around the world, including a sandy, blank plot in Dubai that we turned into a garden. It was sweet sand not salt sand. But it was very hot - you didn't go out from May to October unless you had to. It had *Bougainvillea*, *Lantana*, *Mimosa*, creeping grass and a big *Trachycarpus* from a friend's garden that we moved when he tarmacked his drive. We gave it a bucket of water every day – it rains about four times a year in Dubai. Twenty years later, our son went back and it had grown higher than the house. So, the green fingers worked again. We were once invited aboard Her Majesty's Yacht Britannia and the Queen asked how I made a garden in the desert. I think I said you needed a lot of water. I don't remember doing much gardening in Nigeria. I've served in a lot of places, usually for about two years at a time. In South America, I worked in the embassy as defence attaché in Montevideo. The Uruguayans were lovely people.

And any interests outside the garden?

I follow rugby at Worcester Warriors. I'm involved with the Royal British Legion in Pershore and Leslie and I am members of the Evesham branch of the Decorative and Fine Arts Society. I was in the Army for a total of 35 years, as Colonel for the last five. Before I got married, I did a bit of car rallying – my main event being the East African Safari. I did a lot of competitive shooting as well, with rifles, eventually winning the Queen's Medal at Bisley in 1975. I once shot a pistol in competition with the Ugandan president, Idi Amin, in an event called Ugandan Bisley. I was serving in the Kings' African Rifles in Kenya at the time. He thought he was going to win but he came second!

Any finally, John, what's your view of the Hardy Plant Society?

I've been a member more or less since the Worcestershire group was created in the 1990's. I think it's always ticked the right boxes. It's interesting, there are a lot of like-minded people – and meeting them and going on trips with them has been enjoyable. We're going on the Devon holiday this year. Our members are knowledgeable and you're always learning something. We have been opening our garden under the National Gardens Scheme for about 15 years. Initially we had Open Days but now we restrict visits to "By Appointment only".

Margery Fish, a Gardening 'Great'

The last garden to be visited on this year's garden tour is that at East Lambrook Manor, former home of Margery Fish. This country has produced many gardening legends with names now synonymous with a style of garden which they made popular. The name of Margery Fish will always be associated with the classic English Country Garden.

Like many of us, Margery Fish (née Townsend) developed an interest in gardening quite late in life. Born in London in 1892 she entered Fleet Street after attending sec-

retarial college. There, she worked for the next twenty-two years, most of which were spent employed by Associated Newspapers as secretary to a succession of Editors at the Daily Mail, the last of whom, Walter Fish, she married in 1933, three years before his retirement. For her work on a government mission to America in 1917 accompanying owner Lord Northcliffe she was awarded an MBE.

The purchase of East Lambrook Manor and relocation there from London in 1937 was prompted by the worsening situation in Europe and the threat of war. The couple's new home was a small 15th century manor



'Lambrook Gold' will be familiar. In 1963 she was awarded the Veitch Memorial Medal from the RHS.

Although the property has passed through a number of hands since Margery's death in 1969 and the garden itself almost faded in to obscurity, it has been sensitively restored by a series of owners, not least the present owners, Mike and Gail Werkmeister, who bought the property in 2008. Evolutionary changes inevitably took place. Some were born of necessity. The ditch, which had previously carried water, for example, dried up due to a local housing development and the moisture-loving plants there had to be replaced with more suitable ones. An outbreak of honey fungus, too, led to the loss of all the large trees in the woodland garden threatening the valuable collection of snowdrops and hellebores. In many areas the shrubs and trees had outgrown their allotted spaces and Margery's 'jungle effect' was beginning to take over in the borders; as in any garden the 'natural' look is remarkably labour-intensive. Despite all this, the garden has largely retained its character and remained true to its creator's philosophy. Margery Fish's legacy survives, not just in her garden but in her writings too, which include a series of books appearing between 1956 and 1970, many of which have been translated. It is through these achievements that her place in gardening history will be preserved.

(Photographs reproduced courtesy of the RHS Lindley Library.)

house on a two-acre site and it was there, although a complete newcomer to gardening, that Margery was to create what subsequently became a world-famous garden. She also became a prolific writer and the story of the building of the garden was recorded in her 1956 book *We Built a Garden*.

