

NORTHERN Leaves

Issue No. 53

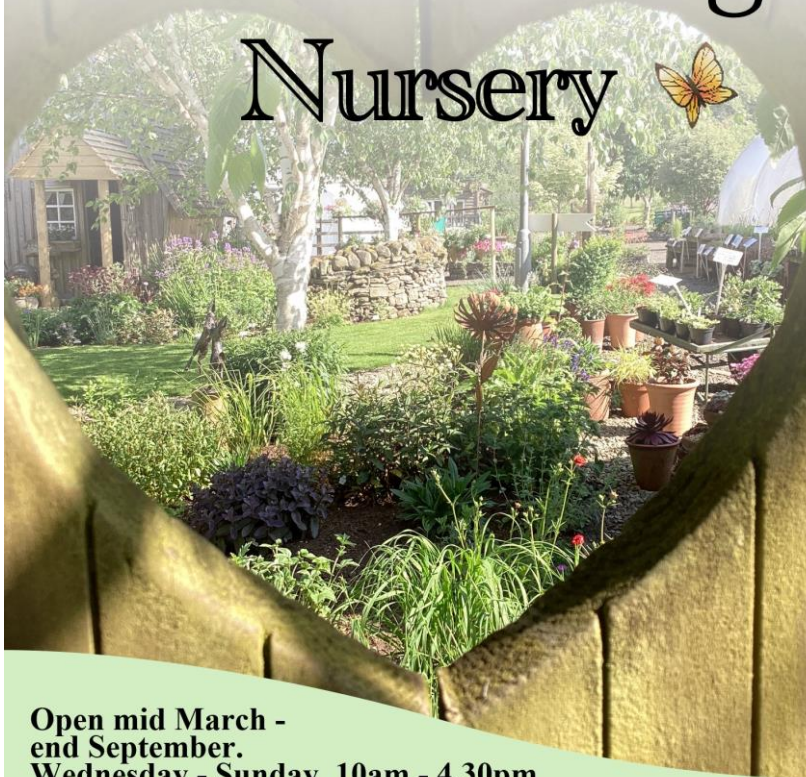
May 2024



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The Hardy Plant Society

The Hardy Plant Society was formed to foster interest in hardy herbaceous plants. It aims to give its members information about the wealth of both familiar and less well known plants and to ensure that all garden-worthy perennial plants remain in cultivation and have the widest possible distribution.

HPS website: www.hardy-plant.org.uk

The Scottish and Northern Borders Group has members all over Scotland and several in the north of England. The group organises garden visits in spring, summer and autumn, with lecture days in the winter, arranged at a variety of locations throughout Scotland. The group produces a magazine *Northern Leaves* in spring and autumn.

website: www.scothps.co.uk

The next issue of *Northern Leaves* will be published in November 2024, please send any articles to be included in this issue to **Chris Sanders**, 3 Queen Street, Helensburgh, G84 9QH
Tel. 01436 678028 e-mail: chrislinda298@gmail.com

It would be appreciated if members could set up standing orders or direct debits to pay their annual subscription promptly.

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We are grateful for the financial support of our advertisers and ask members to mention *Northern Leaves* when replying to advertisers by post or when visiting them to buy plants. Advertisers need to know that they are getting value for money from advertising in *Northern Leaves*.

Photographs on the covers

Front Cover: *Narcissus* 'Flower Record'
Back Cover: Rosewells, Fife

Hilary Bayley
Helen Ostrycharz

From the Convenor

It has been an honour to be chairman of the Group over the last year and I am happy to report that the Group is in a healthy position with a viable membership and a healthy bank balance. The membership has not yet recovered to its pre-covid highs, but I hope we can encourage more people to join, our meetings, apart from the horticultural interest are always a pleasant social occasion.

We had some disruption to the programme with a garden closure and the horrendous weather in October which prevented the Autumn Tints meeting at Drummond Castle Garden taking place with approach roads flooded trees down etc. The coming year has an interesting programme, and we are maintaining our June garden visit tour which remains a popular event. Pass on the word to your gardening friends.

I would like to thank the committee for all their work during the year, we have a number of new members, a healthy sign and they are working hard to ensure the Group can move confidently into the future. Especial thanks to Hilary Bayley as vice-chair, Christina McLachlan our veteran and hardworking secretary and our new treasurer, Elaine Ingram, who has picked up the reins. Hilary has taken over as chair and I wish her well.

Elaine was assisted in her task by the exemplary record keeping of the previous treasurer Colin Cutler. I would like to use this opportunity to thank Colin, not just for his service as treasurer over a long period but for his contribution to the Group as committee member, chairman and representative on the National Committee of the HPS. Colin has served the Group in one post or other for a 20-year period and has been invaluable in our continuing existence. Committee meetings without Colin's presence and comments have not been quite the same. His last activity for the Group was the Plant Sale last year which raised over £700 for funds as well as providing a good day out. We hope to see him in his "retirement" on future visits and events.

Andrew Holmes

Can you help, please?

Knowing that the group membership is geographically widespread and very knowledgeable, the committee would appreciate any help you could give in the following areas:

Gardens to visit

The geographical area covered by the group is enormous and we are not familiar with all the areas. Are there gardens in your area which you know to be lovely or interesting or quirky which you could tell us about? They may not be in the Yellow Book, they may be small or 'different' (or they could be yours!) but they could be the basis for a visit. If you know of any, please tell us. You will not be expected to organise a visit (unless you would like to!) but just the information would be valuable. Especially desirable would be gardens which might open in the latter part of the year, August onwards.

Venues for lecture days and AGM

In fairness to all our members, we want to use venues in different locations and, again, local knowledge can be a great help. It is better but not essential if the venues have reasonable parking space, a room which can be darkened for slides, are easy to get to (e.g. near good road access, public transport if possible) and catering can be included – also not too expensive!

Currently we need a venue for the lecture day/AGM in March 2026, ideally in the west of Scotland, possibly the eastern side of Glasgow. In September 2026, there is a plan that we will host the AGM for the National HPS. The venue needs to hold about 150, raked seating is preferred but not essential – probably not the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens – extortionately expensive!

Speakers

Please let us have suggestions for speakers which you have heard and enjoyed – or would like to hear!

