



The Journal

Spring/Summer 2024

Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland
Cumann Ríoga Gairneoireach na hÉireann

A Host of

Golden

Daffodils



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Note From The Chair



Spring is gathering pace and with it, a strong seasonal urge to get outside and garden. The RHSI is growing apace too, now with over 1650 members from all parts of the island forming a vibrant garden community. Many members volunteer at our gardens in Russborough, Marlay and Bellefield but there's plenty of entertainment online too with regular zoom talks and the brilliant bulletins from Orlaith every fortnight, not forgetting The Journal arriving in our homes, always a special moment in the RHSI year.

I've always loved the title of Thomas D Church's design book 'Gardens are for People' and as I write, I'm seeing images popping into my phone of some friends visiting a garden today in spring sunshine. Where better to meet up and share a common interest and some chat? I've made a resolution to visit more gardens this year and work my way through some more of our wonderful Partner Gardens – I hesitate to number them as it keeps increasing. Growing too are the crowds of people attending events and open weekends and joining trips and tours run by the RHSI. It's a real pleasure to see folk



arriving and enjoying themselves at the many events which you'll see listed in the centre of this journal.

Thank you to all the hard working and committed volunteers who make the activity possible, their work is outstanding – appreciated and enjoyed by us all. Particular thanks, in this context, to Peter and The Journal team for gathering, editing and publishing another great set of articles.

Will you join me and resolve to visit more gardens? I hope so, they're for people as well as bees after all!

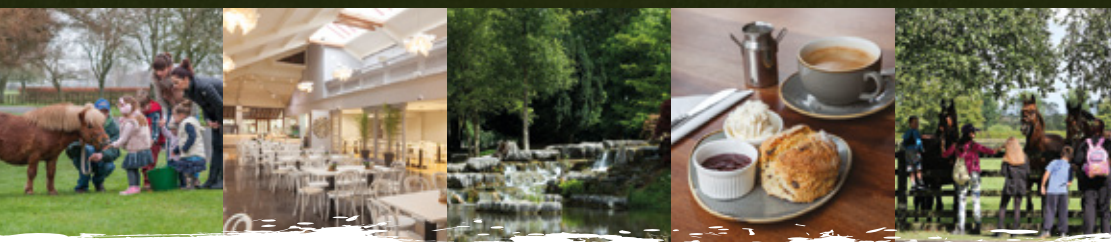
Finally, enclosed with this journal you'll find details of the forthcoming RHSI EGM including the motion on changing the name of the society, a summary of members' feedback and proxy voting forms. Please read all the information carefully and I'd encourage as many of you as possible to vote, either in person at the EGM or by proxy, so the result will be a true reflection of members' wishes.

Wishing you good gardening.
Philip
Chair, RHSI

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Note From The Editor



Spring has arrived and with it comes the beauty of many spring flowers including the beloved daffodil. The front cover shows some of the naturalised daffodils, many of them old varieties planted in the 1940's, in our side garden and brings to mind some of the lines from William Wordsworth's famous poem "I Wandered Lonely As A Cloud" in which he wrote "... a host of golden daffodils beneath the trees, fluttering and dancing in the breeze ...". Who amongst us cannot be moved both by the beauty of the flowers and the sentiment in the poem. I hope that many of you will be out in your gardens enjoying the better weather and seeing your own daffodils, and other spring beauties, in all their glory.

In this issue we continue to follow our aims of providing articles covering sustainability, gardens, gardeners, and reviews with a range of articles on pollinators, historic gardens, plant hunting experiences, and all our favourites – floral art, partner gardens, etc.

It is with sadness that I have to report that two members of the journal 'family' are retiring from their roles with the journal. Deborah Ballard has been writing for the journal for many years and her articles have been an inspiration to all our readers – her excellent material on



Editor confronts suspect
in the crocus thefts

the productive garden will be missed. Phil Last has provided many years of service dealing with the advertising element of the journal and her hard work and great experience in this important aspect of the production of the journal will be missed. I have no doubt that you will all like to take this opportunity with me to wish Deborah and Phil well in their retirement.