As in so many marriages, she and Walter did not see eye to eye on the subject; in fact, it would seem that theirs was not an easy marriage. His concept of a garden involved straight paths, manicured lawns and plenty of bedding plants. Hers was built on informality, with cottage-garden flowers and self-seeding native plants. She also wanted all-year interest from snowdrops to asters; he was looking for a blaze of summer glory.

Walter's death followed in 1947 after which she was able to pursue her ideas unhindered. She developed and managed the garden almost single-handed, working long hours and carrying out many of the hard-landscaping works herself. The gardens began opening for charity in the late 1950's drawing visitors from round the world and gaining many plaudits. She became a noted plantswoman and many plant varieties bear the name 'Lambrook'; *Polemonium* 'Lambrook Mauve', *Artemisia* 'Lambrook Silver' and *Euphorbia*

David Pollitt





Baby Voles in the compost heap

VOLE WARS

With memories of the Great Rabbit Wars passing into history, attention is now focussing on another scourge of the domestic garden. For many years we have periodically suffered mole damage which has been particularly apparent in the lawns. We are all familiar with those mounds of fine earth, which incidentally make good potting compost. These are connected underground by tunnels just beneath the surface. Ridges are formed and the grass turns yellow as the moles search among the roots for our precious earth worms. The ground becomes soft and sinks in when you tread on it. The damage can be extensive suggesting an army of moles is at work. In fact, it is probably a single animal that has wreaked the havoc as they are solitary creatures and do command large territories. A mature active mole was trapped some two months ago and no new damage has been seen since. But the aftermath of his tenancy, visible across large swathes of the lawn, may not have been his doing at all and he may have become the victim of a miscarriage of justice.

After researching the subject, the conclusion has been reached that the tunnels and holes that interlace the lawns like watercourses are the work of voles (*Microstis agrestis*). Like moles, voles tunnel just beneath the surface but do not throw up mounds of earth. (Where does the displaced soil

go?) But they do produce tell-tales holes, escape holes, one to two inches in diameter, at intervals of four to six inches. In the flower beds this activity may not be spotted. In the lawns and on our clay, however, the tunnels open up into wide cracks as the earth dries and contracts in the summer. The holes can become quite large cavities, all capable of leading to a twisted ankle. In appearance voles are not dissimilar to mice but have shorter tails and more rounded heads viewed in profile. They are active all year round and can produce 100 offspring a year. The life span is normally around 3 to



A perfect vole hole



... like watercourses

6 months. For years what we took to be mice, brought in by past generations of cats, were almost certainly voles. We are surrounded by mixed field hedges which provide a perfect habitat as voles do not like being in the open where they are exposed to predators; weed-suppressing membranes also offer excellent cover. The burrows in the compost bins will be their work too and if you whip the lid off quickly you will often see the back legs and tail of a vole disappearing down a hole.

Ginger is already planning an early retirement



Visually disarming, voles are far more damaging in the garden than moles. Their activity in the borders and vegetable plot can have more serious consequences. Voles like to nibble away at the roots of plants. On pulling up a plant that has suddenly died, you may find that the root has been eaten through at the base. With their incisors they will happily strip the bark off a plant or tree at ground level. Sown pea and bean seeds will disappear overnight. They have been a pest in the greenhouse for a number of years and we now protect our crocuses and tulip bulbs in pots using wire netting but outside in the garden such precautions are not really practical. Crocus, tulip and fritillaria bulbs have been soaked in paraffin, and original tonic water with quinine prior to planting but all to no avail.

The internet is replete with 'guaranteed' solutions to the problem. Some are quite entertaining reflecting the degree of exasperation to which the writer is driven. One gentleman resorted to an extreme measure for which he claims 100% success. It entails connecting a length of hose to the exhaust of your car and pumping exhaust fumes down the burrows. This is not recommended. Given the reproductive capability of voles, control and protection measures and repellents are not the answer. Extermination is unfortunately the only option. Poisons and traps are widely available but predation must be the favourite. As so often nature holds the answer, in this case in the form of birds of prey. Yet this is something over which the gardener has little control. We frequently have buzzards in the garden where a bird may be seen keeping a beady eye open before gliding to the ground to peck in the grass for a few moments prior to returning to its perch. We have never seen it catch a vole and it has even turned a blind eye to rabbits playing in the grass below. Enter *Felix domesticus*, in our case in the form of Ginger who adopted us a couple of years ago when he helped do battle with the rabbits. But Ginger, deaf and blind in one eye, is getting on in years and may have to be joined by a friend or two if the war is to be won.