Committee members

We will need 2 new committee members in March 2026. The meetings are 4 times a year, currently in Dunblane. They are friendly, entertaining and sociable with lunch being provided as well as a mileage allowance – and cake! You are welcome to come along as an observer and see if it would suit you. How can you resist?

We are asking for this help from you because, as members, you have in-depth and local knowledge and, we believe, a wish to see the group flourish.

Thank you.

Hilary Bailey

Cuttings from our Gardens

Dear Fellow Members

After this appalling winter, I have been astonished by the determination of plants to survive and flourish in unpleasant weather (and without moaning!). My garden seems to be doing rather well, despite being regularly flooded, and this led to me wondering how the gardens of others have been getting on. This in turn led to the thought of having a new topic in *Northern Leaves* which shared snippets of news about our gardens. It would be wonderful if some of you were to put pen to paper (and/or perhaps finger to camera button) to share your experiences such as highs and lows of your gardening year. I am not suggesting an article as such (unless you would like to, which would be lovely) but a paragraph or photograph about something which is doing particularly well or even an obituary on what gave up the will to live this winter! I have added some

notes on the current highs and lows in my garden. Please give your own experiences some thought and see what you can do this summer for the next *Northern Leaves*.

May your gardens flourish and be sheep free this summer! (see below)

My Highs and Lows



My photograph is of a daffodil I have in a pot beside the door. A non-gardening friend sent me a photo of a daffodil which she had seen in Moffat – did I know what it was as she would like to grow it? I said it was probably ‘Flower Record’ and no, she could not buy bulbs in May and no, it wasn’t a good idea to plant it in pots and then keep them in the cupboard under the stairs for the winter! Having negotiated these hazards, we are both delighted by our bulbs which are now in their second year and have had

practically no attention, mine having been abandoned behind the shed for the summer but now brought to the door to give me great pleasure.

My downside of the year so far is my neighbour’s sheep which are totally inadequately fenced in and think that my garden is an all you can eat buffet. The main back garden is well fenced but the front is open plan and mostly trees and grass. There is a very wet patch which I have been developing into a bog garden with irises and camassias relocated from the back. There are also some plants I acquired from Colin’s plant sale last summer and all were doing rather nicely until SHEEP ATTACK. What they didn’t eat, they trampled and after futile attempts to chase them away, we have had to put up a temporary fence across the road which is very inconvenient as it has to be demolished to let our cars in and out and the postman is getting grumpy. We are definitely developing a siege mentality while trying not to fall out with neighbours. Barbequed lamb anyone?

Hilary Bailey



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Seen at Beeches Cottage Nursery 3rd May 2024



Gatlawbridge Garden Walk – 9th June 2024

The village of Gatlawbridge holds a Garden Walk every second year. This year we hope to have ten gardens open to visitors.

Large and small, each garden is quite different from the next, which adds to the pleasure of walking from one to the other.

Patios, ponds and a polytunnel, a wild flower meadow, veg gardens and traditional borders, we have them all.

The whole village is no more than a mile from one end to the other, on a very quiet back road, two miles from the small town of Thornhill on the A76.

Entry, including car parking in a field, is £8.00 per person, children free. 12.00 - 5.00pm.

Teas are provided by the Marie Curie fundraising committee, included in the ticket price.

Clare Melinsky

Pictures from some of the Gatelawbridge gardens, I took on our visit in May 2023

Chris Sanders



Garden Challenges – Dry Shade

An often challenging garden area is dry shade, be it under trees, against a wall or even a shaded banking. The ground is often shallow, lacking in nutrients and water and of course lacking in sunlight, especially if north or east facing. Often it is not possible to dig in organic matter due to wall foundations or tree roots so in some cases plants have to cope with shade, poor soil and shallow root space. But there are plants that will grow in these conditions and indeed will thrive, providing colour and ground cover all year round.



This is a shady banking at the nursery, under trees and very dry unless it rains heavily.

Before planting consider removing some of the lower branches of trees to heighten the canopy and let in some light. Also dig in as much organic matter as you can to enrich and add moisture to the soil. This will give the plants the best chance to thrive.

After the hard work comes the fun part: choosing plants that will brighten up your shady area. The space you have dictates the size of plants you choose and how many. I have put together a list of plants that will grow in

dry shade, under trees, walls or on shady bankings. As always, I have suggested tough plants that will cope with our Scottish garden conditions.

The genus *Epimedium*, one of the best perennials for shade and one of my favourite plants is a must for shady borders. Not only do they have lovely little flowers in spring, quite often the new spring foliage is colourful and they have great autumn colour, so a good all round plant. They aren't invasive but form good ground cover over time. Inter-planted with small bulbs they provide year round interest.



Epimedium 'Pink Elf'



Epimedium pinnatum ssp.
colchicum



Epimedium grandiflorum 'Nanum'



Epimedium 'Lilafee'

Other plants that will tolerate dry shade and give you colour include *Valerian officinalis*, a tall perennial with pink scented flowers. It can seed around but I think that's a good thing if you have a tricky garden area. The seedlings are easily pulled out if not wanted. Valerian is a herb that has medicinal uses.

Brunnera is another great genus for shady areas and will tolerate dry shade. They mainly have vivid blue flowers and are often referred to as perennial Forget-me-Nots. As well as *B. macrophylla* there are numerous striking cultivars with veined and marbled leaves. Most commonly found are *B.* 'Jack Frost', *B.* 'Emerald Mist' and 'Blaukuppel'. They will flower over many weeks and are well worth growing in the garden.



Valerian officinalis



Brunnera 'Jack Frost'



Deschampsia cespitosa

As well as perennials some grasses will cope with dry shade. *Deschampsia* and its cultivars will do well. Clump forming with arching flower stems, they are hardy and occur naturally in woodland and meadows. They look lovely when the sun catches the fine flowers in dappled shade. *Luzula sylvatica*, a native, known as 'Woodrush', is a lower growing grass with

broad strap like leaves. It is great for ground cover or holding a banking together. Brown flowers appear from May to late June.

There is a small selection of ferns that will grow in this situation.

Dryopteris and *Polypodium* species and cultivars will give all year round leaf form. I like *Polypodiums* or *Polypody*, especially the more interestingly leaved forms. They are a native and you quite often see them growing up trees, clinging to the branches with their roots or on

walls. They are evergreen, low growing and hardy, forming carpets of ground cover. *Dryopteris affinis* is partially evergreen and *D. felix-mas* which is deciduous, both will do well in dry shade. Both are hardy and do well in exposed gardens.



