



*The  
Irish Garden Plant Society*



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Below Garinish Island courtesy of Frances Collins. Report on page 16



Above An Cala courtesy of Berkeley and Mary Farr. Report on page 30  
Cover photo: *Hebe* 'Headfortii' courtesy of Carmel Duignan



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**Thank you to the many members who have taken the time to contribute to this newsletter and apologies to those who sent photographs that were not included because of pressure of space.**

**Mary**

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

**Copy date for the January 2014 Newsletter is December 2nd.**



## *Trees - old and new on the Belfield Campus by Mary Forrest*

The UCD 133 ha campus was formed from the 1940's onwards from a number of estates, each with a period house, a surrounding garden and perimeter woodland. The grounds and woodland of these estates were incorporated into the campus master plan which was developed by the Polish architect, Andrzej Wejchert in the 1960's. What with the existing trees and those planted since the development of the campus, there are some venerable old trees and a representative collection of present day landscape trees and shrubs.



*Ilex x altaclerensis* 'Hodginsii'

The campus derives its name from Belfield House, which was built in 1801. In what would have been the front garden, there are two large examples of Monterey Cypress, *Cupressus macrocarpa* and *C. macrocarpa* 'Aurea', and Atlas Cedar, *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca'. More commonly seen as a dwarf conifer, *Thuja orientalis* with distinctive 'hooked' cones and sprays of foliage has become a good specimen. Of particular interest to IGPS members are two very fine large specimens of *Ilex x altaclerensis* 'Hodginsii'. This holly was raised by the Hodgins nursery at Dunganstown, Co. Wicklow in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In stunning flower in June 2013, it could be called a flowering shrub to rival other evergreen shrubs such as Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) in flower. Two fine Swamp Cypress *Metasequoia glyptostoboides* planted in the 1970's demonstrate the tall upright columnar habit of this deciduous conifer. In September 2010 a Loblolly Pine, *Pinus taeda* was planted by the former US President Bill Clinton. The tree is native to Arkansas, his home state.

### **Ardmore House**

Conifers were fashionable with nineteenth century garden owners. A small pinetum adjoins Ardmore House, which was built in 1871. Conifers include Giant Redwood *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, Lawson Cypress *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, Deodar Cedar *Cedrus deodara* and a large maturing clump of Western Red Cedar *Thuja plicata* planted in the 1970's.

On the lake side of Ardmore House is a small memorial garden known as Cluanóg. The circular outline of the garden is emphasised by a uniform planting of Dawyck Beech, *Fagus sylvatica* 'Dawyck'.

One of the most picturesque trees on campus is a Horse Chestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, a large senescent with wide spreading lower branches, easing themselves gently towards the ground. This tree is located beside the pond at Woodview House, where several replacement trees have been planted in the last years. By Woodview House mature specimens of *Fraxinus excelsior* 'Pendula' and *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata' date to a time in the late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> century when such trees were the trees of choice of contemporary garden owners. In their foreground is a woodland style planting of Mountain Ash, *Sorbus aucuparia*.

Another area of tree interest on the campus is the Arboretum which is located by the Creche on the Roebuck Road side of campus. Though it is unclear when or by whom the trees were planted, large specimens of *Cupressus macrocarpa*, *Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Pendula', *Araucaria araucana*, *Cedrus deodara*, and *Acer cappadocicum* remain. To one side of the Creche a massive old Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*, with huge limbs and little new growth falls into the category of a veteran tree. In the 1970s a representative collection of conifers

was planted by the Dept. of Forestry augmenting the existing arboretum. The more recently planted trees include *Abies delavayi*, *Picea sitchensis*, *Sequoia sempervirens*, *Juniperus communis*, *Picea sitchensis*, *Cupressus glabra*, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, *Sequoiadendron giganteum* and *Cryptomeria japonica*.

Many ornamental medium sized trees were also planted on the campus. Of interest for the spring flowering cherries, *Prunus x yedoensis* by the Computer Centre, *Prunus serrulata*, 'Tai Haku' by the Restaurant, *Prunus* 'Kanzan' pink flowered beside the Library and a later pink flowered *Prunus* 'Hizakura' by the bank. The Cherries are followed in flower by Whitebeam, *Sorbus aria* and Mountain Ash, *Sorbus aucuparia*. Of particular interest for autumn are trees of *Crataegus x prunifolia*, Cockspur Thorn, a much under used amenity tree which are planted on the ring road by the church. Three trees of Weeping Pear, *Pyrus salicifolia* 'Pendula' planted on the lawn between the lake and the O'Reilly Hall are striking from a distance.

Planting of trees continues on campus. A Millennium planting of Oak, *Quercus robur* has become a distinctive and recognisable avenue linking existing woodland boundary planting by the Stillorgan Road with the more recent Health Sciences buildings. In recent years large parts of the boundary woodland have been augmented with native woodland trees, such as Birch, Alder, Oak, Yew, Hazel and Willow.

Species, new to landscape schemes in this country, continue to be planted on the campus and this past spring, Judas Trees, *Cercis siliquastrum*, with distinctive pink pea-like flowers were planted by the Agriculture and Food Science Building.

For information on woodland walks on the UCD campus see [www.ucd.ie/gathering](http://www.ucd.ie/gathering)

## *Worth a Read*

Moorea was first published by the IGPS in 1982. 15 volumes have been printed to date.

Paddy Tobin has downloaded all 15 volumes to the IGPS website:

**<http://www.irishgardenplantsociety.com>**



# *Rational Irrationality*

## *by John Joe Costin*

Planning guidelines on housing densities in developments influence the type of plants we grow in our gardens. In order to use land resources efficiently, densities increased from 4 units/acre in the 1940's to 8 units in the 1960's. By 2000, Fingal County planning standard was 26 units per acre in suburban Dublin sites. Compliance necessitated radical layout changes that included the elimination of front gardens, increased balcony space for outdoor living and gardening, reduced street width, where access is limited to utilities and emergency vehicles, and street side parking being replaced by remote parking. Each increase in density imposed a step change in plant type demand. It caused the demise of previously popular lines and created a market for small, compact evergreens that required no maintenance. Such densities were the norm in Scotland and England in 1979 when our nursery started exporting. Garden Centres' plant purchasing specification was succinct, anything interesting whose ultimate size fitted in a 60cm cube. We had a market for *Carex* cvs, *Convolvulus cneorum*, *Danae racemosa*, *Euonymus fortunei* cvs, *Fascicularia bicolor*, *Halimocistus sahucii*, *Helianthemum* cvs, *Helleborus orientalis*, *Libertia*, *Liriope*, *Ophiopogon*, *Ozothamnus ledifolius*, *Santolina virens* and *Uncinia* cvs. Watson's of Killiney 1966 nursery catalogue registers the change. It lists only two of the above, *Convolvulus* and *Helianthemum*. There would be no space in minuscule gardens for their *Buddleja*, *Deutzia*, *Diervilla*, *Forsythia*, *Kerria*, *Ligustrum*, *Lonicera*, *Rhus*, *Ribes*, *Sambucus*, *Syringa* and *Weigela*. It was the death knell for woody flowering shrubs that required annual heavy pruning.

As a student I spent Saturdays in Dublin in 1963, cycling around working class housing estates looking for nice front gardens to photograph. It was remarkable how little there was to enthuse over. How so many grew vegetables, (potatoes and cabbages predominantly), and how few had lawns. The ornamentals on view were either a *Ribes* or *Forsythia*. Later I would understand why. Nothing was bought. Choice was confined to a few shrubs that rooted from slips, broken off a plant in a friend's garden and pushed into the ground to root in situ in late autumn. We built 14,000 houses in 1968. We joined the European Common Market in 1971 and the economy grew on the back of greatly increased agricultural prices. Irish builders in the UK returned sensing opportunities.

It was a hardscrabble for them, bankers were cautious and mortgage applications were accepted only from the prudent, who could show a consistent savings record over the previous 2 years. Builders had restricted views on what their obligations were in the construction of housing estates. They were adamant that grassing open spaces and roadside verges was not their responsibility and vehemently denied that planting roadside trees had anything to do with them.

The post honeymoon reality facing newlyweds in the 70's was for the radiant bride to get down on her hands and knees and scrub the floor boards of their new home, three or more times, to remove the encrusted cement. Meanwhile, the new man of the house was outside manfully excavating the builder's buried treasure from front and back gardens and roadside verges and sharing the news of his archaeological finds with his equally surprised new neighbour. The builder exonerated himself from any sense of deviousness but was pleased with an efficiency that saved removal and disposal costs of waste. It was the necessity, to communally deal with the landscaping of the open space that gave impetus to the formation of Residents Associations.

Where trees were specified, cost consciousness made builders recidivous. 'Trees of character,' gnarled specimens of birch and mountain ash, falsely imputed with an extra hardiness, attributed to the impoverished environment in which they grew, were liberated from a bog 'down home' or from an exposed hillside and were transplanted to adorn their development in a Dublin suburb. When challenged, they engaged in sophistry, accusing officials on their lack of appreciation of 'natural beauty'. Likewise, where semi mature trees were specified, specimens (mainly ash and birch) were dug by contractors from woodlands with a tree spade. The failure rate was up to 70%. Their coarse roots lacked the finer fibrous root system developed by regular transplanting when such trees are grown as a crop in a nursery.

The gestation period for builders to accept that grounds formed an integral part of a development and that it was their responsibility to landscape them, was a long one. Bye elections were decided on such vexations with builders in suburban Dublin in 1970's. This abdication of responsibility was exacerbated by the absence of a Parks and Landscape Authority in all counties. Co. Dublin landscape policy was under the control of engineers in their very large Roads Department, where their concerns were limited mainly to the safety aspects of roadside tree plantings.



In 1971 Dublin created the first County Council Parks Department in the Republic. This put landscape on a par with other elements in the planning process. They educated builders by providing specifications for street trees and green spaces. They imposed their authority from the outset and brought obstreperous developers to heel, by refusing to take in charge estates that had not been landscaped to their specification. The problems were tackled diligently and systematically. Standards were established, explained and enforced. For instance, they insisted that an open space had to be of a particular size, in an open and accessible central location. This stopped the abuse of resident's trust, whereby the aggregation of bits and pieces of land that could not be built on would satisfy the open space criteria.

When builders accepted that trees had to be planted, their first choice was *Prunus* 'Kanzan', the best-selling tree in Ireland in the 1970's. Its 9/10 day flower festival was sufficient to sate eyes and make minds blind to its deficiencies for the remaining 355 days of the year. Eventually, reality dawned, its poor landscape values were recognised and it fell out of favour. Builders developed an animation for fastigate specimens. It seemed that their pencil slim habit symbolised their own hoped for rocket like growth trajectory! Their earliest favourite was *Populus nigra* 'Italica', enthralled by confirmed growth rates of up to 2m per year. Poplars are propagated from hardwood cuttings, stuck outdoor in winter and make startling growth in one season, so impressive sizes could be procured for a nominal cost. It was the ideal tree for profit minded nurserymen and budget conscious builders who wanted maximum impact at minimum cost. Eventually, local authorities banned their planting in Industrial and Residential Developments because their water seeking roots travelled and blocked drains at 60m from where a tree grew. Poplars look ravishing in the landscape where they shimmer in the Mediterranean light, heat and still air and rich alluvial soils of the Po valley. In Ireland, the Lombardy poplar offers little landscape value. Out of its comfort zone, it looks a wretched landscape refugee, leafing out in late May due to lack of heat and is then defoliated by strong winds by the end of August or early September.