David Pollitt

The Road to Chelsea

Steel-capped boots?

We're less than three months away now and things are hotting up. The early stages of planning were concerned with the two major issues – the plants, and the stand. As we get closer, we're gradually filling in the detail. There are major logistical factors – who loads and drives the vans for both the stand and the plants, what to do with the vans once unloaded (there's nowhere to park so they have to drive straight back), how many people for each job, and so on. The minor details include factors from what goes on the plant labels and list, to where people who are manning the stand can put their coats and bags.

Thankfully, everything is beginning to settle into place. The plants are growing well, tended by a regular rota of members; the stand has been built and tested (it works!). My responsibility is plant labelling – not the taxonomy, but physically getting the labels printed. Thanks to advice from the Kent group, we have a super little labelling machine which gives us professional-looking labels. Jan is writing the plant list, and if I can get to grips with the software, the labels can be printed directly from the list, hopefully avoiding transcription errors. Along with Linda and Jan, I shall also be helping arrange the plants on the stand on the Saturday and Sunday before the opening.

Accommodation has been arranged for those who need it, most of you will have seen the aprons



Rotating Table and Side Screens nearing completion

that Mick has bought to wear on the stand, leaflets are being collated, and details collected for security passes. Still to be done: John will be making two cabinets for the stand, to hold leaflets, information, aforementioned coats and bags etc., and I will have to make fitted covers to slip over them, as we did at Malvern.

Mick has done a great job with publicity, the high point so far being the article in the March issue of Cotswold Life. We're hoping some of his overtures to the BBC will also come to something. And the steel-capped boots? The Chelsea Health and Safety regulations require that anyone involved in set-up "up to and including Saturday 20th May" must wear high-vis jackets and steel-toe-capped boots. My first thought was "do they make them in size 3½?" Yes, they do!

Stella Sullivan

New Dahlias for Free by Robin Pearce

My earliest gardening recollections as a child were growing plants from seed and impatiently waiting for them to germinate, develop and produce a flower. I still find the process as exciting today, despite having grown hundreds of thousands of seedling plants on the nursery; every morning I still inspect the seed trays with anticipation. The idea of creating a brand-new plant from seed is even more exciting. Dahlias offer a great opportunity to produce a completely unique new plant as all garden dahlias are hybrids (other than the species of course) so they will produce offspring that are different to their parents. With most hardy plants the chances of producing a distinctive new plant are less than with dahlias.

At the Malvern Autumn Show a local grower, Gordon Russell from Stoke Prior, exhibited a vase

D. 'Ann Breckenfelder'



of three seedlings from the striking red and yellow collerette *Dahlia* 'Ann Breckenfelder'. He collected the seeds from a single seed head. One seedling looked very much like the parent while the others were a yellow self and a yellow and orange blend, each being very attractive flowers and well worth growing.

Edmund Brown of Cotswold Garden flowers collected seed from *Dahlia* 'Tally Ho' and the seedlings were planted in a long bed at the Offenham nursery. The result was an amazing array of 'Tally Ho' 'look-a-likes', all differing slightly in flower colour, foliage, height and form. He invited dahlia enthusiasts to select their favourites and these are now being grown on for further assessment and may be released in the future.

Dahlias will occasionally produce a sport. The flower usually differs from the parent in colour, and very occasionally in form. 'Tally Ho', with its single red flower, produced a fully double sport on the RHS Trial at Wisley Garden.

Dahlia seedlings



Sadly, the offspring have not been consistently double. If you are lucky enough to have a good sport you want to keep you will need to take a cutting from the branch producing the sport in order to secure the new plant.

Each year, I collect seed from my favourite dahlias in the hope of raising that very special new dahlia; so far, results have been most worthwhile. The best seedlings are chosen and propagated for the following year. My first consideration, when making my selections, is the flower. It must be well formed with an attractive colour and carried well on a strong stem.

By the second year, the plants will have grown allowing more space for me to evaluate the habit and foliage. My aim is to grow a dahlia worthy of entering the RHS Dahlia Trial and achieving the RHS 'Award of Garden Merit'. I live in hope!