Polypodium vulgare

Rona Dodds



Foxgloves also do well in dry shady places, again often seeding around.

Plant List

Perennials

Ajuga
Alchemilla mollis
Anemone japonica
Anemone nemerosa
Aqueligia
Aster divaricatus
Astrantia
Bergenia
Brunnera
Convallaria
Dicentra bachanal
Dicentra spectabilis
Digitalis
Epimedium
Euphorbia amygdaloides var robbiae
Geranium cantabrigiense vars
Geranium phaeum vars
Geranium nodosum
Geranium macrorrhizum vars
Iris foetidissima
Lamium maculatum vars
Liriope
Lunaria annua
Omphalodes
Pulmonaria
Tellima
Tiarella
Vinca

Grasses

Deschampsia
Luzula nivea
Luzula sylvatica

Ferns

Dryopteris
Polypodium vulgare

Bulbs

Galanthus

Shrubs

Mahonia aquifolium

LECTURE DAY
Auchterarder Church Centre
11th November 2023

Creating a Country Garden – Gardening through the year at Cleish
Margaret Kilpatrick

Margaret is a very enthusiastic amateur gardener who moved to Cleish near Kinross. One of the attractions of this particular property was the blank canvas of a two-acre field with a newly planted woodland windbreak. This was the start of the creation of a garden from a field and its development has been a labour of love for over nearly 30 years.



Margaret and her husband moved out of Edinburgh to Cleish in 1994.

The existing garden surrounding the house was small and consisted of a few trees, rhododendrons and shrubs but Margaret had big plans! Along with the house came a two-acre field which had along one boundary, a newly planted, mixed woodland windbreak. The rest of the field was down to grass with a small burn running through the grounds. Prior to doing any gardening work, an old cottage adjacent to the main house was extensively renovated to house ride-on mowers, tools and potting shed. Outside this building, an initial planting of roses was carried out, but as in all gardens this planting was changed when Margaret found out how windy the whole site was, open to the south westerly and easterly winds. Attention was then given to the main field. Firstly, a large pond was dug out (using a tracked digger). The pond was graded out with a deep central pit of approximately four feet deep grading out and shelved to allow marginal aquatics to thrive at the edge whilst the deep part of the pond would allow any pond inhabitants to overwinter safely. A mixed species hedge was planted on the boundary opposite the windbreak woodland to

give more shelter to the site. Island conifer and heather beds were then formed and, as Margaret's talk continued, the growth and development of these beds was clear to see and it was very interesting to see with time lapse effect photos how a large garden can change over the years. It was heartening to hear that the development had continued and the garden was (as all gardens are) forever changing.

Margaret told us that one of her favourite views of the garden was from an upstairs bedroom window and when she was deciding on where to do some more planting that's where she would look out from. In her design planning she also took in the 'borrowed' landscape of the adjoining Cleish Hills and made the surrounding views a part of the overall garden vista. That's a good idea to follow and can visually increase the size of the tiniest of gardens.

All in all, a very interesting talk and an object lesson to us all on how a large garden can develop.

Colin & Lucy Ainsworth

Project PLANTS: Plant Listing for the National Trust for Scotland
Dr Colin McDowall, PLANTS Project Manager, NTS

The second speaker of the day was Dr Colin McDowall who is working for the National Trust for Scotland on a project known as Project Plants. This project is cataloguing the Trust's plant collection at its 39 gardens and to do this has a budget of £1m.



He briefly outlined his background, starting with growing vegetables at the age of seven and a love of horticulture has been blossoming since. When not monitoring the audit schedule he is also a professional gardener and the last few years has worked on a private estate in the Borders (and Yes, I asked and No we can't visit).

The project began in June 2022 and runs until March 2025. There are three regionally based teams that are undertaking an inventory of plants in the gardens and updating the data held in their plant record data base. From May to September the team are auditing the gardens, October to May doing data processing and February to May site revisits. A plant location reference will be given to each plant. I believe he said there are 4413 cultivars, 3515 species and 32430 plants across 13 gardens.

Each garden has a unique story and very different ways of recording their collections and the project recognises the curators and custodians behind the gardens: he instanced the Rentons at Branklyn Gardens, Osgood Mackenzie at Inverewe and E A Hornel and his sister Tizzie at Broughton House. He believed the oldest plant recorded is *Rosa Scharlachglut* planted at Falkirk in 1921. Some very rare discoveries have also been made.

A very interesting project with lots of plant and human discoveries already made and if you want to follow it in more detail there is a Blog which can be followed on the Trust's website.

Marjorie Allen

Botanical Travels in Search of Plants in Wild Places – plant hunting in the Sino-Himalaya

Willie Campbell

Willie Campbell, who is well-known to the Society, was Head Gardener at Gargunnoch Estate (scene of a well-remembered HPS visit and plant sale) for many years and remains as the go-to person for knowledge of rhododendrons and associated Sino-Himalayan plants. Willie's talk covered trips to the region between 2009 and 2016 in Szechuan, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Willie started with his 2009 trip to the Wawu Shan mountain in Szechuan, a Chinese province with 46000 plant species compared to the



12000 found in Scotland. The Wawu Shan is a huge tabletop mountain with access by cable car rising over 3500 metres above sea level and home to over 40 species of rhododendron. A protected area, there is a 10km path circuit of the summit and Willie showed the amazing range of plants to be found with 40 species of rhododendrons including epiphytes.



Rh. strigillosum

strigillosum, which flowers in its native area in May while cultivars in Scotland flower in March as well as various *Pterocarya* species.

Willie then moved on to the Black Bamboo area of Szechuan, an area noted for its humidity and host to a huge range of associated plants. A feature of the trip was the groups drivers' regular stops for smoking breaks and the subsequent roadside botanising opportunities. Willie showed some fascinating pictures of roadside plants with sorbus and arisaema varieties, pleone and the striking *Lonicera subaequalis*. From the area Willie showed pictures of the beautiful, red-flowered *Rhododendron*

A further area visited in Szechuan, the Gongga Shan mountains, the highest outside the Himalaya, allowed alpine hunting at 3800 metres, with a wide range of primula and meconopsis, in flower before grazing yak arrived from the valleys.