The production of the journal is a team effort and the excellent support and input from Mary, Noreen, Peggy, and Orlaith makes it all possible. I am pleased to be able to tell you that Astrid Coleman has agreed to join the journal 'family' and take over the role of gathering our advertising content.

Before I close, I have to note that the very cold weather in recent months here in Co Down led to a significant increase in wildlife visitors to the garden. Not only have we seen a larger number of birds we have seen increased visits from our resident pine martin, badger, fox and red squirrels. All are welcome, even the squirrels, notwithstanding their depredations on our crocus – such is life.

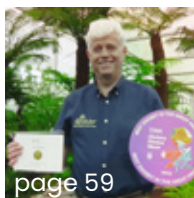
I wish you all good weather and good gardening – with my best wishes,
Peter
Editor, RHSI, *The Journal*



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The Journal

Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland
Cumann Ríoga Gairneoireach na hÉireann

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COVER PHOTO: Naturalised Daffodils at Ros Cuan –
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On Becoming Entomophilous

Mary Montaut

Most plants are in fact entomophilous – that is, they are insect-lovers. Of course, like all love affairs, they are often very particular about which insects they choose, and probably their favourite insects are pollinators and especially bees.

You may be surprised that I am talking about plants as if they make actual choices, and indeed I may be stretching a point there; but it is true that the varied forms of flowers which have evolved over the millennia seem to be specifically designed to attract particular pollinators. As many botanists have noted, plants are rooted to the spot and require the assistance of pollinators to maintain their genetic resilience through mating with other plants of the same species. This is why, although wind and water can also perform pollination (for instance for conifers) most flowering plants ‘choose’ insects, birds or other animals as pollinators. The figure is estimated to be 87.5% [1].

An excellent description of the job of a pollinator is given in Timothy Walker’s *‘Pollination: The Enduring Relationship Between Plant and Pollinator’* (2020). He lists the key responsibilities of the pollinator as “The safe and timely transport of pollen from the male reproductive structures on one plant to the female reproductive structures on another plant of the same species...” He also suggests various ways that the plant will pay a reward for the service with food (nectar and pollen), nesting sites and shelter for cold nights.

The ways in which flowering plants attract insect pollinators are highly

diverse. Some direct insects with ‘nectar guides’ – visual floral guides such as colored anthers, lines, dots, and UV-absorption patterns on petals – which can be seen by insects. These enhance the ‘floral faithfulness’ of the pollinator. For instance, honey bees will learn these signs and return to the specific type of flower, increasing the plant’s chance of reproductive success. Indeed, many plants replenish their nectar, following visits by bees. Such mutual benefit is a powerful driver in the evolution of flowers.

“I never saw a bee visit, yet the plant had copious seeds”

Sometimes I wonder which pollinator has managed to do the work, for instance for my abundant climber, *Eccremocarpus scaber*, the Chilean glory flower. For some years, I was puzzled, as I never saw a bee visit, yet the plant had copious seeds. The cluster of beautiful trumpet-like flowers had certainly been visited, in spite of the narrow mouth of the trumpet which a bee would have to negotiate. But I finally witnessed a bumble bee busily working the flowers, pushing her way into the flame-coloured trumpets – *Bombus pascuorum*, a ginger-coloured bumble bee. And just beside that, an *Abutilon* flowering quite late in the year still invited bees to visit for a sup of nectar; as they delved deep into the



B.pascuorum on Eccremocarpus scaber

flower to reach the nectar, they were inevitably richly coated with pollen.

As in so many relationships, there is also room for cheating. Orchids are great cheats to their polli-nators. Our native bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) encourages male bumble bees to try and mate with its flowers - 'pseudo-copulation'. To the human eye, the flowers do look like bees, but the plant also supplies a scent which mimics the female bees' pheromone. So, when the hopeful male bee energet-ically engages with the flower, he carries away a bundle of pollen, straight on

to the next plant which also smells so inviting to him, where the clever orchid picks up the pollinia exactly in the right place for pollination. Even more devious is *Epipactis helleborine*, a rare native plant which is polli-nated by wasps. Most wasps devour other smaller insects or their young, and I have read that the scent of *Epipactis helleborine* resembles that of a leaf being eaten - presumably, by insect prey which attracts the wasps. The nectar is also said to be intoxicating to them. Strategy indeed. But some orchids do offer real rewards, for example to the tiny male sweat bees

which gather essential oils from them, to attract female sweat bees.