I find it easier to collect seed from open-centred flowers as they tend to set seed more readily and they are much easier to hand pollinate, if you wish to make a deliberate cross. To collect the seed, allow the flower head to die and turn brown, cut the stems and hang up in a warm, airy place. Once the seed heads are completely dried, rub them between your fingers over a sheet of newspaper and the seeds will drop out. Store them until the Spring and sow in March or April, ideally in a heated propagator. The plants will produce their flowers in the summer. They may not all be winners, but it can be just as rewarding to have a plant you can call your own.



D. 'Tally Ho'



D. 'Tally Ho' double



D. 'Orangestad'

AHEAD OF MY TIME?

My attempts to be 'fashionable' sometimes bear fruit and sometimes not! However, I know which colours I like, and from (hopefully) honest comments from my friends and family those are the colours that suit me best. Consequently, every few years I am to be seen in the up-to-date colours, though I understand it is yellow this spring, which I won't be wearing! Roll on blues and lilacs, and apricot hues as well! Perhaps next year? But I should add that I am not really bothered, and a preponderance of blues and lilacs will remain in my wardrobe until the clothes wear out. I think it is rather a similar story in my choice of plants in my flowerbeds. I know what I like and so I grow them, regardless of the latest 'fashion'. Now I am rather pleased to be ahead of the game and I have learned via gardening magazines and flower shows etc. that I have been happily growing and nurturing for many years some of the latest, 'now-in-fashion' garden plants, namely dahlias.

This is really a short introduction to comments on my favourite dahlias which are very much in vogue at present – and rightly so.

Several I have had for many years. They 'moved house' with me from Surrey to Nottingham and

then to Worcestershire. Sadly I have lost some over the last few years here. Despite keeping them clean and dry (having been dusted with flowers of sulphur) and placed in dry compost, standing in a cool insulated greenhouse, some have succumbed and rotted over time. I have occasionally managed to overwinter tubers in the ground, but slugs, snails and over-zealous spring tidying when labels have gone missing makes lifting them in autumn the best if most labour-intensive way of keeping my collection from year to year. My mother used to give me a dahlia tuber instead of a chocolate

D. 'Purple Haze'





D. 'Sam Hopkins'



D. 'Thomas Edison'

Easter egg way back in the 1970's! One or two survive – goodness knows what they are called!

Some of the varieties with dark foliage have now become firm favourites, 'Purple Haze' being one of the nicest ones, I think. It is a chrysanthemum type. Deep-red-flowered ones are worth growing together – 'Chat Noir', 'Sam Hopkins', 'Thomas Edison' and 'Con Amore' make a good splash of colour together in front of the taller 'Bishop of Landaff'. He has been around for a long time and deserves his enduring popularity.

Despite not being fond of yellow in general, *D. 'Orangestad'* is a waterlily type and very reliable. It has become a firm friend. A very rewarding bright-red decorative type acquired from a fellow Hardy Planter some 15 years ago has been a real stalwart; she received it from Bob Brown. I am still searching for its name; I have a label somewhere ... 'Eveline' has a pretty white flower with purple edges and centre that become more pronounced as the flower opens. It is a member of the decorative group. It can grow up to 5ft in height which makes it useful near the back of the border. 'Purple *D. 'Eveline'*



Haze' in front of it is a pleasing combination! I am conscious that this short piece may end up purely as a list – but I must mention one or two more that are a bit different and seem unusual at first glance – the windmill group of which 'Honka Surprise' is one such. I bought it from Bob Brown some years ago. It always creates interest as does 'Blue Bayou' which is an anemone type, and so useful in the middle of the border since it only reaches about 2ft – in my soil anyway! I grew the species dahlia Mercki from seed and it survived several cold winters, but has sadly now disappeared from the flower bed where it had lived so happily.

Most of us Hardy Planters now have internet access and just 'Googling' the name of a particular dahlia will probably result in a good description and several photographs, together with suggestions of nurseries where that variety can be purchased. Failing that, nursery catalogues have beguiling photos too. At risk of advertising I do recommend Sarah Raven's selection in particular. I have bought several by mail order and they have arrived in excellent condition and have become strong plants.

I know some of you are dahlia lovers but hope even more of you will grow dahlias this coming year. Now is the time to look at catalogues and packets in garden centres too, since they don't need to be started in to growth under cover just yet. There are so many to choose from – maybe those members that are successful could list those that they have and in the autumn a list could be made. I am hoping to pass some tubers on to some of you in April/May.