Willie next showed pictures of Arunachal Pradesh in the Indian Himalaya region, an area with little exploration by plant hunters with an impressive range of arisaema varieties and *Rhododendron cinnabarinum*, a species which grows well in Scotland and carries yellow to cinnabar red flowers.

Next up was a 2016 trip to Sikkim, a land of giant rhododendron with *Rh. falconeri* and *Rh. hodgsonii* as well as the endemic *Rh. niveum*. Again, arisaema in profusion causing your correspondent to weigh up their survival chances in Highland Perthshire.

The last trip reported was a seed hunting trip to Szechuan in 2012 before the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol. Some beautiful pictures of alpiners including the rare and unusual *Gentiana melandrifolia*, banks of cassiope and again a profusion of rhododendron, a fitting end to a hugely enjoyable and informative presentation.

Andrew Holmes

Zoom Talk by Samantha Hopes on 25th January 2024 Ashwood Specialities in the Garden

On the 25th January 2024, Scottish and Northern Borders Group members and guests from other HPS groups were treated to a fascinating talk by Samantha Hopes. If the name seemed familiar, this was because around the same time last year we enjoyed a talk from Samantha's husband, Nigel, on the subject of 'A Year in John's Garden' – the John in question being John Massey of Ashwood Nurseries. Samantha's talk was entitled 'Ashwood Specialities in the Garden' so we were keeping it all in the family.



Samantha initially trained and worked as a geologist but following her growing interest in plants, she became a student at Birmingham Botanical Gardens, studying at Pershore College in the evenings. The following year her training moved her on to the RHS Garden at Wisley, where she specialised in rock and alpine plants. While there, she also did work experience at Kew and Great Dixter.

After graduating she went to work alongside John Massey at Ashwood Nurseries, looking after his hepatica collection. This became one of her passions, alongside a new breeding program with roscoes. Alongside her

husband Nigel, she has thrown herself into creating their own garden at home, propagating and growing a range of unusual plants and caring for a National Plant Collection of *roscoea*.

Samantha's plan for the talk was to discuss some of Ashwood Nurseries' specialities, with a focus on hellebores and hepaticas, looking at the range of plants available, the best companion plants to use alongside and how best to cultivate and care for them.

She gave a short timeline of John Massey's development of Ashwood Nurseries. He started with conifers which he believes to be the backbone of the garden. There were slides of beauties such as *Abies koreana* 'Kohouts Icebreaker' and *Pinus mugo* 'Carstens Wintergold', which grows to five feet in ten years and has better colour the colder it is! Pines are grown as a backdrop and species alpines are integrated among the conifers along with dwarf euonymus and acers.

In 1975, John began to focus on lewisia, plants which are tolerant of cold but which need very good drainage which can be helped by planting them on their side. John won his first Chelsea gold with the hybrid 'Ashwood Carousel'.



In 1989 came the hellebores, initially grown as a winter crop to retain staff and keep their loyalty. From this start, the world renowned Ashwood Garden Hybrids were developed and there is now an extensive and glorious choice available on the Ashwood website.



Hellebores are extremely valuable at this time of year as they appear so early and have flowers which last a long time because the ‘petals’ are in fact sepals protecting the nectaries and remaining on the plant until the seeds are ripe.

Dark flowered hellebores are particularly suited to a mixed planting including cyclamen coum or snowdrops and possibly glaucous dwarf conifers. Hellebores do not like waterlogged ground and are therefore suited to a sloping area. They should be mulched and fed in the summer.

Other Ashwood favourites are hydrangeas. Macrophylla hydrangeas are red on alkaline soil and blue on acid – they are therefore a great soil testing kit! A particular favourite at Ashwood is *Hydrangea paniculata* ‘Phantom’ which is good for frost pockets as it flowers on the current

season's wood. After planting, leave for three years and then cut back to one foot.

As suggested previously, *Cyclamen coum* are attractive combined with hellebores but, at the other end of summer *Cyclamen hederifolium* 'White Clouds' with silver and green patterned foliage and also 'Lysander', found in the wild near Sparta, are lovely plants although, unless sheltered, the flowers can become frost damaged. In which case, *Cyclamen hederifolium ssp crassifolium*, with fleshier leaves and a shiny surface may be a better choice as they are probably more robust. Care should be taken to keep *Cyclamen coum* and *hederifolium* separate as *hederifolium*, being more robust, can take over.



Ashwood Nurseries are world famous for their hepaticas, winning numerous awards with them including gold medals at Chelsea. The common hepatica, *Hepatica nobilis*, is generally white, pink or blue and flourishes at the edge of a deciduous wood at Ashwood. They flower in February and March and prefer a sloping site for good drainage. They also benefit from spring sunshine but must be protected from hot summer sun.

A cultivar of *Hepatica nobilis* is *Hepatica* ‘Stained Glass’ which has beautiful leaves and is best grown in a sheltered position.

Hepatica transsilvanica is more like an anemone, it spreads, has bigger flowers and really enjoys the edge of the woodland garden at Ashwood. *Hepatica* x *media* are a result of a deliberate cross between *H. nobilis* and *H. transsilvanica* which has produced excellent hardy hybrids with nice full flowers, one example of which is *H. ‘Ballardii’*.

Hepatica maxima has the largest foliage and must be grown in shade. *Hepatica schlyteri* is a cross between *H. maxima* and *H. nobilis* which combines the best of its parents, lush foliage and big blue flowers. It has hardy hybrid vigour but is perhaps best grown under glass.

Hepatica ‘Millstream Merlin’ is thought to be a cross between *H. transsilvanica* and *H. americana*. It has long lasting flowers which are irregularly semi-double.

As can be seen, there is a huge range of hepaticas to choose from and the hepatica greenhouse at Ashwood contains 2000 plants.

One of the favourite summer plants at Ashwood is the salvia, with macrophylla being a bit hardier. They should be planted late May after risk of frosts but as soon as possible so that they can get their roots well established before the winter – they will tolerate cold but not wet. Do not cut them back too early in the spring, leave until after Easter (although perhaps longer this year!).

Salvia jamensis ‘Moonlight over Ashwood’ has dark stems, creamy yellow flowers with a pink blush and golden leaves.