Venalties were perpetuated where there was weakness in supervisory knowledge. Tailored tree selections were specified, with compact or upright growth habits, suited to a streetscape, or neat enough, not to overwhelm a small green space or a local park. A good nursery tree worker can differentiate *Sorbus aucuparia* cultivars by their winter buds. Profitable substitutions of cheaper seed raised species for costlier budded cultivars occurred where neither the specifiers, supervisors nor health inspectors had a matching knowledge to verify and keep the landscape contractor, nursery or the builder honest.

John Boland, the Minister for the Environment in 1975, noting the success of Dublin County's Park Department, seconded its Director to his Department for an 18 month period to draft a blueprint with the objective to create a Parks Department in each local authority. Oil prices quadrupled in 1972, the result of the formation of an Arab oil cartel and the scarcity of money that ensued caused mortgage interest rates to increase to 18%. It put the country into recession. In the election of 1977 Fianna Fáil won a landslide majority based on three promises: abolish car tax and rates on private property and create 22,000 public sector jobs to solve the unemployment problem. The spending power of the newly employed, it was claimed, would kick start the economy. It did not, and the country by 1981 had a balance of payment deficit on a scale akin to our present crisis. How we spend our money is not economics, but a behavioural science. Those newly employed choose to pay debts and to save. They did not spend. John Boland's blueprint was not enacted and we still await the creation of a Parks or Landscape Authority in most of our counties. The absence of this expertise, contributed to the landscape excesses perpetrated in many counties during the Celtic Tiger years.

The 80's were awful. We had three governments in 1982. Austerity programmes were postponed and avoided. Finally, the necessary deep cuts were made in '87 and devaluation in 1992 triggered a recovery. The Celtic Tiger emerged with the change of currency to the Euro, and with it came an unlimited supply of money at very low interest rates. Builders' backgrounds are remarkably similar. They are predominantly the sons of small farmers from the border, midland and western areas, the so called 'BMW' counties. They learned a trade in the vocational school, served an apprenticeship in the building industry, became subcontractors and the ambitious aspired to be builders. They shared similar interests and values, and certain symbols marked stages in their progress. The estate car, the Hi-ace Van, the Toyota Land Cruiser, the large car, and the top of the range car with chauffeur. Some acquired the helicopter within 10 years. Swankiness was a mansion overlooking paddocks, an avenue, copper beech hedging, lots of topiary spires and horses in training. It was just a change of symbols that signalled success, a previous generation of emigrants, hired fur coats to wear home for the annual holidays. In their midst were some very bright men, self-educated by consultant reports on best practice that they had commissioned to support their development application through the planning process. Some possessed a rare 3 dimensional intelligence that could correct errors in their architect's drawings of a 20 storey building. From their milieu of cattle jobbers and horse tanglers, they were reared on the art of the deal, a skill not taught in college, but crucial for a builder.

By the 1990's developers had an attitudinal change. It had taken 20 years to accept that houses sold quicker if they had lawns. They grassed fronts initially and later all spaces. They observed a sales benefit and saw a price increase potential in the previously resented imposed landscape standards. They employed designers to embellish and add image. By the mid 90's they wanted instant landscapes, predominantly evergreens, in the largest sizes available to create an immediate impact at the entrance to their development and around each show house type. A plant's long term performance or survival was of little concern. These were short term installations especially if the development sold off the plans. Attuned nurseries styled themselves as 'Show House' supply specialists and landscape contractors promoted their specialist 'Show House' design skills. The Show House was a new garden style used as a marketing device to demonstrate potential. It did not form a part of any sales offer, but it stimulated the imagination of would be buyers and aroused interest. It suggested that 'the instant' was now a reality and that the long wait for privacy no longer had to be endured. There might be three or more show gardens in a development, one for each house type built.

**A Landscape Budget might be:**

Entrance	€125,000
Top Executive	€ 95,000
Gay couple	€ 95,000
Middle executive	€ 47,500
Verges and Open spaces	<u>€137,500</u>
	€500,000

In an estate of 100 houses this added an extra cost of €5,000 per house. Where the public reaction was positive, the developer could and did immediately raise the average price of the house by €50,000 or more. Builders placed great store on evergreens to give a furnished look, particularly in the colder and bleaker spring months. The symbol of Tuscany, *Cupressus sempervirens* was imported in impressive numbers in the largest sizes. These were planted at strategic locations as modern round towers within developments. Its growth habit is maintained on a Mediterranean diet of low humidity. In our cold sauna climate its tautness is eventually undone by high humidity and battered into disfigurement by strong winds to which they are unaccustomed. Elegant 5m spires of *Magnolia grandiflora* were placed and stood sentinel like by front doors. Splendid specimens of *Phormium tenax* cultivars, grown in 250L pots were planted in inland sites, where they were vulnerable to the first severe frost. Enormous cubes of the wonderful foliage of *Camellia japonica* cultivars hidden by a profusion of flowers were planted and admired. In the absence of Mediterranean levels of heat, they would seldom flower again.

The market for the instant became insatiable, driven by the availability of specimens in the largest sizes, aided by Irish nurseries who suspended their reservations about plan hardiness. Lazy assumptions were made based on leaf similarities. Gardeners who wanted to achieve the classic effect of a trimmed box hedge, no longer needed the patience of Job or the self-denial discipline of an ascetic monk. *Ligustrum delavayanum* resembles a dark leaved *Buxus*. They were imported as attractive, topiary and in 'instant hedge' sizes at affordable prices. Despite Forrest, (the plant collector) naming *Ligustrum delavayanum* as one of the top 12 plants he introduced, yet, Forrest (the enumerator) lists it in only 2 Heritage Gardens. Why? It is easy to propagate from cuttings, so despite its desirability, its scarcity in Irish gardens is attributed to its lack of hardiness. Bean 8<sup>th</sup> edition, 1979, records it growing as a beautiful hedge at Headford (Kells Co.Meath) but Forrest's survey of that garden in 1983 does not record it. Perhaps the hard winter of 1982 eliminated it.

*Euonymus fortunei* cultivars thriving on neglect in out of the way places, commended itself to garden owners. Its resilient toughness was imputed to *E.japonicus* which is a superb, unblemishable, salt tolerant seashore or cliff top plant. It is also widely marketed as a shade and cold tolerant evergreen house plant. It was procurable in a wide range of seductively attractive sculptural forms that chimed with the projected new lifestyle. Those planting it in cold places were blithely unaware that it would expire in the first severe frost. Those who projected themselves to be at the leading edge of plant selection, embraced climate change with a conviction that suggested that Clones now sat on the Cote d'Azur. They specified and planted magnificent specimens of *Bougainvillea* in full flower, in a range of primary colours trained on elaborate supports and of *Trachelospermum jasminoides* presented as a perfumed sheet of white, supported on large rectangular trellis frames as well as various species of *Wisteria* that do not perform here, draped in 60cm flower chandeliers already tall enough to reach the house gutters. Likewise, we wondered why we had been denied the distinctive September feast of glorious *Hibiscus syriacus* flowers. They arrived burdened with buds and were fated to flower again only after heat wave summers. *Cercis canadensis* and *Cornus florida* cultivars initially flowered profusely, primed on the heat of the Mediterranean sun. They too would seldom again receive sufficient heat to set flower buds. “Your own **lemon fruit** picked off your own lemon tree, growing in your own conservatory” was the new exclusivity of those who grew Citrus fruits.

High priests invented their indispensability in ancient Egypt, by convincing the populace, that it was only they who were equipped by education and class, to talk to the gods and interpret their wishes. They grew rich and omnipotent on this wheeze.

They unfailingly reappear at different times, in different places, at moments of opportunity. Show House garden design reached its apotheosis when the beautifully coiffured, perfumed, bejewelled, in country couture Amanda, the interior designer, arrived in a 4 W.D soft off roader that was unreliable if it went into the soft. She changed the concept of the design from landscape to lifestyle. She spoke in the ethereal and introduced a new vocabulary. She perceived “potential in extending her interior design concepts to the exterior, harmonising the whole to synergise and release this duality potential to the owner occupier”. It was indecipherable to nurserymen’s ears, but she had customers. This Cuckoo displaced Andy, the honest toiling landscaper in dungarees with wellingtons and van, earthed in concerns about the limitations imposed by soil and site.

She understood lifestyle. Leading Garden Centres reported annual sales of garden furniture in excess of €1 million. Her lack of science was not a handicap, the lady had élan. Nurserymen's quest for botanical accuracy was now redundant and they were perplexed to receive inquiries for green material, specified in a novel language of different shapes and sizes and required in particular textures and tones. 'Materials' had to be contemporary and complementary. Her clients, she explained desired a stylish, smart and sculptured look. The 'green material' would be placed under her direction, to complement modern garden furniture, stone, smoke, candles and scent she had sourced elsewhere. Clients commanded! A knowledgeable landscape architect was dismissed for incompetence, when she advised a moneyed dot.com client that bamboos grow and that she could not stop them, as he demanded. Others were dismissed, when they advised that their lush house plant style specifications would not survive on a roof top garden where seaside plants are better suited to such large windswept spaces. *Amelanchier*, native to damp woodland in North America was recommended for coastal gardens.

Corrective low temperatures in 2010 and 2011 purged our gardens of the aggregated evidence of practices based on bad science that were preached and disseminated over the previous 15 years as consumerism. These excisions were cathartic and should help to restore the primacy of science to garden practice. Gardening is applied ecology, a science that requires knowledge of the soils, of climate and of the habitats of plants, we would wish to grow. Art embellishes how a garden looks, but it will not make a garden grow. The absence of art does not diminish the solitary pleasure of a knowledgeable plantsman who induces an Alpine rarity to reveal its exquisite flowers in our alien damp climate. His achievement comes from a precise understanding that enables him to recreate the habitant requirements of a garden gem.

Amanda's arrangements based on good design principles but bad science gave us preposterous gardening. Plants of desert origin like *Agave americana* 'Variegata', *Aloe vera* and *Yucca*'s selected for their wonderful architectural forms were planted in urns where they were destined to rot in our damp climate. They can withstand the severe low temperature of desert nights but not the gentle attrition of our fog and damp. The lovely *Cycas revoluta*, has historical cachet. It was admired for its neat architectural distinctiveness, was embraced and planted without ever inquiring that its home place was subtropical southern Japan, where it might occasionally experience a light frost. **Apricots and peaches** were advertised as fruits to grow on your patio. A complaint on misrepresentation to the National Consumers Agency elicited indifference. Pomegranate juice enjoyed a temporary elevation as the new elixir of life. *Punica granatum* also known as **Punic Apple** was the symbol of Carthage. A visit to Hannibal's site in present day Tunisia would dampen forecasts of the possibility of it producing its Poinsettia red flowers or fruit in Ireland.