Jackie Davies

COMPOST

Members this year ordered just short of 60 bags of the Fertile Fibre, peat-free compost, rated the best in Britain by *Gardening Which?* magazine.

A minimum order of 55 bags was required to qualify for the specially negotiated discount but the total was reached in little short of 30 minutes after the offer was announced at our January meeting.

The previous year, the first time our group tried the compost, it took nearly seven weeks before the total was reached. Follow-up questions to buyers last autumn found the vast majority enthusiastic about the quality of the compost.

Mick Dunstan



PLANT SALE

This year's Plant Sale will be held at Peopleton Village Hall on Saturday 10th June. Now a permanent fixture in a busy calendar, the sale has grown in size and importance since its inception in 2011. Its success and value to the Group can readily be measured in terms of sales which reached an impressive total of £860 last year, a great achievement and a credit to those members who invested so much time and effort in it. This additional contribution to our coffers has enabled us to reach out with confidence and book some outstanding speakers. But the value of the sale can be expressed not just in monetary terms. It helps the Society and our Group secure a place in the minds of the local gardening public and must be a contributory factor to our rising membership. Not only that, it helps bring us together with a sense of common purpose, giving something back to our Society, at the same time doing what we enjoy most.

The procedure will be similar to that of previous years. The Hall will open at 12 noon to receive members' donated plants. To avoid a last minute rush, all plants should be delivered no later than 1.30pm, and preferably much earlier. Free tea and coffee will be available to members from 12.30pm with facilities in the hall for you to eat a packed lunch. Please wear your HPS lapel badges throughout (available in the foyer as usual) so that we can raise the profile of the Hardy Plant Society to visitors.

Quality and presentation are the key to success and it is essential that plants are well presented

and weed-free in clean pots. (The team responsible for receiving and pricing the plants will have little time to tidy them up.) Plants should be clearly labelled either with their common name or botanical name if known and any additional information such as flower colour, flowering season, height and growing conditions etc. will help to sell them. Any plants left on the table at 4.00pm will be taken to the next meeting for the donated table. However, from an organisational point of view it would be preferable if you could please remove any of your unsold plants if you are able to stay until the close of the sale. Members in the past have been more than generous with their time and will, it is hoped, once again rally to support this event.

Contributions are not restricted just to hardy perennials; annuals, alpines, vegetable seedlings, fruit bushes, shrubs etc. will all be welcomed. If you have plants for the sale but cannot make it on the day, please bring them along to an earlier meeting or drop them off at one or more collection points. Helping hands will be needed on the day itself, both in setting up and after opening and Julia Dale will be looking for help with refreshments too. So do come along and enjoy the day whether as helper or customer.

David Pollitt

Scented Stars of the Garden in February

On a February morning when I walk around the garden I get great pleasure from the perfume of three winter flowering shrubs; *Sarcococca hookeriana*, *Daphne bhulua* 'Jacqueline Postill' and *Lonicera x purpusii* 'Winter Beauty'. They never fail to amaze me, bravely flowering and filling the air with scent so early in the year. I like to cut a few stems for a small vase in the house the perfume is gorgeous in a cool room for a few days. It is best to plant them close to a path and near to the house, as one does not wander far outside early in the year and this way you will get the most benefit from them.

Scent has always been important to me and certain flowers evoke memories; the smell of Hyacinths takes me back to the February when my youngest son was born; my mother in law had sent me a bowl of spring bulbs; I plant bowls of Hyacinths each Autumn and store them in the dark garage until January, so that I can bring them out to flower during February and March. The smell of Lilac reminds me of revising in May for examinations as a student. The lodging house where I rented a ground floor room had a lovely, purple Lilac outside my open window. I have planted two Lilacs in my garden one white and one purple and I cut some for the house in May each year.

I have attended Yoga classes for many years now following a back injury and one of the Mindfulness exercises we have learned is to concentrate on one sense exclusively for a few minutes. This exercise is well suited to gardeners with winter flowering shrubs in their gardens; so next time you wander through your garden, stop, stand still, close your eyes and sniff the air, concentrate on your sense of smell, you will be surprised what you have been missing.

Lyn Maile

Editor's footnote : the *Sarcococca* shown in close-up is in my own garden and is bearing both flowers and berries at the same time.