Having travelled around the garden and the seasons, we were at the beginning again with the first flowers of spring – galanthus. Samantha said that among the favourites at Ashwood were ‘John Gray’ and ‘Margaret Owen’, two of the bigger ones which team well with winter aconites and *Cyclamen coum* in the woodland conditions and with a backdrop provided by the structural conifers, both large and small.

The talk was very enjoyable with lots of lovely slides to cheer us up on a deepest January evening. There were lots to tempt us for spring planting but if the hepaticas tempted you then take a deep breath before ordering the more choice varieties – they are definitely budget challenging!

Thank you, Samantha.

Hilary Bailey

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Stirlingshire Snowdrop Day

21st February 2024

Gargunnoch House



We met up on a very grey and wet day in Stirlingshire for our Hardy Plant Society Scottish and Northern Borders Group's first outing of the year. Our first visit of the day was to look at the snowdrops at Gargunnoch Garden. The village of Gargunnoch sits on the south side of the Forth valley about six miles west of Stirling. Lying to the east of the village, the Gargunnoch Estate comprises 400

acres of flat farm land and 800 acres of grouse moor. Its house stands at the foot of the Gargunnoch Hills in five acres of mature parkland and woodland. This fine old house is approached along a long drive (the old military road) of imposing redwoods, firs, acers and some of the oldest and largest Spanish chestnuts we have ever seen. Our guide, Willie Campbell, who was head gardener at the gardens for nearly twenty years, informed us that these were original estate trees planted before the redwoods which themselves date from 1860. Willie, a great rhododendron enthusiast (President of The Rhododendron Society and active member of the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group), cared for and extended the notable collection of rhododendrons as well as many other choice shrubs and trees in the five-acre garden during his tenure there.



He and his team lifted snowdrops originally planted around the house, and split and planted them over the years down the drive to make the welcoming sight we see today. Early flowering rhododendrons such as *Rhododendron praecox* and *Rhododendron* 'Christmas Cheer' were also bravely flowering away. The drive opens up towards the house and we stopped to admire the ochre-painted Georgian frontage of the very much older Scottish tower house dating back to the 1600s. A line of *malus* trees have been planted in view of the house alongside a good stand of American deciduous azaleas. These have been underplanted with daffodils and must present a very pretty display in late spring.

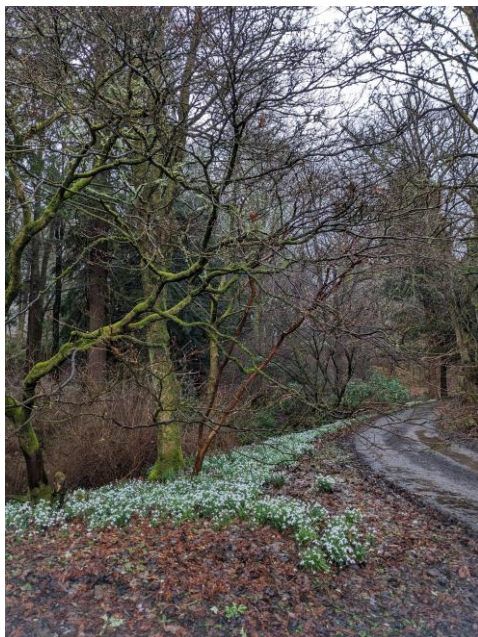


Along the drive, interspersed among the conifers and rhododendrons are some very fine acers which were planted by the last owner, the late Miss Viola Stirling. She was a keen plantswoman and on entering the garden itself, there were many more choice plants to be seen. The house dining room looked down over the semi-formal garden which merged into the woodland plantings. Magnolias, camellias and osmanthus mixed through rhododendrons and the attractive flaking bark of a *Stewartia pseudocamellia* caught the eye. Of course we were there too early to see

them in bloom however there were some nice large snowdrops and some fancy hellebores for spring interest. A casualty of Storm Arwen, a huge copper beech lay across our path, its removal I would think, presenting a huge problem for the gardening staff.

We then made our way along the driveway past the house's castellated doocot, down to the walled garden, dating 1750/60 built by the then owners, the Campbell family. As is the case with most old walled gardens, this one too was repurposed and Willie's last project was to plant up an arboretum there with the remaining ground being taken over by the charity

Green Routes which provides, through horticulture, education and work training for people with additional support needs. A worthy cause, they are training up around fifty young people.



The garden, well-known for its large rhododendron collection is open under the Scotland's Garden Scheme and is open, by arrangement, between 1 February – 30 September.

Text and photographs: *Elspeth Mackintosh*

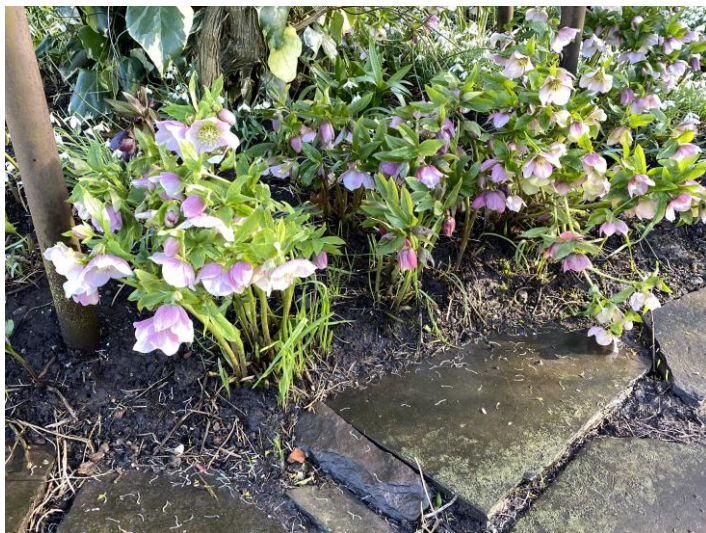
Thorntree, Arnprior

After a morning of mixed weather fortunes – heavy rain, light rain, gloomy skies, sunny skies and, amazingly, a series of wonderful rainbows – our day in Stirlingshire developed into an afternoon of brilliant sunshine and blue skies with striking cloud formations. When we arrived, after a steep uphill drive, at Thorntree garden, we were greeted with yet another offering from the weather gods, a high wind of considerable force and chilliness.