Pollen gathering is the trait shared by all the bees, and is different from other insects which may also act as pollinators. Butterflies and moths are excellent pollinators, but they carry the pollen *gratis* from flower to flower. Bees on the other hand have evolved branched body hair which acts like a brush to gather up the pollen. Honey bees and bumble bees have 'pollen baskets' (corbiculae) on their hind legs as well, and they gather the pollen up into these baskets to supply the young larvae in the nest. Solitary bees also gather pollen, but in different sites on their bodies. I love to watch the little leafcutter bees in the garden, with their entire undersides completely packed with pollen. In fact, these little bees can carry their own weight in pollen. All these bees turn the pollen into 'bee bread' - pellets of mixed pollen and nectar - which are the food for their larvae. Bumble bees and honey bees organise this food in cells in their nests where the larvae are tended by adult (nurse) bees. But solitary bees lay an egg directly onto a 'bee bread' pellet, seal up the compartment and go on to lay another egg similarly. You may see the compartments formed in your 'bee hotel' if you have one. All these bees are premium pollinators, enabling the development of the plant community in your garden and beyond.

So, what should gardeners do to promote the resilience and health of their plants? Become ento-mophilous - start looking favourably on the insect life in your garden, even when it seems to threat-en your favourite flower. When you apply a chemical to control



Abutilon



Two Bumbles and a Honeybee on Inula helenium



Bumble bee *B. lucorum* queen on gorse



Leafcutter bee on Inula

a 'pest' insect, the remedy is more deadly than the disease. The chemical is simply intended to kill insects. It may say 'greenfly and blackfly' on the bottle, but even if it were possible to target these little bugs, the residue the chemi-cal will leave in the environment of your garden is not controlled by the gardener. Inevitably, it will affect 'good' insects as well. The fungicides which are meant to keep your young plants safe have also been shown to damage bees. Research has clearly demonstrated the 'sub-lethal' effects of many of the commonly available chemical 'pest controls', which build up in the environment over time. But if you can be more entomophilous and just wash off the greenfly with water or (for extra satisfaction) squash them where you find them, your garden bumble bees, solitary bees, moths, but-terflies and hoverflies, will survive far better. All these insects benefit the plants, and they find nest-ing sites in our gardens. Most common bumble bees nest in or on the ground, and solitary bees (you will surely have some of these little

treasures which you have never yet noticed) like the dry stalks of our tall perennials for overwintering.

Gardeners' love of flowers is the key. Many different plants, flowering all year round, make our gardens a very important resource for pollinators and for the health of the environment we live in. Sadly, the countryside is often too monocultured and agrichemical-soaked for them: we are seeing decline even in many of our commonest species. It is ironic that gardeners still have easy access to the modern chemical warfare which is decimating our insect life - and impacting on many other spe-cies such as birds. Do please become an Entomophilist and look kindly on the 'untidy' bits of your garden and your neighbours'. They may well be the healthiest parts! ■

[1]. Jeff Ollerton, 'Pollinator Diversity: Distribution, Ecological Function and Conservation *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution and Systematics*, 2017

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A New Chapter at Patthana Garden

TJ Maher

A view into the courtyard

Gardening in a small space is challenging and requires endless restraint. For twenty-four years at Patthana I gardened in a relatively small garden. This meant I had to forego countless plants for reasons of their size, tendency to spread, or maybe simply because their flowering period was too short. Because space was precious, each plant was carefully chosen. Trees and shrubs had to be of interest for the longest time possible. Like many of the other plants in the garden they also had to have an upright habit. There was room for only one, or a few, of any chosen variety. Swathes of this and drifts of that, I could only dream about. Plants whose show ended just as I was beginning to enjoy their performance were replaced by those which flowered for longer. Sterile plants which flowered over an extended season but produced no seed, gained my attention. Geranium 'Ann Thomson', for example (which is sterile), flaunted her magenta flowers for six months of the year, while her relatives with more fleeting tendencies ended up in the compost bin.