Likewise, you may dine under the magnificent bell flowers of *Brugmansia* (*Datura*) in Marbella but are less likely to do so on a patio in Malahide. Garden Centres too affirmed the presence of a Mediterranean climate. Specimen *Acacia dealbata*, irresistible in full bloom, were sold for a 'reasonable €600', planted in a midland garden and died. I offered bereavement counselling to another, who paid €1375 for a multi stemmed *Cordyline australis*, planted in an inland garden to celebrate her 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The garden centre assured her 'it would do fine in her place'!

*Agapanthus umbellatus* standing 1.5m tall in a 10L pot in full flower showing its large flowers in early July is an irresistible find. It is the species that Mediterranean nurserymen grow. It is what will take your breath away, if you see the astonishing outdoor Blue Room they create in Oporto Botanical Gardens when they start to flower in June. Stately homes grew it too in tubs on their terraces. There was nothing to compete with its magnificent flower display. They also knew, it was not frost hardy and needed to be cosseted in winter. They have grown it that way for the last 90 years. Plant breeders crossed it with smaller flowered, hardier evergreen species. These are the parents to the much hardier *A.* Headbourne hybrids. The hardiness of the latter was imputed to *A. umbellatus*. Despite these known facts, it **was** planted indiscriminately in large numbers. Wholesaler losses resulted and the designers were mystified as to why.

The olive has the longevity of a yew. You can see 2000 year old trees grow in the dry air and soils in Gethsemane, a garden, synonymous with suffering.

It is the easiest of trees to transplant in the largest sizes and we imported the oldest. Our garden artists enthralled by its sculptured gnarledness and showing no inquisitiveness about its habitat needs, planted it in our damp climate, where it quickly suffocated. Bloom's adjudicators too, asserted the primacy of art over science in Irish Landscape design practice, when they awarded 'best in show' to an exquisite Olive Grove garden. 60,000 impressionable visitors would not have been left wondering was this really possible, if the adjudicators added a disclaimer "**Lovely in Florence but not for Roscommon**". In the breathless hoopla of television and press there was no dissenting voice.

The science was known and is documented in the botanical inventories of our 30 Heritage Gardens. These gardens were planted by the most adventurous of plant collectors and are located in the widest range of sites, varying from the benign subtropical to the coldest in the midlands and across 8 soil types. Yet, in their entire inventory, none of our greatest list *Agave*, *Aloe*, *Bougainvillea*, *Citrus*, or *Cycas* only two list *Cercis canadensis*, *Ligustrum delavayanum*, *Olea* and *Punica*. If they could be grown, they would be in these gardens. In 2005 we built 90,000 homes but by 2012, the number built was 8,600 homes. The weather and the collapsed economy undid what needed to be undone. It exposed the hubris and revealed the lies of lazy consumerism, enabled by unscientific commentary.

**Hyun Song Shin of Princeton University** explained that the mortgage and banking madness of 2008 as '**Rational Irrationality**'. In plain language, behaviour which at the individual level is perfectly reasonable, but which when aggregated in the market place produces calamity. Essentially, those that were not in felt they were compelled to get in, as competitors could not forego the growth and profit that their opposites were enjoying. What emerges is that everyone had to play to the same tune. What was not understood is that sensible rational individual choices added up to collective disaster. The evidence supports those who hold a lurking suspicion that morality is no more than a veneer anyway that masks self-interests of the rawest and most unenlightened kind.

The demise of the Kildare Trade Show after 23 years could be foretold in 2008 when 11 leading wholesale producers, could with the change of a name plate, assume the identify of their continental supplier. They had willingly forfeited the certainties of their own production identity to mass display specimens from the Mediterranean. Why go to Punchestown when you could see more in Pistoia, in guaranteed sunshine. Mass commercial suicide is the ultimate rational irrationality.



# *Annual General Meeting 2013*

Kenmare in the county of Kerry was the beautiful setting for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting held on the 11<sup>th</sup> May this year so it was no surprise that 56 members along with a number of guests attended the formal meeting and the subsequent garden visits, excellently organised by Martin Edwardes.

## **Chairman's Report**

Acknowledging that there had been a bumpy few years post-recession, Paddy Tobin gave an upbeat assessment of affairs including a recovery in membership numbers resulting in increased subscription income, an up-to-date membership database, the introduction of Facebook and Twitter, and a revamped website which had recently gone live. The work by the editorial team of Anne James, Mary Forest and Mary Davies would result in the publication of our journal, *Moorea*, before the end of the year. Meanwhile under the editorship of Mary Rowe the Newsletter continued to perform an essential function. He thanked the outgoing treasurer, Ricky Shannon, for her sterling work over her four year term together with Aleen Herdman and Jackie Halliwell of the Northern, Dan Murphy of Munster, and Emer Gallagher of the Leinster sub-committees who were standing down. He emphasised how essential the work of the regional sub-committees was to the Society in delivering an interesting programme of events to the membership. Despite this pivotal role, there was a gap in that the constitution made no provision for regional sub-committees. Therefore constitutional changes were being proposed. He believed these would allow the Society to function more efficiently and allow for greater participation. He singled out for praise a small group of volunteers in the North for their work in developing and maintaining Lismacloskey Rectory Garden in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, the organisation of the Leinster Plant Sale which regularly raised significant funds for the Society, Stephen Butler's continued organisation of the seed list, and the success of a number of new Irish cultivars.

## **Finance**

The outgoing Treasurer Ricky Shannon reported that it had been a satisfactory year with income holding up well giving a total of €16,737 as against €16,265 the previous year. There had been an overall increase of €1000 in expenditure from €10,287 to €11,273, the main reasons being increased expenditure on lectures and higher running costs such as postage and travelling expenses.



## **Constitutional amendments**

The Hon Sec, Maeve Bell, explained that the proposed amendments were intended to do three things: create the post of Membership Secretary, provide for regional sub-committees and their organisation, and set out clearly the length of service for the various posts. Each individual change was put to the meeting and all were agreed. Your personal copy of the amended constitution is elsewhere in this Newsletter

## **Elections**

The Chair read out the names of the people who had been put forward for the vacant posts as follows:

Vice Chairman	Anne James
Treasurer	Brendan Ruddy
Membership Secretary	Hilary Glenn
Munster Representative	Frances Collins
Northern Representative	Patrick Quigley
Committee member	Ricky Shannon.

This brought the number serving on the National Executive Committee to nine.

## **Maeve Bell, Honorary Secretary**

### *A.G.M Garden Visits*

#### **Stephen Austen's garden, Blackwater**

The weather cleared to mainly sunshine for our morning visit to the first garden, that of Mr Austen near Blackwater. This garden had everything, showing good design and hard work over eight years on the two acres. The ground is level at the side and front of the house then slopes, in some parts steeply, to a further level area which borders onto an area of bogland.

The shrubs and magnolias looked brilliant in the sunshine. There were gently slanted lawns with flower beds, and tiered paths on the greater inclines. The vegetable garden had some raised beds, areas with chicken netting protection, and chickens, and the necessary garden shed, and the lower section near the bog had a pond under construction.

All the paths led to interesting features to suddenly surprise you; with beds of shrubs or urns or wooden structures. From the garden there was a recently laid boardwalk to take us partly into the bog. Trees are to be planted in the 16 acre area. With paths, lawns, trees, shrubs and vegetables, what more could one wish for?

#### **Graham Manson**

## **Garinish Island**

Seals basking on the rocks were the wonderful sight that greeted us as we approached Garinish Island on the Iveragh peninsula. Our visit there was a highlight of the A.G.M. weekend 2013. As Garinish Island is private we were lucky enough to be treated to a tour of the island by head gardener Seamus Galvin.

Garinish Island is located close to Sneem, overlooking the Kenmare River. The 3rd Earl of Dunraven had a house built here in the 1860s. The architect was a local man James Franklyn Fuller. His son, the 4th Earl developed the gardens. Garinish has a series of narrow valleys running from northeast to southwest. These are separated by rocky outcrops, sometimes covered with a thin layer of soil. Because of the various valleys, some of the gardens in these areas were themed: The Camellia Garden, the Magnolia Garden, and the New Zealand Garden. Seamus and his team have added the South American Garden, the Mediterranean Garden and others that are not so geographical. These are the Waterfall Garden, the Maple Garden and the Fruit and Vegetable Garden, where the fruit trees are grown as single cordons trained on the rock face.

Narrow paths lead from one garden to the next and segue nicely through this woodland garden, and on around the shore, affording spectacular views of the Atlantic, the Beara Peninsula and Cahal Mountains and MacGillycuddy's Reeks. As with the other gardens on the Kenmare River, Garinish boasts fine examples of *Drimys*, *Clethra*, *Acacia*, myrtle or *Luma apiculata*. There is a fine *Agathis australis* and a good camphor tree, *Cinnamomum camphora*. There is a great specimen of *Magnolia campbellii* which flowers well most years. At Garinish the tree ferns are sublime. There is a tree fern walk, planted pre 1900 that makes one feel as if on another continent, and not, as is the case, less than 100 meters from the Atlantic. There were some stowaways on the trunks of the ferns in the form of *Hymenophyllum flabellatum* from eastern Australia and New Zealand, and *Rumohra adiantiformis* from the same region including Tasmania.

The harsh winters of recent years resulted in some casualties notably *Acacia baileyana*, *dealbata*, *longifolia*, *rhetinoides*, *melanoxlyn* (mature trees). Mature *Clethra arborea* trees were killed. *Acacia rubida* was the only one to survive unscathed. *Dicksonia fibrosa* and most *Dicksonia antarctica* survived, and although the odd one died, all unfortunately lost their fronds. Despite these losses, Garinish remains a wonderful garden which continues to evolve and flourish from year to year under the expert care of Seamus Galvin and his crew.

## **Frances Collins**

## Dhu Varren

On a dull and damp Sunday morning, we carpoled again to head to Mark and Laura Collins' remarkable garden that is about 10 miles from Killarney.

Martin Edwardes was a most efficient car-park attendant. A magnificent triple-stemmed *Dicksonia*, presiding over the wildlife pond, dominates the car park itself.

The garden is called after Dhu Varren House in Portrush, Co. Antrim, where Mark comes from. Both he and Laura work outside the garden, which is testimony to their boundless energy and enthusiasm during their 'time off'. It covers 2.5 acres, and was originally a farm. The abundance of growth and hard features makes it hard to believe that the garden was started in bare fields in 2001. Mark's objective is to source and cultivate rare and unusual plants in a landscaped setting for the enlightenment and enjoyment of garden visitors.