As we stood around chatting while Hardy Planters trickled in from their lunches in various local hostelrys, it was sometimes quite difficult to recognise a friendly face behind layers of padded waterproof! So it was a relief when we finally assembled as a group in the shelter of the barn to meet our hostess Carol Seymour, who regaled us with her lively and informative account of her and her husband's life there since they took over the property in 1991. Aided on their way by friendly and highly efficient architects and joiners, garden volunteers, well-stocked nurseries, and a local source of mushroom compost (highly recommended!) they reached the present garden and building layout – a very attractive L-shaped range of low white buildings and an equally attractive garden layout round about it, with its hilltop site affording a fantastic view ranging from Ben Lomond round to Doune and the Stirling Plain. The distant high peaks were striking against the multi-coloured clouds with blue skies stretching above.

The garden is a delight – beds of gleaming snowdrops, interspersed with bright yellow aconites and hellebores of various colours and sizes, all of them immaculate and clearly happy in their hilltop climate. Bushes and trees provide contrasts of size and texture, most of them showing well-developed buds with the promise of leaf, flower and fruit in the spring and summer to come (we hope!).



And, happily for Hardy Planters, a very comprehensive range of young plants for sale, including pots of snowdrops in the green. Needless to say, our members took full advantage.

Carol and her helpers sent us on our way fortified by hot drinks and yummy home-made chocolate goodies. Despite the unfriendly gale, it was an afternoon of good chat and good cheer, and beautiful flowers.

Text and photographs: *Brenda White*

a double Haiku for spring

daffodil dancers
yellow bonnets and green gowns
in the Spring sunshine.

just one day later
slate grey sky air still and chill
first day of April!

May Howie

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Carnegie Conference Centre Dunfermline

16th March 2024

Blue is the colour (well mostly) – the big blue poppies and autumn gentians

Gavin McNaughton of Macplants

Gavin McNaughton's mum Beryl has been a member of the HPS for many years and has hosted our group at Macplants Nursery. The lecture covered two groups of blue flowers meconopsis and autumn flowering gentians.

Meconopsis

There are 7 – 80 species of meconopsis, the true blue poppy. They were collected in China and the Himalayas. Seed was sent to Britain in 1900. Seed which reached Scotland germinated and grew well in the west of Scotland. Over the years the poppies have hybridised. In 1998 the Meconopsis Group,



including Beryl, started to organise the nomenclature and classification; more information is available on www.meconopsis.org

The species sub groups are: Sherriff, Fertile Blue, Infertile Blue.

Plants in the Sherriff group

Meconopsis ‘Dalemain’. This is a good robust big blue. It grows well in the west of Scotland and Cumbria. It needs fertile moist soil and will flower during May and June.

Other recommendations are ‘Huntfield’ and ‘Jimmy Bayne’.

Fertile Blue

These are widely available and popular; ‘Louise’ was recommended. ‘Lingholm’ group is popular and widely available.

Propagation is by division.

Infertile Blue

These form clumps and can be divided twice a year in early spring and autumn.

‘Barney’s Blue’ is very popular, the colour fades from purple to blue. ‘Mrs Jebb’ is a favourite and has been awarded an AGM.

Trials for these meconopsis were undertaken at the RHS Garden Harlow Carr and Edinburgh Botanic Gardens. A white meconopsis ‘Stewart Annand’ has an AGM and was recommended by Gavin. Gavin propagates these in autumn. The plants are kept in a shade tunnel over winter. They can tolerate cold and wet outside conditions.

Autumn flowering Gentians

Gentiana sino-ornata flower from October to early November. These plants have had a limited appeal because of late flowering and straggly growth. Gavins's father, a plant breeder, decided to tackle this problem using his expertise. The plan was to breed a gentian which would flower earlier, have a more compact form and more flowers.

A new variety 'Balmoral' met the criteria. It flowers in July the earliest of the new varieties. Other varieties followed: 'Iona' which is pale blue, 'Braemar' dark blue and 'Oban' which is white.

'The Caley' a blue gentian received an award from the Caley Society in 2008 and the George Forrest medal, so is very special.

Gentian trials were carried out in Holehird Gardens near Windermere in 2020. The trial lasted for three years. All the new Macplants gentians have been awarded AGM by the Royal Horticultural Society. This shows the amazing quality of the plants.

Gavin finished his talk by telling us how easy it is to grow autumn flowering gentians in a container. Here are the instructions: Cover the drainage hole with some crocks. Fill the container with a good multipurpose compost, plant your gentian and place on a sunny patio close to the house. Just wait for it to spread and flower like Gavin's pictures. Lots of gentians were purchased from Gavin to try out his instructions. I am looking forward to seeing the photographs.

This was a very interesting talk with lots of good tips. The photographs told the real story of the joy of these beautiful blue flowers.

Marjorie Anderson

Delightful, De-lovely, Deranged
Nancy Stevens



This was an entertaining and fascinating talk about plants from around the world to which one or more of these adjectives apply. There were too many examples to cover here but a few stood out. *Wisteria sinensis* ‘Lavender Lace’ (originally spelt ‘Wistaria’ to honour the 19th century physician Caspar Wistar), was first planted in 1894 in California, destroyed the house on which it grew and now covers one acre, has a million blooms and weighs 250 tonnes.

Similarly invasive is ‘Kudzu’ or

‘Japanese Arrowroot’, known as ‘The Vine That Ate The South’.

Introduced to try to mitigate the effects of soil erosion in ‘The Dust Bowl’ it now covers millions of acres in the southern US. A bug has been introduced to combat it but unfortunately the bug is also very partial to soya bean crops.

On a lighter note, the ‘Damask Rose’, grown in ‘The Valley of the Roses’ in Bulgaria, is a key ingredient of rose oil. The roses are picked in June in the early morning when the oil is at its most intense and pressed the same day. 3.5 tonnes of roses are needed to produce one kilo of rose oil. The oil has another very practical use, as a greasing agent in the space industry! For the romantics, the Japanese Iris is the main feature of the Suigo Itako Garden in Japan, where 1.5 million plants grow in a riverside park where brides are rowed through canals full of purple, yellow and white irises as part of the marriage ceremony.

At the other end of the scale, the national tree of Colombia, the Wax Palm, is the tallest in the world reaching 200 feet in height. These trees grow strongly in the Cocora Valley, and as well as being impressive have practical uses for animal feed, wax for candles and fronds for Palm Sunday.