A unique opportunity to garden on a grander scale arose in 2020, when we purchased land which bordered our existing garden. It was both terrifying and exciting in equal measure. Houses needed to be screened to give privacy, but the nearby church glimpsed through an opening in the hedgerow of our existing garden was now in full view, alongside our closest mountains. During the previous years I had created a very private garden, screened from the outside world. Now, here I was taking a section of agricultural field where cattle had grazed, which was open to the elements and the eyes of neighbours, and about to create a new garden.



Geranium Anne Thomson flowers for six months



The inner garden in spring



The large border allows for repetition of plants

Work began in June 2020 when the mini digger arrived. Out in the field the space was bigger, the sky was bigger, and the challenges were bigger. Borders and pathways were marked out. I didn't want to use chemicals to clear the site to create a blank canvas for planting. So, the top layer was turned with the bucket of the digger, sod by sod. We let all the seeds present in the soil (the seed bank) germinate over the following months, and then with the help of our wonderful volunteers we removed them by hand as they grew. (Notice, I avoided the word weed, – but that's another subject.) Then, in October we began to plant our new 'Torc' garden.

In this new garden, I no longer needed to rely on plants which were well behaved and stayed within their allocated spots. Here, the possibilities were endless. Plants which sprawled and self-seeded were not only allowed but encouraged. Some plants which struggled in the rich soil of our original garden were thriving in the freer draining soil of the new Torc garden. Prolific self-seeders such as *Verbena bonariensis* seemed set on conquering every available gap. Because of the scale of this new garden, I had to put

aside the notion that I was master. Any ideas that I had of being in charge were quickly challenged, as mother nature seemed to have plans of her own. I knew I had to relinquish some control back to her. I planted and she took away – she planted, and I took away. But together, we would create something neither of us could have created alone.

“The Torc garden is more exposed than the Inner Garden, so there are challenges”

The borders in this new garden are vast in comparison to the borders I had created in our original garden. No longer did I need to choose plants

so carefully. On these gravel paths they could broadcast their sprawling stems, proclaiming their space whilst softening the transition between border and pathway. Plants such as Nepetas, Penstemons, Anthemis all happily jostled together in the front row, while avoiding getting trampled on by the bigger players who occupied the areas behind. Here in the outer perimeters, they mingled with evergreen herbs such as sage and rosemary.

The Torc garden is more exposed than the Inner Garden, so there are challenges. Tender plants are more likely to be damaged by any early frosts. Plants must be able to stand up to the wind without any added

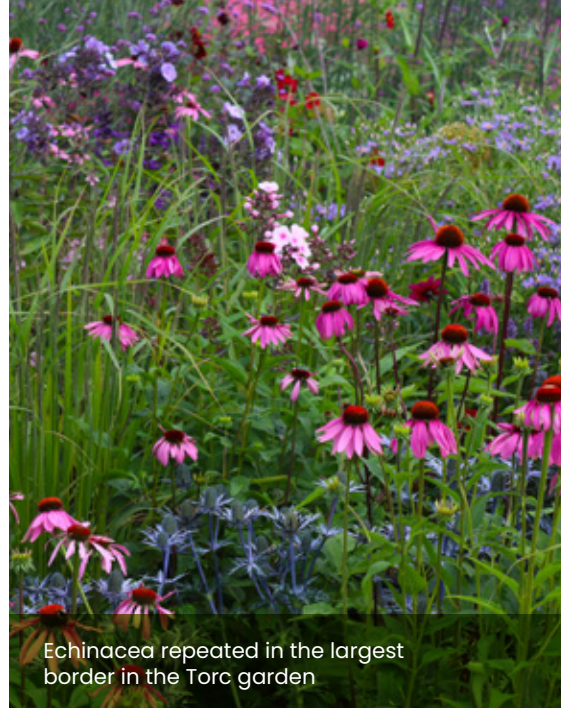
support. Because of the scale of the largest border, I could now plant in the drifts I had dreamed of, with plants appropriate for the site. I discovered that Echinacea liked this new garden. Instead of working with a sparse sprinkling of plants, as I was used to doing, I could, if I wished, plant in larger quantities, and create a river of pink Echinacea interspersed with islands of other plants to bring detail and discovery to the experience of viewing.