Daphne flower in close-up



Sarcococca in close-up



The Scented Sarcococca hookeriana



A FASCINATING STORY

We take the plants that grow in our gardens for granted. At a pinch we might recall where, when and how we acquired them. But we never question how they come to be with us, how they came to our shores from their native habitats many years ago. Nor why we can today enjoy such a rich proliferation of their cultivars.

Jane Kilpatrick has made a special study of the early plant hunters who at great personal risk brought back the seeds and plants from which those now familiar flowers and shrubs were propagated. Her special interest is China and in her talk in February she introduced us to four of the French missionaries who in the 19th century went out to convert the Chinese to Christianity and at the same time discovered and brought back many hitherto unknown plants.

The following extract is taken from Jane's latest book 'Fathers of Botany, the discovery of Chinese plants by European missionaries' and reproduced with the author's kind permission.

"... For the most part, though, Père David was able to explore the countryside surrounding Chengde without incident and among the plants he collected was one that is now recognised as a fine ornamental garden plant. He came across it in June 1864, while exploring a mountain slope, when he was attracted by clusters of vivid violet-rose plumes. As he got closer he realised that he was looking at the flower panicles of a splendid astilbe growing on the banks of a stream. The plant that Père David collected that day was initially described as *Astilbe chinensis* var. *davidii*, as if it was a naturally occurring form of *A. chinensis*, but it was not until the professional plant-hunter E. H. Wilson sent seed back to Veitch's nursery in South London in 1901 that living plants were first raised in the West. The Astilbe grown by Veitch was considered so superior to *A. chinensis* that Augustine Henry, an Irish plantsman very familiar with the Chinese flora, decided it must be a separate species and, when he described it in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* in 1902, he gave it the name *A. davidii* in honour of its discoverer. It is now known that *A. chinensis* is very variable and, as several different forms are found in the wild, botanists generally include them all under *A. chinensis*. Horticulturalists, though, continue to recognise Père David's plant as a distinct variety

because it is clump-forming like other astilbes, whereas *A. chinensis* is very vigorous with a running rootstock.

"One of those who saw Père David's new astilbe growing at Veitch's Coombe Wood nursery thought it 'certainly the most remarkable hardy plant lately introduced', and a group of these very tall astilbes in full flower is very beautiful. At the time, all known astilbes had white flowers and the German plantsman Georg Arends (1863 – 1952) was so intrigued to learn of a coloured astilbe that he came over to London specially to acquire the new introduction. He then used Père David's find, along with three other Asian species, to develop the ornamental range of *Astilbe x arendsii* hybrids that are so familiar to gardeners today. Indeed, we owe almost three-quarters of all astilbe cultivars to Arends, who derived them all from his original *A. chinensis* var. *davidii* plant. As hybrids developed from *Syringa villosa* showed, the introduction of new plants from China provided Western nurseryman with an opportunity to breed new ornamental plants and, in several cases, the new cultivars and hybrids have largely replaced the original introductions in our gardens...."

Fathers of Botany was first published in 2014 by Kew Publishing, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

***Astilbe x arendsii* cultivar in mid-summer at Sir Harold Hillier Garden**



Hardiness Ratings Put To The Test

Colin and I were among the group members who went to the Coffee Morning at Margaret Stone's garden, Brockamin, in 2014 on a damp, drizzle-y early summer morning. So for us, volunteering to help at her garden opening to celebrate the HPS 60th anniversary was a chance, we hoped, to see her garden on a bright, crisp winter day. Best-laid plans....

The car thermometer registered an unwilling 3°C, the sky was unrelentingly grey, the drizzle had a try at being sleet and the wind was chilly.

But we arrived to find 21 Staffordshire members ready to leave the shelter of their coach and come cheerfully in; soon after other visitors drifted along and at one point the (exposed) car park was over-full. The sight of snowdrops, aconites, *cyclamen coum* and *iris reticulata* for sale brought smiles and looks of concentration. A pot of iris 'Lady Beatrix Stanley', fully out, was a blue beacon for this activity.

We are not galanthophiles though we love our two ('only two!' I hear) types, most of them the ordinary single and a few double. The array in Margaret's garden kept all the visitors well-occupied, making comparisons between them, exclaiming over the size of 'Big Boy' and 'Imperati' and wondering whether, though definitely unusual, they liked 'Walrus'. Seeing so many close together meant comparisons were possible for those of us who don't usually have considered views on varieties of snowdrop, and gave the more knowledgeable a chance to add to their expertise. The 'yellow' snowdrops had never appealed, but seeing 'Wendy's Gold' in clumps near others might have done a conversion trick.