The garden is packed with interest. In the Oriental garden, a Japanese tea-house stands over an immense, man-made pond. A black and red bridge over the pond provides the best viewpoint for the king-sized Koi. Mark beefs them up by keeping their water heated, even in the summer. There is a terrace with red chairs for taking [what else?] tea. Notable here are Acers and Laura's cloud-pruned shrubs.

A rockery was built with 40 tonnes of stone and 1 tonne of soil, which had to be carried by wheelbarrow to the site. This is home to the alpine collection, which includes dainty *Auriculas*, *Meconopsis*, Irises, Saxifrages and *Lewisia*, [Mark showed us how to plant them sideways to maximize drainage]. I noted *Scilla peruviana*, and wondered where mine had disappeared. There are two glass-houses, which were a warm refuge on a cold morning. One is a Cactus House, where, in addition to cactus of every size and shape, there are aloes, aeoniums and other succulents. The other is a tropical house, where we noted ferns and banana, and which colourful butterflies animate in summertime.

A wooden boardwalk traverses the woodland and bamboo garden, which is expertly dried out by a series of complex drains. The collection of bamboos is most impressive; there are over 70. Mark had gruesome tales of how Japanese prisoners-of-war experienced their vigour. Even more impressive are the *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, grown from seed; now 8 meters tall! The glossy leaves and blue flowers of the large clump of Chatham Island forget-me-nots, *Mysotidium hortensis* were, well, unforgettable. The bronze and greens of a virtual hedge of *Euphorbia griffithii* 'Dixter' was very striking. *Magnolia laevifolia* was a great success to judge from the number of magnolia-spotters who whipped out their cameras. The beautiful green flowers were a sharp contrast to the shiny bronze stems on *Viburnum plicatum* 'Rotundifolium'.

Unforgettable too were the Rhododendrons and other ericaceous shrubs growing not in the poor farmyard soil, but in/on a kind of cushion of cut-up tree ferns that had died en route to Kells Bay. We were very grateful for Laura's hospitality at the end of our visit; endless cups of tea and coffee warmed us up.

**Brendan Ruddy**

### **Muckross Gardens**

The weather had improved somewhat, when we arrived at Muckross House and Gardens. After lunch, the head gardener Gerry Murphy took us on a tour of the gardens and arboretum. Muckross House was built in 1843 for Henry Arthur Herbert and his wife, the water-colourist Mary Balfour Herbert. It was during the 1850s that the Herberts undertook quite extensive garden works in preparation for the visit of Queen Victoria in 1861. When the Bourn Vincent family purchased the house in 1910, many further improvements were carried out in the gardens, including the building of the Sunken Garden, Rock Garden and Stream Garden. We started our tour by passing in front of the house and to the side where the Sunken Garden is located. Unfortunately, there were not many plants flowering at the time. Gerry was asked if he had had problems with the various diseases that have been affecting our native trees. He replied that they had some cases of die back in the past, but nothing of late. With such a vast collection of trees, it must be a great source of worry.

We headed over to the magnificent Edwardian glasshouse, which we have always wanted to enter on our numerous visits to Muckross. Gerry made a lot of people happy by bringing us into the glasshouse to view some of the beautiful plants that live there. One such plant was *Strelitzia*, otherwise known as the Bird of Paradise Plant. On leaving the glasshouse, we passed the stream garden and headed into the arboretum, which has been extensively planted with all types of trees and shrubs including camellias, rhododendrons, magnolias and azaleas. Deer are a big problem here as they can do a lot of damage, so there has to be an extensive system of fencing employed to keep them at bay.

Because the gardens are open to the public all the year around, there has to be a very high standard of maintenance, and this was quite evident. Also because of this and that the garden entry is free, it can be overlooked by more "serious gardeners" as a great garden in its own right. In fact, the garden has quite an extensive collection of plants, including some specimen trees. The variety of colours of the rhododendrons and azaleas in the spring makes a quite magnificent tapestry. Janet and I always enjoy going there, especially in the spring and never cease to admire the breath taking views over the lake and the beauty of the garden.

**Martin Edwardes**

## **THE CONSTITUTION OF THE IRISH GARDEN PLANT SOCIETY**

### **1. NAME**

The name of the society shall be the IRISH GARDEN PLANT SOCIETY

### **2. OBJECTS**

- a. The study of plants cultivated in gardens in Ireland and their history.
- b. The development of horticulture in Ireland.
- c. The education of members on the cultivation and conservation of garden plants.
- d. To research and locate garden plants considered to be rare or in need of conservation, especially those raised in Ireland by Irish gardeners and nurserymen.
- e. To co-operate with horticulturists, botanists, botanical and other gardens, individuals and organisations in Ireland and elsewhere in these matters.
- f. To issue and publish information on the garden plants of Ireland and to facilitate the exchange of information with other interested individuals and groups.

### **3. THE MANAGEMENT OF THE AFFAIRS OF THE SOCIETY**

- a. The affairs of the Society shall be managed by a National Executive Committee [the Committee] of a minimum of four and a maximum of ten elected members.
- b. The officers shall be the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer and Membership Secretary. The duties of the Chairman shall be to preside at the meetings of the Society and the Committee and lead the Society in pursuit of its objectives. The duties of the Vice-Chairman shall be to deputise for and assist the Chairman. The duties of the Honorary Secretary shall be to record the minutes of the Committee and general meetings, to issue notices of these meetings and conduct correspondence on behalf of the Society. The duties of the Honorary Treasurer shall be to manage the finances of the Society and liaise with the Membership Secretary. The duties of the Membership Secretary shall be to keep the membership records.
- c. Regional sub-committees may be established by the National Executive Committee. Such sub-committees shall be responsible to the Committee for organising the Society's activities within the region and shall keep the Committee fully informed.
- d. Each regional sub-committee shall nominate a person from amongst its members as a representative to the National Executive Committee. Such representatives shall be elected at the annual general meeting to serve as committee members, subject to clause 4.e governing length of service. The representatives shall report on regional activities to the Committee and shall report back to the regional sub-committee on any directions and other matters arising at the Committee.
- e. A regional sub-committee shall comprise a minimum of three officers, namely a regional chairman, a regional secretary, and a regional treasurer. They shall be responsible for carrying out the activities set out in clause 3.c.
- f. The Committee shall have the power to co-opt a maximum of two additional members who may serve until the following Annual General Meeting.

#### 4. **ELECTION OF THE COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS**

- a. The election of members of the Committee shall take place only at the Annual General Meeting, as committee vacancies arise.
- b. Election shall be by secret ballot.
- c. The term of office for a National Executive Committee Officer shall be four years in any one office and at least four years shall elapse before he or she may be re-elected to the same office.
- d. The term of office of National Executive Committee members other than officers shall be four years. At the end of that term he or she may be re-elected for a further term of four years followed by a final term of two years. No member of the Committee may serve continuously for more than ten years.
- e. The term of office for a regional sub-committee officer shall be four years in any one office and at least four years shall elapse before he or she may be selected again for the same office.
- f. The term of office of members of regional sub-committees other than officers shall be four years. At the end of that term he or she may be selected for a further term of four years followed by a final term of two years. No member of the sub-committee may serve continuously for more than ten years.
- g. All nominations shall be in writing and signed by two members of the Society and by the Nominee. Nominations for election to the Committee shall be given to the Honorary Secretary at least two weeks before the Annual General Meeting.
- h. Temporary appointments may be made by the Committee to fill vacancies arising during a term of office.
- i. No one receiving regular remuneration from the Society shall be eligible to serve on either the National Executive Committee or a regional sub-committee. Out of pocket expenses properly incurred in connection with the Society's business may be paid.
- j. The Committee shall be empowered to appoint sub-committees from among members of the Society and to appoint non-members as observers.
- k. In any Society elections proxy votes shall not be valid.

**Note:** It is recommended that steps are taken to ensure that all office holders do not retire in the same year.

#### 5. **MEETINGS OF THE SOCIETY**

##### A. Committee Meetings

- a. The Honorary Secretary shall be authorised to call meetings of the Committee.
- b. A quorum at a meeting of the Committee shall consist of four elected members.
- c. Members of the National Executive Committee or regional sub-committees who fail to attend three consecutive meetings shall be deemed to have retired unless the Committee agrees otherwise.
- d. The decisions of the Committee shall be taken by a majority vote. The Chairman shall not vote except in the event of a tie.

- B. Annual General Meeting
- a. The Annual General Meeting shall be held at approximately annual intervals, at such time and place as shall be directed by the Committee.
  - b. The Honorary Secretary shall, at the direction of the Committee, be empowered to call a general meeting for the consideration of the business of the Society.
  - c. The Honorary Secretary shall give all members of the Society not less than three weeks' notice of the date, time and place of any general meeting.
  - d. Decisions shall be taken by a simple majority vote with the Chairman having a casting vote in the event of a tie.
  - e. A quorum of any general meeting shall be fifteen.

6. **FINANCES OF THE SOCIETY**

- a. The funds of the Society shall be in the name of the Society and shall be operated by the Honorary Treasurer who shall be accountable to the Society and shall produce accounts at the Annual General Meeting. The accounts of the Society shall be verified by an independent accountant.
- b. Regional treasurers shall provide quarterly reports to the Honorary Treasurer in a timely manner.

7. **PUBLICATIONS OF THE SOCIETY**

- a. The Society shall publish a journal. As far as possible, one issue shall be published in each year.
- b. The journal shall be open to receive papers and articles on – (i) The history of Irish garden plants and gardens. (ii) The cultivation of plants in Ireland. (iii) The taxonomy of garden plants. (iv) Reports of the work carried out by the Society and its individual members.
- c. The production and editing of the journal shall be managed by an editorial sub-committee appointed by the Committee. It shall consist of an Editor who may be requested to attend Committee meetings as an observer and three other members of the Society: at least one member of the sub-committee shall be an elected member of the Committee. The sub-committee may refer papers received to referees for their opinions.
- d. Others publications may be issued as approved by the Committee.

8. **MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOCIETY**

The following shall be categories of membership:

- i. Ordinary – open to all persons interested in the aims of the Society.
- ii. Student – All full-time students shall be entitled to student membership
- iii. Group – This is open to other groups, institutions and societies.
- iv. Honorary – Honorary members shall be nominated and elected at AGM. Persons may be elected to honorary membership who, in the opinion of the Committee, have contributed in an outstanding way over a long period of time to the advancement of horticulture in Ireland. As honorary members they shall be entitled to the full benefits of ordinary membership for life.

**Note:**

- a. All members of the Society on 1 September 1981 and who pay their annual subscription for the year beginning 1 July 1981 shall be Founder Members of the Irish Garden Plant Society.
- b. Every person seeking admission into the Society shall have his/her name submitted to a meeting of the Committee which, unless an objection is raised and sustained by the majority of members present, shall declare the candidates elected.

9. **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION**

- a. The annual subscription shall be decided by the Committee.
- b. The annual subscription shall be payable on 1 May each year by all members.
- c. Those joining on or after 1 January of any one year shall be considered as paid-up members for the sixteen months following that date.
- d. Student members shall pay half of the annual subscription and shall enjoy full privileges of membership.
- e. Group membership shall be three times that of the annual subscription.
- f. Any member who shall be in arrears with his/her subscription for one calendar year shall be deemed to have resigned from the Society but the Committee shall, at its discretion, reinstate such members.