One of the highlights of purchasing a field turned out to be just that. It was a field, and it had beautiful meadow grasses in its furthest reaches. I remembered my childhood adventures in such places when a stroll through

such grasses revealed all sorts of flora and fauna if you were willing to pay enough attention. What looked like sameness, was on closer inspection a revelation of various interwoven plants, each with associated insects which relied on them for laying their eggs on. The grasses here in April revealed Cardamine pratensis (Cuckoo flower). A lover of damper soils, it was my que to follow mother nature's lead and plant another damp meadow lover, Fritillaria meleagris (Snakes head fritillaria) into the grass. Here (as in the garden borders) was the opportunity to have fun with plants. I could introduce those that would co-exist with our native grasses. The existing garden plants were looked at in a whole new light - for their ability to hold their own amongst the wild grasses. In autumn 2023, around 2,000 bulbs were planted after the grass was cut and taken away in late September. This is an experiment, but an exciting one, as every day something new will reveal itself as it pops to life amongst the grasses and native and non-native perennial plants. Some plants will thrive as others fail. Is this not, though, the real joy of gardening, to simply enjoy plants - to throw away the rule books, or at least bend the rules a little? Sometimes our best laid plans succeed, and sometimes not, as mother nature shows us another point of view. ■

TJ's book 'Grounded in the Garden – An artist's guide to creating a beautiful garden in harmony with nature' will be published on March 7th.

Patthana Garden opens in April for the season with special planned events. See Patthanagardenireland.com for details.



Echinacea repeated in the largest border in the Torc garden



A leafy mix in a shady corner of the garden

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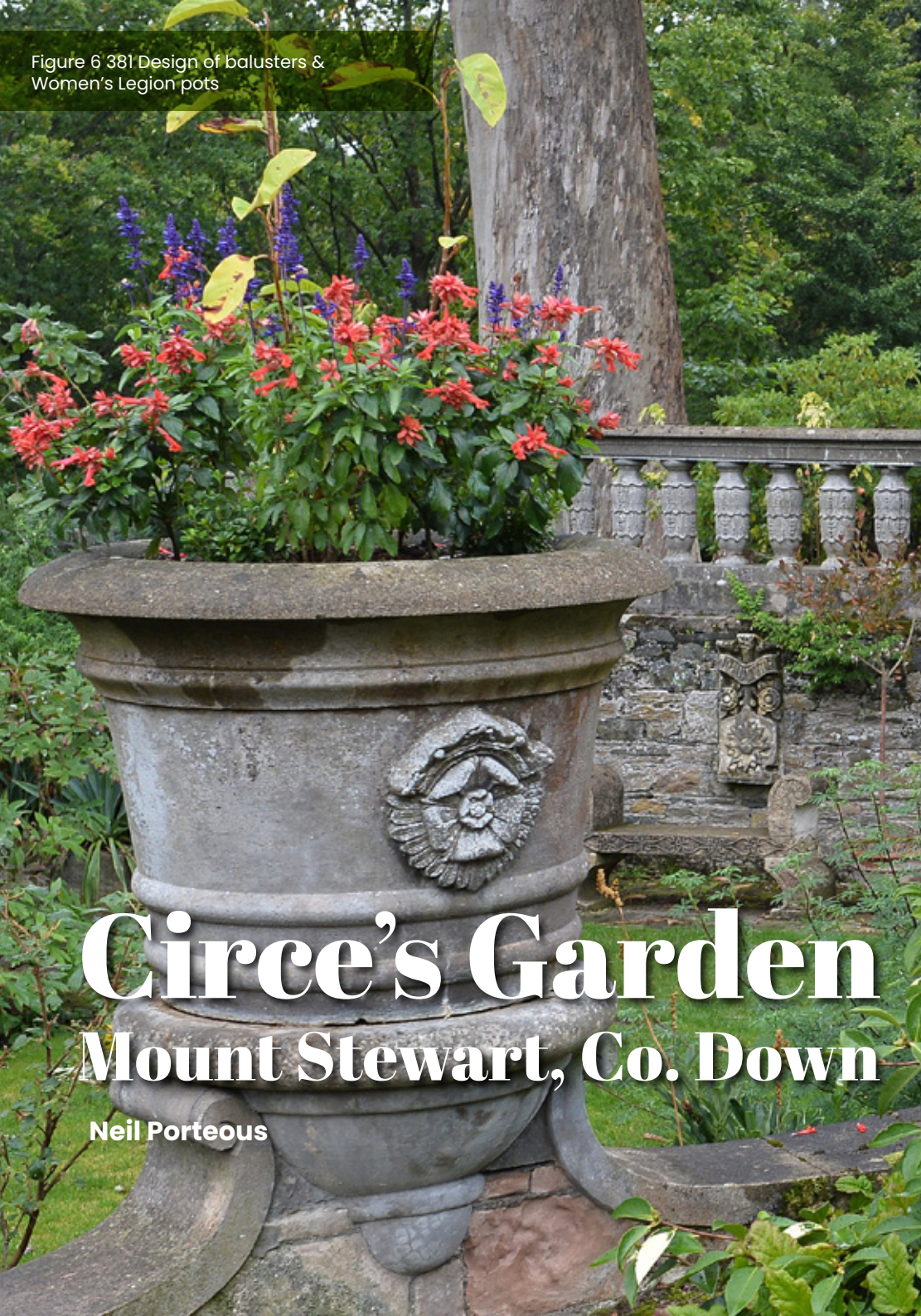