The photographs illustrating the talk were excellent and we learnt that Nancy herself had taken many of these during her trips around the world. The Singapore Garden Festival in August this year is in her diary!

Patrick Callaghan

Return to Upton – Happy memories!

Coming across the report of the HPS Northern Group visit to Upton House at Edgehill in Warwickshire in June 2023 brought back happy memories of visits there in the early 1980s when my husband Colin and I lived near Warwick. Colin and I were friendly with the Head Gardener, Chris Smith, and his wife Mary at Upton House at the time. Chris and Colin had been fellow students of the Diploma course at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh previously. Chris and Mary lived in Bog Cottage, situated at the end of the Bog Garden on the Upton Estate. They occupied the upper level of the building, the lower, damper part, was used for storing garden implements etc.

On sunny summer evenings we would visit Upton. Mary and I would have a game of tennis while Chris and Colin played squash and then we'd get together for a much welcomed swim in the outdoor pool mentioned in Oliver's article.

On alternate weeks, Chris and Mary would meet up with us at the Warwickshire College of Agriculture at Moreton Morrell where the four of us would play badminton in the Royal or Real Tennis court in the village followed by a swim in the college outdoor pool. This pool was also used as a reservoir for the college.

Colin was employed as a Technician/Instructor in Horticulture at the college while I worked at the National Vegetable Research Institute in Wellesbourne on the fungal diseases of brassicas.

Lucy Ainsworth

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Visit to Fife 25th April 2024

South Flisk

We were given a warm (in every respect) welcome to South Flisk by Mr and Mrs Young on a cold and windy spring morning, when the woodburning stove and tea, coffee and delicious cakes were much appreciated.

South Flisk is a blacksmith's cottage, built in 1815 in the small village of Blebo Craigs, which runs along a south facing ridge about five miles from St Andrews. The development of the village and, as we found out, the form of the garden were both dominated by a series of large quarries from which building sandstone and roofing slate were extracted and sent to St Andrews in the 1800s. The house is perched on the edge of one large

flooded quarry, with two smaller ones lower down; the garden is woven amongst these with steep steps and paths connecting the different areas.



Julia Young told us that the derivation of South Flisk means ‘land hard to till’, however a minimalist Japanese garden was present in the 1960s. Since they came in the 1990s, they have developed it extensively. Rather than impose on the land they made a garden in and around the existing quarries and the mounds, hills and undulations formed by the spoil from the quarries, large piles of rocks

with decades of rotted leaves and decomposed material on top. They are much plagued by rabbits, deer, badgers and an otter which preys on the fish in the flooded quarry.

The quarry is now a picturesque small lake with a boat. It is a challenging site on which to create a garden and Julia owned up to falling in the lake more than once! Many old stone paths wound round the site with mature trees and spring flowers to delight the eye. Steep steps led down from the house into the lower garden past a grove of

shuttlecock ferns overlooked by a rather leonine ceramic Green Man, and a beautiful drift of brilliant white sanguinaria. Erythroniums and tulips abounded amongst the rhododendrons that were just starting to bloom. A large wooden puffin seemed surprisingly at home in this landscape. Below the flooded quarry a wet garden was under development which will be a lovely addition to the garden once it matures.



In complete contrast to the rest of the garden, on the south side of the house there was a traditional flower garden which was a lovely suntrap on this cold day. A *Magnolia stellata* in full bloom presided over beds of tulips.

Over the 30 years since the Youngs started they have created a garden that is full of interest and sits very comfortably in the landscape.

Chris Sanders and Helen Ostrycharz



Rosewells



Before the garden

We were welcomed by Brigitta MacDonald whose infectious enthusiasm for the garden was only matched by her impressive knowledge of plant names and varieties. She told us she had started her gardening as a child, given a small patch of ground to look after and

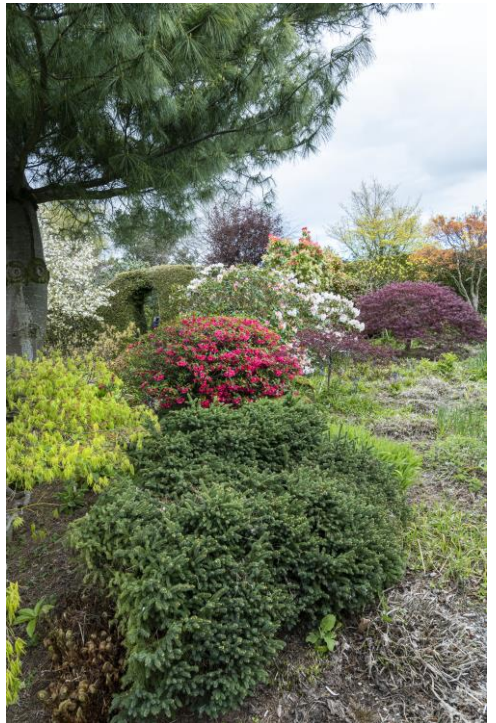
gardens got gradually bigger until, 25 years ago she started to convert this site, once a one-and-a-half acre paddock for Clydesdale horses. There are horseshoes still evident on one of the buildings.

Tables and chairs had been set out for us in various corners of the garden along with sweet treats to go with hot drinks so we could sit and drink in the beautiful blooms everywhere. One of the first plantings 25 years ago was a sequoia, now a substantial tree. There is a huge variety of texture and foliage in the trees and shrubs. On the ground, hellebores and trilliums mix with daffodils, narcissi, and tulips. Magnolias, azaleas and some rhododendrons were in full bloom, a magnificent display of colours and scents.



Horseshoes

Helen Ostrycharz



Sidelights into Garden History

I have been reading 'Man and the Natural World, changing attitudes in England 1500 – 1800' by Keith Thomas (Penguin 1984). This covers the transition between the assumption that all plants and animals were created specifically for the benefit of mankind, to the birth of the recognition that we are but one part of a complex web of life, that became established in the nineteenth century. However, the section on the development of gardening in England over this period contained some information that I found surprising and, in places, amusing; I quote some extracts below.