10. **PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP**

Members (who have paid their subscriptions) shall be entitled to:

- i. Attend and vote at general meetings of the Society and to attend lectures, courses and garden meetings organised by the Society. (In the case of group members, each group may appoint one representative to attend general meetings. The representative shall be entitled to one vote.)
- ii. Receive circulars and all regular publications of the Society.
- iii. Submit papers, notes and letters for consideration for publication.
- iv. Co-operate in projects organised by the Society for the conservation of garden plants.

11. **AMENDMENTS AND ALTERATIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION**

- a. No rule shall be made, altered or deleted from the Constitution except at a general meeting. Any member is entitled to suggest an amendment prior to a general meeting by submitting the suggested change in writing to the Honorary Secretary.
- b. The Honorary Secretary shall notify members of any suggested amendment before the general meeting at which it is to be considered. A majority of two-thirds in favour of the amendment shall authorize the amendment.
- c. Amendments proposed before a general meeting may be amended themselves during the general meeting with the consent of the proposer and a simple majority of those present at the general meeting.

**As amended at the AGM held on 11 May 2013**





## Regional Reports

### MUNSTER

#### April 2<sup>nd</sup> *Gardening on an Island*, a talk by Seamus Galvin.

Seamus Galvin is the head gardener of Garinish West, an island just off the coast of Sneem, Co Kerry. It is the island that we visited at the AGM of this year, so this talk was really a preview of what we could expect on our visit.

At the start of his talk, Seamus gave us a short history of the ownership of Garinish West island. In the middle of the 1860's, the 3rd Earl of Dunraven had a house built on the island, the architect being a local man, James Franklyn Fuller. It was the 4th Earl of Dunraven who actually started the garden. He owned the 39,000 acre Adare manor estate in Co. Limerick and was a very keen huntsman and yachtsman. He was the owner and co-owner of the 1893 and 1895 America's Cup yachts Valkyrie 11 and Valkyrie 111. The island was under the ownership of the Dunravens for about 90 years and it was then bought by an English Woman, Mrs Simmons who owned it for a further 10 years. She subsequently sold it to Mr Reginald Browne, whose family had it for about 30 years. It then passed to a Dutchman for a brief period and it was subsequently bought by the current owner, an international business man based in Switzerland, who has had the island for 20 years.

The actual garden is a very natural one, which makes use of the rock formation which allows valleys to be formed. These valleys provide natural shelter for the many plants that now grow there. The vegetable garden was started in 1995 and fruit trees were grown in an espalier style with the branches pegged to solid rock. Seamus created a bog garden and then built a waterfall. There are no formal places in this garden and because of the nature of the terrain there is very little lawn area, so a Kobuta lawn tractor would be totally useless here! In fact the only type of machinery that Seamus uses is a power winch, which he uses to pull out the *Rhododendron ponticum*. There are tree ferns in abundance here. They look totally at home as they are planted in the correct environment. Seamus said that they had a very difficult time during the two very bad winters of 2010 and 2011. He lost a lot of plants during that time. He showed us unbelievable pictures of the island and its plants covered in snow. It is a picture which no one would expect to see on an island just off the coast of Sneem. Nature can be full of surprises.

It is obvious that Seamus has planted up the garden in a very sensitive way, so that the whole place still looks completely natural with the introduced plants looking as if they have always been there. That is the true hallmark of a very good gardener! After the talk, one man came up to me and said he would go on the AGM weekend in order to see that island. We were certainly not disappointed when we actually finally did visit.

**Martin Edwardes**

### **April 28<sup>th</sup> A visit to Rosemary Punch's Garden**

On a very cold Sunday in April, we went to see Rosemary Punch's garden at Kilroan, Glanmire, Cork. There is a lovely drive up to a very impressive house, which looks down a hill to a paddock, where horses graze. Most of the garden is to the left of the house, as you face down the hill. Just outside the house to the left, there is a gravel garden containing various small conifers, rhododendrons, grasses and many choice plants. Some plants had to be caged to protect them from the rabbits. As the garden is on a hill it is subject to a certain amount of wind, but Rosemary's main trouble is damage to her plants and the endless hole digging by rabbits. The problem has worsened recently since the demise of her dog, who was a great help in keeping the rabbits away. We walked by the side of the house to the back, where we were greeted with a beautiful stone wall, which extended all along the back of the house. A bank containing many rhododendrons, conifers and shrubs sloped up to a timber fenced field, the perimeter of which was flanked by numerous mature trees. As we proceeded along the path we came across a beautiful specimen of *Rhododendron falconeri* subsp. *eximium* and quite close to that there was a fine mature *Rhododendron maccabeanum*. We carried on along the winding path and passed numerous rhododendrons, azaleas, unusual conifers, primulas and daffodils which were planted along the banks on either side of the path. We eventually arrived at the woodland walk which contained an amazing display of primulas and hellebores. We headed back down the woodland walk and arrived at a more formal large garden, containing a lawn and straight paths. This enclosed area was surrounded on many sides by a beech hedge. A path containing arches extended right across the total width of the enclosed garden. Rosemary has quite an extensive collection of Rhododendrons, including 'Rex', 'Polar', and 'Grace Seabrook' with its characteristic very deep red flowers on a dark green background of foliage. Some of her extensive collection of trees include, the handkerchief tree, (*Davidia involucrata*), *Ginko biloba*, *Zelkova* and *Styrax*. Because of the very late cold spring, a number of her trees and plants had not come into leaf, so I hope that we get another opportunity to come and see her beautiful garden in more clement weather conditions.

**Martin Edwardes**



## *Reports from the Argyll tour May 2013*

### **Benmore**

Benmore is located seven miles north of Dunoon and is one of the four Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens. It is a woodland garden of around 120 acres, originally owned by James Duncan, a wealthy sugar refiner, and subsequently by the Younger brewing family. There are 11 gardeners and Peter Baxter, the curator, gave us an insightful introduction. Peter explained that the long tradition of Scottish plant-hunting may have derived from the fact that estate gardeners were often schoolteachers, and therefore comparatively well educated. Benmore has plants grown from seed brought to Scotland by many plant-hunters, but especially by George Forrest. Peter showed us *Paris polyphylla* 'Forrest 5945' a division from the original brought back from Yunnan by Forrest in 1911.

The site is challenging in many ways. It is surrounded by hills rising to 2000'. The garden itself rises from 50' to 450' above sea level. About a third of it is on the flat; the remainder hilly. At the top, the viewpoint offers a superb panorama across the gardens to Holy Loch and the Clyde. Rainfall averages 106" p.a., but Peter recorded more than 5" in one day in November 2012, until the rain gauge spilled over. Extremes of wind, mainly from the southwest, are also a feature. On 3 January 2012 winds of 110 mph felled about 100 trees, including a 190' Sitka Spruce, *Picea sitchensis* which left a 15' jagged stump. It is impossible to do justice to the rich variety of the exotics in Benmore; three examples are given below.

The avenue of 49 Wellingtonias *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, was planted in 1863 by Piers Patrick, a wealthy American who had bought the estate the year before. It is an astonishing sight; the trees are 40' apart in each direction and are now 150 years old and sesquicentennial celebrations are planned for later in the year! It is a sobering sight to watch visitors shrink to nothing as they walk away from you under the canopy of these giants. And yet other riches abound; the eye is caught by a perfectly grown cut-leaved beech, *Fagus sylvatica* 'Asplenifolia' at the western end of the avenue.

The garden is justly famous for its Rhododendrons; there are more than 300 species and many more cultivars; more than 3,000 plants in total. On the way up to the lookout we noted *Rh.* 'Roza Stevenson'; brilliant lemon-yellow with trusses of 8-10 flowers, and *Rh. pruniflorum*, ssp. *Glauca*, a much more modest plant with mauve flowers, maybe an inch across.

James Duncan built the Fernery in the 1850s, at the height of the Victorian fern-craze, but it had decayed badly until fully restored in 2009. It is once again an impressive building of significant architectural importance. Ferns of all kinds, from *Dicksonia* to the most delicate, grow in three different climates, corresponding to three levels of elevation within the glasshouse. Finally, the café is not to be neglected; this visitor recommends the Bakewell for quality and quantity.

**Paul Smith**

### **Strachur House**

We arrived at Strachur House mid-morning, in brilliant sunshine. What a joy after all the cold wet weather we had endured over the past months. Only our second garden of the tour we were full of anticipation and enthusiasm and we were not disappointed. Strachur House is an imposing, stylish white building looking out onto Loch Fyne with a semi-formal garden behind the house. The present owners Sir Charles and Lady Maclean, their gardener and two very friendly dogs greeted us and Sir Charles talked about the garden. It has an interesting history as it was the home of the late Sir Fitzroy Maclean, diplomat, spy, soldier and adventurer, who was one of the models for Ian Fleming's James Bond.

We then wandered round at leisure across the lawns, up an avenue of pollarded lime trees under which were planted bluebells, tulips, roses and *Nepeta*, stopping in the sunken garden known as 'the bear pit', where Sir Fitzroy used to sit to do his writing. From there to a pleasant sitting area at the top of the garden and past the mixed borders that surround the lawns to the woodland gardens beyond. We followed the path along the streamside through the woodland - a mass of deciduous and evergreen azaleas and semi-dwarf *Rhododendron*, backed by mature Japanese maples and carpeted with spring bulbs and bluebells. The scents and colours of the azalea walk were delightful. Finally we strolled to the terrace where a recent planting of box squares in the gravel brought the garden right up to date. I loved the scale of this garden and the tiers of planting rising to the mountains beyond. It has a style completely its own and my description certainly doesn't do it justice. Apologies! Go and see it for yourself - open on selected days for the Scottish Garden Scheme.

**Shirley Snook**

### **The Duntrune Garden. Kilmartin**

On arriving at Duntrune we were warmly welcomed by Robin and Patricia Malcolm and her daughter Jemima. Robin told us the history of his family, and the existence of the garden for many centuries, and how it had been altered and simplified over time. On a glorious May afternoon, Patricia and Jemima escorted us down a short walk to the walled garden. We entered through a

small gate, adjacent to which stands a curved Yew hedge on which deer feed at the base, however I was immediately drawn to a sparkling display of blue *Meconopsis* which reflected the colour of the sky, this display was enhanced by a vivid burgundy *Azalea* and pale *Pieris*.

This garden is sloped on three levels with acid soil, dampest at the front of the garden. Vistas are created by the use of trees through which *Clematis* weave, with under planting of shrubs, Candelabra primulas and bluebells. The garden gradually reveals itself through a series of interlinking smaller gardens giving maximum delight to the senses. In one such area what was once a formal fishpond now has another use and is filled with hostas.