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Figure 6 381 Design of balusters & Women's Legion pots

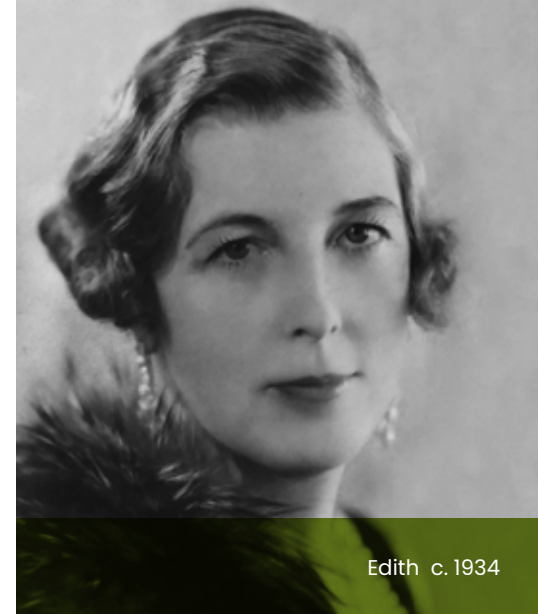


Circe's Garden Mount Stewart, Co. Down

Neil Porteous

Mount Stewart, on the eastern shore of Strangford Lough, resonates with the unique personality of its creator. Even now, over one hundred years after the gardens were planned, Edith, Lady Londonderry (1878–1959), speaks eloquently through her design. Edith imbued the garden with rich veins of meaning, reflecting her own passions and one of the best plant collections in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Personal triumphs were celebrated, and allegories derived from Greek classics alluded to, with whimsical stories interwoven with the local Irish folk lore and all presented in a self-deprecating, light-hearted way. Edith's Rhododendron collection, celebrated in her lifetime, remains one of the best on the island of Ireland.

To understand Edith's Garden, it is necessary to understand something of her character and her background. Born in 1878, in spirit, Edith most resembled her father, Henry Chaplin. Henry loved horses and country sports and from him she developed charisma, drive, and a strong sense of joy and fun. Henry married well; Lady Florence Leveson-Gower, the eldest daughter of the 3rd Duke of Sutherland. Sadly, her mother died when Edith was only four and her father never remarried. All her life, Edith harboured a strong romantic sense of Gaelic culture, one she was to transfer from her childhood home at Dunrobin Castle in Sutherland, Scotland, to Mount Stewart. As a young girl she was further influenced by her Aunt Millicent only eleven years her senior and to her character was added a devoutness, a sense of duty and an ability to forgive and a certain humility to perceive fault in her own actions. As Edith and her



Edith c. 1934



Edith & Mount

elder brother grew up, her father by innate example, expected a degree of professional perfection in the way the children managed their own mounts, a long lesson Edith was to apply to everything she undertook.