We are very envious of anyone who can grow *eranthis* as prolifically as Margaret; *cyclamen coum* added contrast and also interest in the lower part of the garden; even in the extreme grey the cornus branches glowed.

Warm drinks were clutched, and then went down even more gratefully than usual; delicious cake was consumed. By the end of the day there had been 75 visitors, including the party from Staffs, two from Cornwall Group (who had been at a snowdrop sale in Dorset the day before) and two from South Wales.

Margaret was throughout enthusiastic and happy to share her extensive knowledge with everyone who came. (I learnt from her blog on the national website that snowdrops don't open till it's 10°C.) She definitely has Hardiness Rating H4, possibly H5, while some of the rest of us might manage H3 but would prefer H2.

by Judith Doughty

G 'Warley Belles'



G. 'Walrus'



A TASTE OF THINGS TO COME

Five speakers have already been booked for the early part of our 2018 programme schedule.

Details of 2017 speakers are on our website but in January we will be listening to an illustrated talk by Paul Hervey-Brookes that explores the nature of garden spaces and ways to create a sense of place or feel, before moving into practical solutions to help make even the smallest garden feel larger. Paul, from Stroud, is a former Pershore College student who has worked at Cotswold Garden Flowers. He is now a garden and landscape designer – and RHS Trials judge - who has won awards at Chelsea and other national events.

February sees a visit from James Hitchmough, head of the Department of Landscape at Sheffield University. He has worked extensively with Nigel Dunnett from the same university, on a range of projects including the Olympic Park in East London. His topic will be **Perennials in the Urban Landscape** and aims to explore the idea of how to transfer the knowledge that home gardeners have of these plants into much more challenging urban environments. In March, **Glyn Jones**, the former head gardener at Hidcote and now head of gar-

Photo: Glyn Jones, our March speaker.

dens at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust will be joining us. During his 17 years at Hidcote, he helped restore missing features, improve standards of horticulture and established environmental standards. He had previously worked at Tintinhull House in Somerset, alongside designer Penelope Hobhouse.

Since February, 2016, he's been head of gardens at the **Shakespeare Birthplace Trust**. Today's talk is on the gardens themselves, which extend to 50 acres at the five Shakespeare family homes - and which are tended by a team of nine gardeners, supported by an apprentice and 18 volunteers. They welcome more than 800,000 visitors a year.

Heather Godard-Key from the family business that is Fibrex Nurseries near Stratford will be telling us about **Ferns** in April, while May sees advice on planting in containers from Harriet Rycroft, ex-head gardener at Wichford Pottery. She says gardening is her focus but there are occasional excursions into natural history, rural matters, travel and art! She has a blog at harrietrycroft.com. Her topic is **Summer Splendours**, which looks at planning and planting exciting summer displays.

Mick Dunstan



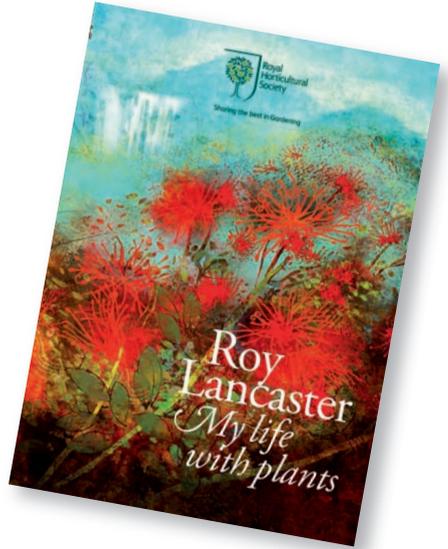
CELEBRITY LECTURE DAY UP-DATE

Exactly 100 tickets were sold for our Celebrity Lecture Day during the first 50 days of being on sale.

Just under 60 have been bought by our own members, their families and friends – and the rest by non-Worcester members. The advert for the day, which appeared in the national Hardy Plant Society newsletter in early February, caused a surge in applications. There are a maximum 180 seats available, but it could be a little crowded at that level of attendance.