A Folly on elevated ground is situated at the rear with steps leading up to it, while nearby a handsome specimen of *Rhododendron* 'Loderi King George' exuded an exquisite perfume. Urns, sculptures and seating are placed around the garden and allow for rest and contemplation, while a narrow rill winds its way naturally down to a small pond. Birdsong and the sound of water completed this oasis of beauty and tranquillity. Robin and Patricia Malcolm are happy for people to wander in and out of the garden. It is open in support of Action Aid and Scottish International Relief.

**Gabrielle O' Connor**

### **Crarae Gardens**

We tumbled out of our hotel to be met by yet another glorious day. Loch Fyne was already basking in the sunshine, mirror calm and glistening. Our driver appeared, wearing his kilt, such was the nature of the day. Flecks of snow on the distant hills indicated another sort of weather but, at that moment, combating snow and rain was certainly not on our agenda.

We were greeted at the Reception Centre by a representative of the National Trust for Scotland and were given a short account of the part played by successive members of the Campbell family in creating and then developing Crarae before it passed into the care of the N.T.S in 2002. At present, not all the garden has been made accessible to visitors but there are already four colour coded routes laid out, by means of which a substantial part of it can be explored. Most of us elected to take the Red Path - The Himalayan Glade.

This particular path meanders ever upwards, eventually crossing a small footbridge spanning the Crarae burn. It then descends, always affording glimpses of the burn itself, tame enough on a day like this, yet still sparkling and glistening as it chuckled its way to Loch Fyne. But before reaching the splendours of the gorge we came upon a glade of *Rhododendron falconeri* replete with enormous trusses of beautiful pale ivory flowers. More delights were to follow. Everywhere along the burn were drifts of *Rodgersia podophylla*, *Lysichiton* and *Gunnera*. On the opposite bank were glimpses of

the glowing orange blooms of *Rhododendron* "Conroy"- a cinnabarinum hybrid created by Lord Aberconway of Bodnant. A little further up was a large specimen of *Rhododendron* "Mrs James Horlick", a gift from Sir James Horlick of Achamore on the Isle of Gigha.

On this magnificent day it was the sheer exuberance of the planting and the splendour of the setting which truly bowled us over. Crarae is a magnificent, heroic planting, a fitting home for a wonderful collection of plants. Apparently Sir George Campbell, who was largely responsible for this particular extension of the gardens, achieved his task by abseiling into the gorge, his jacket pockets full of seeds and seedlings which he proceeded to jam into suitable crevices as he descended. Apocryphal as the story may be, I would like to believe that there is a grain of truth in it. In any case the resulting effect is stunning. From the upper bridge we began our descent via the opposite bank. We passed stands of *Rhododendron augustinii* bearing flowers in two or more shades of mauve. We passed a very pre-occupied red squirrel and noticed young *Rhododendron* plants apparently growing as epiphytes on decaying tree stumps. Eventually we passed a lovely grouping of *Meconopsis* "Crarae" and shortly afterwards arrived back at our starting point.

Upon reflection it was generally agreed that, brilliant as the gardens appeared on this particular day, they would also be equally stunning in late autumn. In this report scant reference has been made to the many specimens of *Disanthus*, *Betula*, *Quercus*, *Acer* and *Sorbus* which co-mingle with all those Rhododendrons. They surely will have their day later in the year.

And finally.....it is worth noting that in very recent memory Crarae faced a very uncertain future. Happily it is now flourishing under the stewardship of N.T.S and long may it continue to do so.

**David Ledsham**

### **Ardmaddy Castle Garden**

We were welcomed to Ardmaddy Castle by Charles and Minette Struthers with an enjoyable lunch on a bright sunny day. During lunch Charles gave us a brief talk about the history of the Castle which his family purchased in 1938. Minette has been restoring the one and a half acre walled garden which had been previously sub-let during the 1960s. There were large mature Rhodies and shrubs along each of the walls of the garden, which contained four plots of neatly clipped box hedging forming two plots for vegetables, one for flowers and one for a fruit cage. Some of the old Rhodies and shrubs had been removed which had made pockets for other shrubs and plants. *Leucojum*, *Ribes longiracemosa*, a *Hydrangea petiolaris* climbing 40 feet up a sycamore tree, a *Davidia involucrata*, and a *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*. Around the lovely pond at the top of the garden were huge *Gunnera*, rodgersias, *Iris* and primulas. Through the gate at the top of the garden in the new woodland

area with a large pond were three *Betula jackmontii*, swathes of white, pink and blue bluebells, and pheasant eye narcissus. We walked over the old Bridge and back along the burn and down Lady Murray's walk. There were *Eucryphias*, *Magnolia wilsonii*, *Cornus* 'Venus', *Magnolia* 'Susan' and *Erinus alpinus*. Minette's ambition is to have more colour during the summer months. Everyone without exception thoroughly enjoyed a delightful garden and was very impressed that Minette has achieved so much with minimum help.

## **Peter and Mary Browne**

### **Arduaine Gardens**

I.G.P.S. members visited Arduaine (pronounced "Are-do-knee") the sixth garden of our Scottish trip. Clever organisation found us overnight on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May at the Loch Melfort Hotel from where it is a very short walk to the entrance of what is now a National Trust for Scotland property. Just before the entrance two variations of *Orchis mascula* were in flower - its purple and pink forms growing side by side. That had to be a good omen! The weather was sunny and warm, even the locals found it difficult to believe.

Arduaine lies west of the A816, more or less half - way between Oban and Lochgilphead in mid Argyll. The 20 acre garden was begun by J. Arthur Campbell in 1897. It sits on the southern slope of the Arduaine peninsula, dwarfed by the immensity of the landscape. It retains the feel of a personal, private garden, its paths and various sections well delineated and accessible. On entering you find yourself immediately in a double herbaceous border. This is pleasantly informal with *Rhododendron luteum*, *Berberis*, *Leucojum*, Bluebells, Hostas, *Anthriscus sylvestris* 'Ravenswing', *Dicentra*, Greater Celandine, *Thalictrum aquilegifolium*, *Doronicum*. (Incidentally, English Bluebells were growing all over Argyll, often in settings we would consider unusual. They appeared to be flowering later than in Ireland.) Moving on through the Lower Long Border, we had missed the large planting of *Narcissus cyclamineus*, but *Luma apiculata* and *Betula utilis* var. *occidentalis* were prominent. Nearby is the Old Tennis Court Lawn, dominated by *Olearia macrodonta*. Here also were some *Rhododendrons* - *R. pseudochrysanthum*, *R. burmanicum* and *R. keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy'.

There are various ponds with *Caltha palustris*, Hostas, Ferns, *Primula prolifera*, *Gunnera tinctoria*, *Magnolia sieboldii*, pale pink *Rhododendron zaleucum* and *Camellia* growing nearby. Native aspens (*Populus tremula*) form a backdrop to this area. Near the Heron Pond, often fought over by eels and otters was *Meconopsis* 'Lingholm', a striking blue poppy. Moving on to the

Woodland area here were to be found *Mahonia japonica*, *Rhododendron* 'Sesterianum' with scented white flowers, *R. johnstoneanum* with scented cream-coloured flowers and the dark red flowers of *R. sanguineum*, not forgetting *R. 'Shilsonii'* with its peeling bark. Also to be found here were *Lophosoria quadripinnata* and *Pseudopanax arboreus*. The view from "The High Viewpoint" is worth the moderate climb. One can take in the man-made harbour of Craobh Haven to the left, the mountains of Mull off to the far right. Northern members were looking out for Rathlin Island, 60 miles away as "on a clear day you can see forever". A relatively new shelter belt of Ash, Rowan, and Spruce has been planted below the viewpoint. "The Owl's Walk" has white Trillium, *Rhododendron floccigerum*, *R. lindleyi*, *Fascicularia bicolor* and also *Schefflera impressa*. The Cliff Path is a geological dyke, outcropping high above the garden and running down to the sea. Here were *Rhododendron arboreum* subsp. *zeylanicum*, introduced as seed by Arthur Campbell in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Embothrium coccineum* and *Aralia elata*.

This is a spectacular garden, well worth a visit; many hours are needed to do it justice. No tea-room exists at the moment but full facilities are available at the Loch Melfort Hotel. Please allow me to thank Andrea Duffin, Yvonne Penpraze and Patrick Quigley for a really well structured trip.

## **Mary Bradshaw**

### **An Cala**

Island gardens have a special character and this was to prove the case in the charming garden of An Cala, which marked the finale of the IGPS Argyll tour. Access to Seil Island is by means of the splendid 18<sup>th</sup> century 'Bridge over the Atlantic Ocean' and An Cala nestles into cliffs overlooking the ocean and islands. We had the advantage of an introductory talk by the present owner, Mrs. Downie.

The garden was created by Thomas Mawson in a disused slate quarry in the 1930s when 30,000 tons of soil was imported to cover the bare rocks in a series of informal terraces. The original design has stood the test of time with great use of the local slate in walls, numerous paths and rounded steps. A stream meanders with ponds and a small waterfall. Rhododendrons, azaleas and flowering cherries were in full bloom with the large pots of tulips adding a spectacular dash of colour. A small flock of wire sheep graze the upper lawn while the summer house at the reflecting pool is decorated with fir cones in the manner of a shell house. The overall ambience is of an enchanting bygone age.

## **Berkley & Mary Farr**





## *Acquiring plants by Rae McIntyre*

Much of the fun in gardening comes from buying/being given/even stealing plants. I do not, I hasten to add, steal anything but I know a number of people who have great pleasure in taking cuttings - or slips as they call them - from other people's gardens. Once I took a group round Helen Dillon's wonderful garden in Dublin and Helen told everyone at the outset that there was to be no thieving. A few months later there was a review evening when we showed slides of all the gardens on the tour. Two women said, "You know how we were told not to touch any plants in the Dillon Garden? Well we managed to slip a bit of everything we wanted and all the cuttings have struck. Everything is doing well". I broke out in a cold sweat when I heard this. The thought of being banished forever from the Dillon garden was appalling especially when I was the group leader. There were plenty of plants for sale at reasonable prices so there was no need to steal.

When I started gardening in the late seventies many of the plants came from a garden centre that was one of the first in Ulster. In June 1978 I was given a voucher by an organisation for £75 and decided to spend it all on plants - on roses to make a rose garden. Two formal beds were to have hybrid teas and another two to have floribundas. In the centre there was going to be a fountain or a bird bath or even a statue. Fortunately the garden centre had no roses left in June but they did have various conifers which I was persuaded to buy. Conifers and heathers were very much in the ascendant in the late seventies. So two raised beds, surrounded by stones from the local quarry, were made for the assortment of conifers. The colour scheme was extremely low key being in blue-grey, green-grey, 'golden' and green. In four years they had grown so much in our ample rainfall that I had to make another big bed at the side of the garden to accommodate them. Gradually, as they became less fashionable, I moved them to other parts of the garden or, if I became tired of them, I gave them away. Some conifers can be quite domineering and do not assort well with other plants. I don't have many left. There's a columnar yew called *Taxus baccata* 'Standishii' which is slow-growing and has overtaken me in height over the last thirty-five years, two specimens of the dwarf *Podocarpus alpinus* stuck in behind rhododendrons and quietly minding their own business, and two thujas the name of which I have forgotten.