Edith, in her turn also married well. In 1899, she married Charles, Viscount Castlereagh, the eldest son of the 6th Marquess of Londonderry. The Londonderrys were a wealthy and



Ipomoea indica Mount Stewart

powerful dynasty of Conservative political magnates and Theresa, Edith's mother-in-law was the political and court hostess of her generation. Charley was a handsome young cavalry officer in the Blues, much admired by women and Edith fell in love with him unreservedly.

Early in their marriage in the summer of 1902, Edith sailed with her uncle 'Strath' who was to become the 4th Duke of Sutherland on his yacht Catania to Spain where she was introduced to the King of Spain, and they became friends. This influence gave Edith the perfect introduction to the great Moorish palaces, then still in private ownership, among them the Alhambra and the Garden Generalife. This experience influenced the design of the formal gardens at Mount Stewart. Edith had weak lungs and occasionally suffered from pleurisy. In 1903, under her doctor's orders, came another powerful influence, a long holiday with Charley to India, to Bombay. At Barackpur, the Vice-royal Country Lodge, they breakfasted under a Banyan Tree on a terrace festooned with Morning Glory, *Ipomoea indica*.

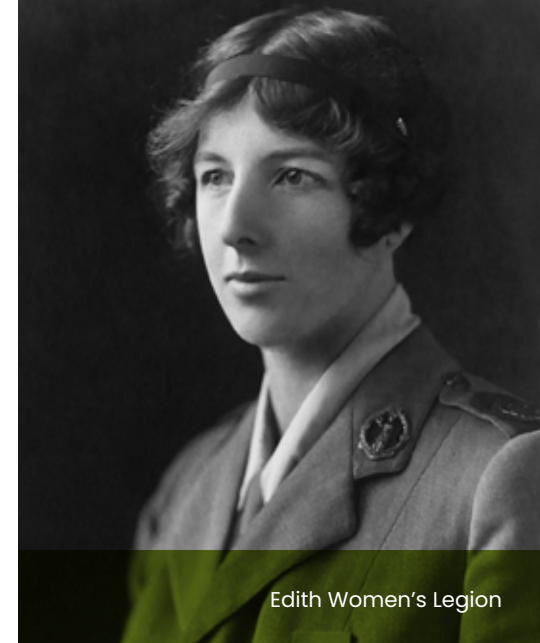
So began a love of plants and gardening which became one of the main passions of her life. Edith gardened both intellectually and physically. The nurturing of living plants and their combination into three dimensional paintings which could be walked through, stimulating all the senses and changing over time and with the seasons, she found utterly absorbing. In 1906 after gardening in Springfield, Rutland and their hunting lodge at Loch Choire in Scotland, she sailed to the Duchess of Leeds villa at Bordighera on the Italian Riviera. Using her influence and contacts, Edith visited many of the famous renaissance gardens of Italy at this time and elements of some of these would be adapted into the design at Mount Stewart.

With gardening as her private recreation with its blend of intellectual, spiritual and physical rigour, Edith's character became increasingly powerful. As Viscount Castlereagh, Charley was expected to pursue a life in politics and this he embarked upon somewhat reluctantly. He became an MP in January 1906. Through Charley,

Edith was now part of a young political elite and the romantic in her drove her to the suffragist cause, much to the dismay of those in her immediate family and beyond, but of all human attributes, Edith admired and valued courage. When Great Britain became embroiled in World War One, at a time when all the pressing causes, Home Rule in Ireland and Universal Suffrage were side-lined for an increasingly desperate struggle for survival, Edith saw her opportunity. Initially she became Colonel-in-Chief of the Women's Volunteer Reserve, but she resigned because of its rigid military organisation in January 1915 and formed the Women's Legion.