Around six volunteers from the Worcester group are needed to help things run smoothly on the day. Please contact Mick Dunstan as soon as possible if you can help direct cars as they arrive, help prepare seating and plant sales areas and tidy up afterwards.

Three speakers are booked – first up is Devon nurseryman Julian Sutton, speaking at 10.45am. His topic is **How Flowers Came To Be**, which he is



writing specially for our event. His talk will look at the nature of flowers, their forms, colours and even timings. It will include a series of biological stories about the evolution of floral diversity – and all illustrated by garden-worthy plants.

Next up is Derry Watkins, from Special Plants in Wiltshire, who will speak after lunch on the subject of **New Plant Introductions from Around the World**. And the day ends with HPS president Roy Lancaster, who will talk about his new autobiography, **My Life With Plants**, published in March.

On the day, there will be a short talk by master composer Jeremy Thomas, who will have a stand to dispense information on how to make the best compost.

Derry and Julian will be selling plants from their nurseries in the Frank Parkinson Centre from 9.45am to the start of the first lecture, and again during lunch and afternoon breaks. Margaret Stone, from our Worcester Group, and Josh Egan-Wyer, from the plant shop at Pershore College, will be selling plants too. John McGhee will also have his plant stakes on sale.

Mick Dunstan

NEW COLOUR BREAKS FOR RETICULATA IRISES

I. 'Eyecatcher'



A few years ago, at a committee meeting of the West and Midlands Iris Group, our host placed some most unusually coloured reticulata irises, in full flower, in her sitting room for us to admire. Being a botanical artist she was planning to paint them. I had previously heard of Canadian plant breeder Alan McMurtrie, and these were some of his newly introduced hybrids acquired at the RHS Spring Show at the Horticultural Halls where they had been shown by Alan himself on Jacques Amand's stand. I was immediately smitten by the lovely colours and blends, so unusual beside the blues and mauves we are used to, the yellow *I. danfordiae* and the popular Katherine Hodgkin. Alan had been plant hunting in Turkey some 30 years ago and brought back a diploid, *I. danfordiae* which he crossed with *I. sophensis*. On a subse-



I. 'Mars Landing'



I. 'Sunshine'

quent expedition, again to Turkey, he acquired a blue *reticulata* specimen. Over the intervening years, through various controlled crosses and back-crosses, he succeeded in creating the colours we see today. Working together with the Dutch he has managed to build up sufficient quantities to offer them on the market. I have to confess that the science of all this is beyond me but suffice it to say that these hybrids are now available and they are simply dazzling.

I ordered several varieties last year and have been enjoying the rewards over the last few weeks. My small selection includes *I. 'Splish'*

I. 'Sea Breeze'



Splash' which is a mixture of green, yellow, creamy white and purple, *I. 'Mars Landing'*, a new colour break with brown standards and bright yellow, brown-speckled falls, *I. 'Sea Breeze'*, bright blue, white and yellow, *I. 'Eyecatcher'*, another blue, yellow and white but having deeper colours and *I. 'Sunshine'* with bright-yellow flowers

The bulbs were planted in clay pots and pans using a mix of John Innes No. 2, fine grit and our own leaf mould, topped off with horticultural grit. They were initially placed in a cool greenhouse until the buds appeared when they were moved out to a sheltered spot near the house. Once in flower they were brought in to the porch where the flowers could be seen and admired.

Some varieties proved to be more robust than others and one or two were rather short. My overall favourite is *I. 'Eyecatcher'* which has good substance, large flowers and is quite tall. It has also stood up well to everything the weather has thrown at it and has an extended blooming time. Another beauty is *I. 'Mars Landing'*. Though not as robust as 'Eyecatcher' and very small, the colouring is gorgeous. *I. 'Sunshine'* can also be recommended. I am told that all varieties bulk up well.

For my part, I am well and truly hooked and will definitely buy more this autumn.

Judith Pollitt

www.reticulatas.com (Alan McMurtrie's web site)
Retailer: Jacques Amand

DATA PROTECTION NOTICE

Under the Data Protection Act you should know that your name, address, e-mail address and telephone number are held as paper records and/or on a computer file for administrative purposes. No personal information will be disclosed to any organisation or person outside the Group without the member's permission, except to compare data with that held by the Hardy Plant Society National Administrator. If you are concerned about the methods used to store your data please contact the Secretary, **Lyn Maile**.