There is one on either side of steps that can be seen from a back window of the house and their gold foliage is cheerful in winter.

After the conifer phase I discovered Hillier's in Winchester. I was given *Hillier's Manual of Trees and Shrubs* one Christmas and was overjoyed when I discovered that I could buy their plants by mail order. They could be considered the horticultural equivalent of Harrods with arm and leg prices but I still ordered a few shrubs and trees from them every autumn.

From Hillier's came *Acer* 'Karasugawa', *Embothrium lanceolatum* 'Norquince Valley', *Eucryphia milliganii*, *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, *Hoheria glabrata*, *Magnolia* 'Wada's Memory', *Magnolia denudata*, *Crinodendron hookerianum*, *Sorbus* 'Joseph Rock', *Sorbus scalaris*, *Tetracentron sinensis* and unusual deciduous azaleas. I remember ordering a *Cornus florida* f. *rubra* from them because I was smitten with the description in the manual but they rang me to advise me that it would not succeed in Northern Ireland's climate. Instead they suggested *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' so I bought it instead. Unfortunately it has developed into an upside down wedding cake being much wider at the top than it is at the bottom. I'm not sure if they were right about the unsuitability of our climate because I have seen for example, *Cornus* 'Eddie's White Wonder' and *Cornus kousa* 'China Girl' flourishing in a garden fifteen miles from here. Thank goodness Hillier's no longer send plants by mail order because I have no room for any more shrubs and emphatically none for trees.

The late Patrick Forde had a nursery full of unusual plants within his estate at Seaforde in Co. Down. I discovered this when I was attending a weekend conference in the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle one October. We were allowed a couple of hours of freedom on the Saturday afternoon when the weather was glorious. The car seemed to go to the nursery of its own accord and I spent much longer than the two hours blissfully choosing shrubs like *Salix melanostachys*, *Salix matsudana* 'Tortuosa', *Salix exigua*, *Eucryphia x intermedia* 'Rostrevor', *Rosa* 'Complicata', and *Rosa mulliganii*. Only on the way back to the hotel, with the car bunged to capacity, did I remember that I was supposed to be giving three other women delegates a lift to Coleraine. Such is the power of plants, but the women were not best pleased when they had to make other transport arrangements.

An interest in acquiring herbaceous plants developed after the tree and shrub collecting. For some time Northern Ireland garden centres seemed to concentrate on shrubs while perennials were sidelined. It's different now of course. Miss Jan Eccles was a redoubtable figure, pipe-smoking and wearing jeans until her eighties. She looked after the Bishop's Gate garden, at Downhill Castle, a National Trust property outside Coleraine. Jan lived in the gate lodge,

had a lovely small garden around it and, as well as keeping it in perfect order, she propagated plants, many of them unusual, which she sold for National Trust funds. From her I got treasures like *Alchemilla alpinus*, unusual primulas, *Podophyllum emodi* and the rose 'Blanc Double de Coubert' which has grown enormously.

Blooms of Bressingham in Norfolk used to have a mail order catalogue which I enjoyed browsing through. I used to write down very long lists of the perennials I wanted and then totalled the price which was astronomical. It then had to be reduced by about three quarters. Perennials, I discovered, do not last for ever and plants that probably thrived in Norfolk did not do so here. Members of the daisy family such as heleniums and many asters had little time for me and my works, but day lilies and crocosmias did well and many that came from Bressingham originally are still going strong. However my favourite crocosmia 'Severn Sunrise' came from Anna Nolan who gave it to me some years before she died. It flowers in August and I am always reminded of Anna and her beautiful Dublin garden when I see it.

Plants given to me by friends are always valued. At the start of my interest in gardening people used to offload invasive little brutes like *Sedum acre* or comfrey on me. I actually wanted them to fill up spaces and the donors were only too happy to get rid of them. Now I am only given plants that I want. Nigel Marshall, when he was head gardener at Mount Stewart, propagated the rose 'Alister Stella Gray' for me and Helen Dillon dug out a chunk of Helleborus *viridis* when she heard I couldn't find one anywhere. There have been many more deeply appreciated gifts too numerous to mention. When my mother was alive she and I used to give each other plants all the time. The one snag about this was that she gardened in limestone and I have acid soil which limited us somewhat.

Newspapers regularly offer plants for sale and I occasionally buy them. The one disadvantage is they're always terribly small and are sold in 9 centimetre pots. I worked in imperial measurements for many years before I became familiar with the metric system so I still stupidly think of 9 centimetres as 9 inches. 9 centimetres are actually less than 4 inches. Not big. The plants are usually what Christopher Lloyd used to describe as 'squinky little runts'. A hydrangea in a 4 inch pot takes a long time to mature but even perennials in the same pot size are mere youngsters and need a lot of looking after before they can be planted into the garden.

Then we come to the acquisition of rhododendrons. Very important that is. About half of the rhododendrons in the garden, and that includes nearly all

the ones that are species, came from Glendoick Gardens in Perthshire. Admittedly their plants were small and up to ten of them could be packed into a box less than a metre square. However growth was rapid and after ten or twelve years of buying them I had to ask Glendoick to stop sending me their catalogue in hospital recovering from a heart attack and, rather than go home in the gap between afternoon and evening visiting times, I decided to visit John's nursery. He pointed out that, as it was July, there were no rhododendrons in bloom. I knew that but I feel perfectly happy with rhododendron foliage and I spent two fairly pleasant hours, under the circumstances, just talking about them. A significant feature of rhododendron lovers is that they also love to talk about their plants. Since then I have bought several of John's rhododendrons; they're much bigger than the Glendoick ones and are usually in bloom which is pleasing. John has semi-retired now and unfortunately I cannot think of any other nurseries specialising in rhododendrons in the province. Anyway I DO NOT NEED ANY MORE RHODODENDRONS.

Mail order roses are fairly satisfactory although they do not perform here as well as rhododendrons. Roses come bare-rooted which makes carriage cheaper and are pruned and ready to plant in late autumn or winter. Having run out of garden space in recent years I've been growing climbers against old farm buildings in the yard. A hole is dug out in the gravel using a pick, filled with goodies that roses love including *Root Grow* mycorrhizal fungi and then the roses are planted in it. So far they've thrived except for a 'New Dawn' growing against a gloomy north-facing wall. I think I'll move it this autumn.

All bulbs are bought from mail order catalogues. Ordering them is an enjoyable occupation but this year I have cut down drastically on the numbers I usually buy. This is because they've become so very expensive even at supposedly wholesale prices.

I've always found plant sales at gardens open to the public a rich source of unusual plants. Hiding in the plant stall among commoners like *Alchemilla mollis* and *Geranium endressii* can be rarities which the donor is happy to share. That is how I found *Peucedanum ostruthium* 'Daphnis', an attractive ground elder relation with variegated leaves but no bad habits, a striking brown and orange-yellow striped daylily and a vivid blue *Linaria*. There are talented people who take great pride in growing unusual plants from seed to stock plant stalls for organisations such as the IGPS, the Alpine Garden Society and the National Trust's Ulster Garden's Scheme.



## *Visiting Roy Lancaster's Garden – A Plantsman's Paradise by Seamus O'Brien*

Over the years, the English plantsman, broadcaster and botanical explorer, Roy Lancaster, has been a regular visitor to Ireland, particularly through his consultancy work in Co. Kerry. In the 1970s Hillier's began supplying plants to the grounds at Dunloe Castle and to Ard na Sidhe near Killorglin, all choice species, chosen by the late Sir Harold Hillier and Roy Lancaster (then based at Hillier's Nursery in Hampshire).

Both of the Kerry gardens already contained historic collections, though were desperately in need of rejuvenation. Ard na Sidhe ("the Hill of the Fairies"), the lesser-known of the two, was the work of Lady Edith Gordon, who built a fine manor house of warm brown Kerry sandstone in 1913 and surrounded it with 32 acres of lush gardens that sweep down to the shores of Caragh Lake. The medieval keep at Dunloe saw many owners over the centuries and it too, has benefited enormously from a wide range of carefully selected tender species of trees, shrubs and herbaceous material now nicely maturing. Dunloe is a superbly sheltered site and several trees, previously untried for hardiness in Europe succeeded here, the best known example being the Taiwanese endemic, *Eriobotrya deflexa*.

An expert on China, her plants, people, culture and history, Roy was one of the very first Western horticulturists to visit China when that country finally reopened to Western travellers in the 1980s. There, he became a frequent visitor, discovering several new species such as his namesake, the lovely *Hypericum lancasteri* from Yunnan and sending back copious amounts of seeds of many rare plants that we now enjoy in the gardens of Britain and Ireland. His travels in China resulted in his opus magnum *Travels in China – A Plantsman's Paradise*, nowadays regarded as the finest guide to 20<sup>th</sup> century plant exploration in China. In 1996, prior to my own first expedition to Western China, this book was to become a vital reference and was constantly consulted before we set off to explore mountains botanised by Delavay, Forrest, Kingdon Ward and Rock. I still use it on a very regular basis and no doubt it will be recognised as a classic in the years to come.

It was with great delight then, that I accepted an invitation from Roy and his wife Sue, to visit their garden in Hampshire. Roy was on a visit to lecture in Waterford, and was staying on the Tourin Estate near Cappoquin. I was also based there for the weekend and it was over dinner Roy suggested I should come see his garden the next time I was in England. Earlier this year, in mid-March, while most of England was being blasted by snow storms, I had to travel to both Oxford and to Castle Howard in Yorkshire to deliver lectures; it was while staying in Oxford, I travelled down to Hampshire for a day-long visit to the Lancaster's garden during a brief respite from the appalling spring weather.

Chandler's Ford is a quiet leafy suburb near Southampton and Roy's garden is a short drive from the suburb's centre. A gravelled drive leads to a solidly-built, red brick, late Victorian (1896) house where Roy and Sue have lived since 1982. The garden covers just one-third of an acre and despite its size it features two different soil types. The smaller front garden lies on acidic Bagshot sand over gravel, meaning it is extremely free draining and perfect for plants that demand good drainage. The larger back garden, on the other hand, is London Clay, providing good growing conditions for a wide range of plants. The site is extremely well sheltered and the house walls provide additional opportunities for a range of climbers and wall shrubs.

Many of the plants growing here have been raised from Roy's own collections and it was of little surprise that Chinese plants dominated. For example, in the front garden, pinned against the north-facing wall of the house are numerous extremely rare shrubs and climbers. The most exciting of these had to be the Mount Omei laurel, *Aucuba omeiensis*, a large shrub or small tree to 6 m (20 ft.) tall with bold, leathery, deeply serrated elliptic leaves over 30 cm (1 ft.) long. Planted at Chandler's Ford in 1983, *Lancaster 614* was collected in 1980 on the steep mid forested slopes of Mount Omei, the famous Buddhist mountain and sanctuary in western Sichuan province. E. H. Wilson found it there in October 1903 (*Veitch Expedition No. 3701*) and it was also collected by the Glasnevin Central China Expedition in September 2002. There it grew near the Xianfeng Monastery on a shady north-facing slope with *Aspidistra* species, forming large 7 m (23 ft.) tall shrubs. In China, at Leshan, it is trained into handsome single stemmed street trees. It is currently available for staggering sums from a single nursery in Wales.