The spectacular growth between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries of domestic flower-cultivation is a social development that deserves far more attention than it has yet received and it reflects a shift in sensibilities similar to that reflected in the changing attitudes to trees and to animals. Of course flowers had been grown in the Middle Ages and their presence in embroidery, tapestry and illuminated manuscripts shows they were appreciated for their beauty as well as their herbal use.

By the Elizabethan period the 'garden of delight', as opposed to the mere vegetable- or herb-garden was a well-established luxury, the recognised source of what a Jacobean herbalist would call 'flowers of beauty and respect'.

Some sort of organised trade in flowers had existed since at least the thirteenth century. But the first recognisable commercial nurseries appeared in Tudor times, multiplied in the early seventeenth century and increased sharply in scale thereafter. In 1546 the Keeper of the King's garden was able to buy 3,000 red rose trees at 3s 4d a thousand, while in 1629 John Parkinson felt it necessary to warn his readers against knavish gardeners ('whereof the skirts of our towns are too pitifully pestered'), who give false names 'to deceive men and make them believe they were the finders out or great preservers of rarities, of no other purpose but to cheat men of their money'.

In the 1690s there were at least fifteen nurseries in the London area. Of these the largest concern, the Brompton Park nursery, contained in 1705

nearly ten million plants – ‘perhaps as much as all the nurseries of France put together’, thought a contemporary.

A parallel development was the emergence of the new profession of gardeners and landscape-improvers, in the eighteenth century often Scotsmen, offering advice to the Crown, aristocracy and gentry, prescribing new fashions like tailors and commanding correspondingly substantial fees. In 1683 the new gardener asked £80 per annum for looking after the grounds at Lyme Hall in Cheshire; he was beaten down to £60, equivalent to the income of a well-to-do clergyman. On Easter Day he appeared in a suit with gold buttons, “better worth than two of my best suits”, wryly commented his employer, Richard Legh. In 1764 a visitor to Thomas Mawe, head gardener to the Duke of Leeds, found him ‘so bepowdered and so bedaubed with gold lace’ that he thought he was in the presence of the Duke himself.

In 1760 it was estimated that the country contained ten garden-designers, a hundred and fifty noblemen’s gardeners, four hundred gentlemen’s gardeners, a hundred and fifty florists, twenty botanists and two hundred market gardeners.

More flower-gardening had gone on in the Middle Ages than is sometimes appreciated. But the repertoire seems to have been fairly limited, with a heavy concentration on roses, lilies, gillyflowers (pinks), cowslips, marigolds and violets. In 1500 there were perhaps 200 kinds of cultivated plants in England. Yet in 1839 the figure was put at 18,000. Nearly all our garden flowers arrived during the intervening years; in the sixteenth century tulips, hyacinths, anemones, crocuses; in the seventeenth michaelmas daises, lupins, phlox, Virginia creeper and golden rod; in the eighteenth sweet peas, dahlias, chrysanthemums and fuchsia. There were auriculars from the Pyrenees, fritillaries from France, lilies from Turkey, marigolds from Africa, nasturtiums from North America.

By the late seventeenth century flower-gardening (‘this lovely recreation’, as John Rea called it) extended far beyond the world of the rich and fashionable. There was ‘scarce a cottage in most parts of the southern

parts of England' declared in 1677, 'but hath its proportionable garden, so great a delight do most men take in it'.

Flowers had become more various with the growth of fashion. In 1629 Parkinson listed approximately 50 varieties of hyacinth, 70 carnations, 70 anemones and 140 tulips. Twenty years later John Evelyn was told by a French florist that there were no less than 10,000 different kinds of tulip. No other flower proliferated on such a scale. Even so, Richard Bradley thought in 1728 that there were nearly a thousand different sorts of gillyflower; and in 1777 Richard Weston's catalogue offered 208 anemones, 575 hyacinths, over 800 tulips and no less than 1,100 ranunculi. The rose, by contrast, though always conventionally regarded as the queen of flowers, does not seem to have become the object of intense experimentation till the end of the eighteenth century. In 1800 there were still fewer than a hundred varieties. But by 1826 there were 1393.

In 1770 a commentator thought that small tradesmen, weavers or the like usually won prizes at town flower shows, because perfect blooms needed constant attention and industrious artisans had the habit of regular application. Auriculars, tulips and pinks were to be found in their highest perfection in the gardens of the manufacturing class; one did not see such fine flowers in the gardens of the nobility and gentry because they depended upon hired servants, who took less care than those who tended the flowers for themselves. In the late eighteenth century the best pinks and auriculars were produced by the weavers of Spitalfields, Manchester and Paisley, while one of the first men in England to grow a magnolia from seed was a butcher at Barnes.

Flowers varied in social acceptability. Since the seventeenth century it had been recognised that the plants found in cottage gardens were the old-fashioned ones, lagging far behind sophisticated taste. In the 1820s it was taken for granted that pinks, roses and polyanthus went with cottages, whereas villas would aspire to geraniums, dahlias and clematis. The auricula was, like the tulip and the pink, a poor man's flower; and the honeysuckle was the poor man's shrub.

Yet even unpretentious flowers were an encouraging sight, for refinement and sensibility were associated with flowers of any kind. By the late eighteenth century flower-gardening had emerged as a means by which humble men could prove their respectability. Gardening, it was believed, had a civilizing effect on the labouring poor. It attached a man to his home and it spread a taste for neatness and elegance. Honeysuckle round a cottage door was not just picturesque, it was also a sign of the sobriety, industry and cleanliness of the inhabitants within. A greenhouse, thought William Cobbett, had a *moral* value.

In the 1860s ‘the love of flowers and a taste for gardening’ were seriously suggested as a means for reducing the high rate of illegitimacy in Cumbria; establishing a Cottagers’ Flower Show would raise the moral tone. It was ‘the spread of education amongst the working classes’, thought *The Gardeners Chronicle* in 1894, which had helped to cause the growth of the public taste for flowers’; and a Scottish clergyman remarked that on his visits to parishioners he had never had an unfriendly reception in a house which had a flowerpot in the window.

The garden was an infinite source of personal satisfaction. ‘From heavy hearts and doleful dumps, the garden chaseth quite’ sang an Elizabethan poet. This was partly because it provided the sedentary with much-needed exercise. ‘Gentlewomen’, observed a gardener in 1657, ‘if the ground be not too much wet may do themselves much good by kneeling upon a cushion and weeding’.

Chris Sanders

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