Nearby, another little-known Mount Omei (or Emei Shan as it is known nowadays) collection, is the spectacular *Schizophragma megalocarpum*, a climbing *Hydrangea* relative, bearing enormous flat-topped terminal cymes of tiny white blossoms surrounded by long-stalked petal-like enlarged sepals.

The collection of *Mahonia* in this garden is certainly one of the largest in Europe, over seventy species from around the world, many not found elsewhere in Britain and Ireland. Not far from the Mount Omei laurel, pinned against the same north-facing wall, was one of the best of these, *Mahonia russellii*, named after its discoverer, the late James Russell, Curator of the plant collection at Castle Howard in Yorkshire. Russell found it in Veracruz in Mexico in 1984, where it formed 2 m (6.5 ft.) tall shrubs bearing slender panicles of cream-coloured blossoms with pink-tinged sepals. The small bead-like, bloomy-black fruits are strung along long slender panicles giving a second season of interest. Planted in 1991, Roy's plant is a cutting from Russell's original seedling at the Savill Garden, Windsor.

The aptly named *Mahonia nitens* was first found by E. H. Wilson, on red sandstone cliffs on Hongya Xian (Hungya Hsien of Wilson) in western Sichuan in September 1908, while he was collecting for the Arnold Arboretum near Boston. Wilson however didn't introduce it, and so it remained only as dusty dried specimens in various herbaria worldwide until Lancaster's friend, the Japanese plant hunter Mikinori Ogisu collected seeds from Wilson's type locality in October 1994. Roy's plant, from the original collection is now 1.3 m (4 ft) tall and carries handsome, glossy leaves up to 44 cm (17 in.) long, with 6-7 long pointed leaflets up to 12 cm (5 in.) long. In bud the erect flowering racemes are orange-red and altogether this plant has enormous horticultural potential. In the wild this species also grows with the purple-flowered *Mahonia gracilipes* (the best of the mahonias when well grown, Helen Dillon's plant is probably the best in Britain and Ireland) and hybridises with it. Another of Lancaster's October 1980 introductions from Mount Omei was *Mahonia eurybracteata* (syn. *Mahonia confusa*), a leggy shrub to 2m tall. Originally discovered in central China by Augustine Henry in the Antelope Glen near Yichang in the spring of 1887, much of the stock now in cultivation derives from the 1980 collection. In the Savill Gardens near Windsor this species hybridised with *Mahonia gracilipes* creating what's now known as *Mahonia* 'Savill Hybrids'. These form small lax-habited shrubs bearing upright, dense flowered racemes of blossoms which are red-tinted in bud. Here in Ireland there is a good example in Carmel Duignan's Shankill garden.

The most striking tree in the front garden is *Acer tegmentosum* 'White Tigress', a small tree with jade and white striated bark. The best of all the snakebark maples, Roy's tree is now about 8 m (26 ft.) tall and its winter effect rivals that of the best white-barked birches. Despite the early season *Lindera obtusiloba* gave a great show of bright yellow blossoms on naked stems. The charming little rock garden plant, *Veronica umbrosa* 'Georgia Blue' was one of Roy Lancaster's discoveries from the Republic of Georgia in 1979 and was also

introduced by him. In mid winter to late spring this pretty little speedwell is at its best, when it is smothered with mid-blue flowers above mounds of foliage that turn purple in cold weather.

For an avid collector of plants there is a good, solid overall design to the large back garden and this careful order and neat formality Roy attributes to Sue, who also takes an active role in the garden. From a paved area near the back of the house a flight of steps leads onto a formal rectangular lawn. Beyond here, a low hedge divides the lawned area, from a woodland-styled garden, the latter divided in two by a straight line of stepping stones, leading to a large greenhouse full of treasures. Not far from this greenhouse, a clipped box dome gives an air of formality, though with a difference; the plant here is not common box, but a Chinese species *Buxus bodinieri*, named for one of Roy's hero's, Emile-Marie Bodinier (1842-1901), the French missionary and plant collector.

The back, south-facing wall of the house obviously presents opportunities to grow sun-loving climbers and among the best here is the climbing honeysuckle, *Lonicera calcarata*. Planted in 1998, this plant is now over 8 m (26 ft.) tall and originated from seed collected by Mikinori Ogisu on Mount Omei. It is simply a gorgeous (though rampant) climber and bears its paired flowers in leaf axils in May and June. These change colour as the blossoms age, turning from white to apricot and orange. The Chinese honeysuckle makes a good wall companion with *Rosa brunoni* 'Betty Sherriff', another rampant and floriferous climber, raised from seeds collected by Mrs Betty Sherriff (wife of the Himalayan explorer Major George Sherriff) on the Tibet/Bhutan border in the 1940s. Another spectacular climber on this wall is the little-known *Holboellia brachyandra*. Native to northern Vietnam and adjacent Yunnan in south-west China, it was described as a new species in 1997. The white, pink-tinged blossoms of this species are the largest and most showy of this gorgeous group of climbers.

Near these climbers, grew one of my favourite shrubs, and like most of the plants in this garden, it is a rarity, seldom encountered elsewhere. *Escallonia resinosa* is native to Peru, though despite this exotic provenance it appears perfectly hardy, even surviving -18°C on the Wicklow/Kildare border during the polar winter of 2010. There is an old tree at Glasnevin (sadly damaged by heavy snow in the following cruel winter of 2011) and another young recently trained tree (propagated from the Dublin tree) at Kilmacurragh. Left to its own devices it will form a large gangly bush; far better to train it on a single stem.



Variouly known as the 'curry tree' or 'vindaloo tree', it is from its dead leaves that a curry-like aroma exudes and this is particularly good after a heavy downpour or on a misty, wet day. The Incas, apparently used its timber for building purposes.

In most of our gardens, our plants have a history, associations with people and stories behind them. This garden is full of all these elements. Take for example *Betula luminifera*; the tree here was raised from seed collected by Roy below the church and seminary in which the Abbé Armand David was based in Baoxing in present day Sichuan province in 1879. History comes to life in a garden like this one.

Many of these plants also serve as living reminders of historic botanical expeditions to various parts of the world. One of the most important of these was the 1981 Sino-British Expedition to China (SBEC), primarily to the Cangshan Range near Dali in north-west Yunnan. Earlier explored by P re Jean Marie Delavay and George Forrest, the British team, including Roy, were to tread, literally, in the footsteps of these great collectors. The Cangshan Range is home to an enormously diverse flora and from this now famous expedition Roy grows *Deutzia subulata*, a medium-sized shrub bearing rounded cymes of white blossoms. It was first described from material collected by the Austrian botanical collector Heinrich Freiherr von Handel-Mazzetti between Lijiang and Zhongdian (to the north of the Cangshan Range) in June 1915.

For a relatively young garden it comes as some surprise to learn that it contains champion trees. Perhaps the best of these is *Magnolia cylindrica*, a 12 m (39 ft.) tall tree introduced through wild-sourced seeds from the Shanghai Botanical Garden in 1984. Almost three decades on it is the British and Irish Champion. The white, pink-tinged blossoms appear on naked stems in April creating a magical display.

Another fantastic foliage tree near the *Magnolia* is *Nothaphoebe cavaleriei*, a rare member of the laurel family (Lauraceae). Very similar in appearance to the camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*), this tree potentially has the added bonus of being perfectly hardy across much of Britain and Ireland and it gives an exotic air to this Hampshire garden. Planted in 1996, it is fast approaching 7 m (23 ft.) tall. Several other laurel relatives thrive in this garden, including *Lindera praetermissa*, from India, Burma and Western China, and *Litsea japonica*, another fantastic foliage plant with much potential. While at the moment, good garden plants like these are restricted to the gardens of a few knowledgeable connoisseurs, it's hoped that some enterprising nursery firm could make them more widely available to keen gardeners.

Again, mahonias abound in this garden area, displaying the great diversity this genus offers in terms of flower, foliage and habit. One of these, *Mahonia* species Cox 6509 was collected by Peter Cox from Glendoick in Scotland on the Mekong-Salween divide in May 1994. In his recent *Seeds of Adventure* (2008) Peter Cox describes passing a group of Tibetan girls carrying buckets of this *Mahonia* to eat, and it was from these same fruits it was introduced to cultivation. An autumn flowered species, this is a really spectacular plant, particularly in regard to foliage, which in Roy Lancaster's opinion even surpasses that of *Mahonia lomariifolia*.

Among these mahonias Roy has planted a range of choice shrubs with bold architectural foliage, giving an exotic air to this well-stocked garden. One of these, *Aucuba chinensis* var. *angusta* (syn. *Aucuba himalaica* var. *dolichophylla*) forms a dense evergreen mound to 1.5 m (5 ft.) and bears narrow lance-shaped leaves speckled gold. One of its bed fellows includes the Himalayan *Schefflera rhododendrifolia*, a small tree with large, leathery palmate leaves, perhaps one of the most exotic foliage plants we can successfully grow out of doors in these Islands. Other little known trees nearby included the recently described *Parrotia subaequalis*, a small upright tree from China, with narrower leaves than the commonly encountered Persian ironwood, *Parrotia persica*. It also creates a far more dazzling display than the latter; leaves turning burgundy-purple in autumn.

The exotic theme is further carried on using Australian endemics like *Lomatia frazeri*, a small tree in the Protea family, bearing long, lance-shaped leaves and spidery-creamy flowers. This is the sort of tree that looks as though it should be under glass, rather than defying the snows of Hampshire. Coming from the mountainous parts of New South Wales and Victoria, *Grevillea victoriae* is equally at home and bore masses of red blossoms when I visited. The royal (or mountain) grevillea is rare in its native habitat and is perfectly hardy throughout most parts of Ireland.

Among the many rarities in a shaded part of the back garden, one plant that really caught my eye was *Kerria japonica* 'Albescens', the extremely rare white flowered form of this valuable spring flowered shrub. It forms a lower growing plant than the typical form but bears masses of extra-large white flowers. A single nursery in England supplies this lovely cultivar, so I was mightily pleased to see roots appearing on cuttings I brought home from Chandler's Ford. We spent an entire day exploring this garden and further explored Roy's library over a long, leisurely lunch as snow beat down outside the dining room window. Needless to say it was a real treat to see the garden of one of the world's greatest plantsmen.



The Lancaster back garden with clipped domes of *Buxus bodinieri*. The trunk of *Magnolia cylindrica*, the British & Irish Champion may be seen on the left.



# *The Irish Garden Plant Society*



***Rhododendron 'Grace Seabrook'*** courtesy of Martin Edwardes

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