By February 1915, women were in the army catering and nursing in hospitals organized by the Women's Legion and then were assimilated into the Army Service Corp as drivers, dispatch drivers and mechanics. The 30,000 strong Women's Legion cooking section was assimilated into Women's Auxiliary Corps and then reformed in February 1917 and expanded to drivers (& drivers for the Flying Corps), mechanics, draughtswomen, instrument makers as well working on the land. On March 16th, 1918, Edith lead the march past to the Queen at Buckingham Palace. By the end of the war, women were fulfilling approximately 80% of what men were doing before war broke out.

The success of the Women's Legion constituted the most prodigious feat of organization and diplomacy in equal measure, but in tandem with this great work, Edith also used her social skills as a hostess extraordinaire by forming the 'Ark' in late January 1915. This private club sought to bolster the morale of the Londonderry's social and political



Edith Women's Legion

circle during the war, the Honourable Order of the Rainbow. It should be noted that the Women's Legion and the Ark went hand in hand forming what today we would call a unique networking opportunity. Charley was in France, but Edith presided over soirees organised each Wednesday evening in the attics of their palatial Londonderry House, the main rooms being used as a military hospital. Many great people were attracted to this flame shining out in the dark war years and Edith's sense of fun presided. Members had to take on a rhyming appellation; Charley the Cheetah, Winston the Warlock, Harold the Hummingbird, Ramsay the Ram and her own title as the prime mover, possessed of warm mesmeric charm, was Circe the Sorceress. On February 8th, 1915, Lord Londonderry died and Charley, still in France, became the 7th Marquess.

Edith visited Mount Stewart, then a convalescent hospital for wounded



Charley the Cheetah

soldiers in 1917, as Charley was recovering there from appendicitis. Unimpressed by its cold and damp, she had two evergreen Oaks cut down to the south of the house which let the light pour in; reflected and constantly in flux from nearby Strangford Lough. Within a couple of weeks she would write to Charley, "This is the most divine house. Why do we ever live anywhere else."

Charley had seen action at the Somme and at Monchy-le-Preux in the Battle of Arras and in May 1917, Edith succeeded in having him sent home. In August 1917, Edith was made Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire, one of ten women to be so honoured. In January 1918, her DBE was transferred to the military wing and was the first woman to hold the military honour. On 6th February 1918, six million women over the age of 30 were placed on the electoral register. By 1928, The Equal Franchise Act, had lowered the voting age for women from 30 to 21. About five million more women benefitted. Edith was justifiably proud of the role she had played. At Mount Stewart, the Women's Legion is commemorated in The Mairi Garden and the Ark is celebrated on the Dodo Terrace.

Edith was drawn to Mount Stewart. Situated in a low drumlin landscape, the house nestled into a shallow declivity with an artificial lake on ground which sloped to the south. Shelterbelts surrounded the house on all sides, but if one had a mind, a fabulous, borrowed landscape across the Lough to the distant Mourne Mountains or to the Stewart Monument on top of Scrabo could be framed. Situated on the inner, westward coast of the narrow Ards Peninsula, the microclimate was very favourable, surrounded as it is by sea water warmed by the Gulf Stream and with equitable rainfall and as many hours of sunlight as is allowed in Ireland. With its magical air and wholesome wind-blown smell, you could be forgiven for thinking you were on a Hebridean Island. Edith's mother-in-law, the indomitable Theresa had made something of the garden and grounds and kept a gardening staff, but on 15th March 1919, Theresa died of flu. With no worry of censorship, Edith could make the place her own.

Charley had been appointed Under-Secretary for the Air and Vice President of the Air Council in January 1919. He had become Lord Lieutenant of Co. Down in August 1916 and he was needed in Northern Ireland as trouble brewed across Ireland. In April 1920, Charley was promoted to Secretary for Air. The new Ulster Parliament opened 7th June 1921 and James Craig invited Charles to become leader of the Senate and Minister of Education and he accepted. For Edith, this marked a personal triumph, living more closely together and then by the early autumn of 1920, Edith was finding herself, in her own words, "unaccountably seedy"; she was pregnant at the age of 41. Now



West Terrace & Italian Garden 1926

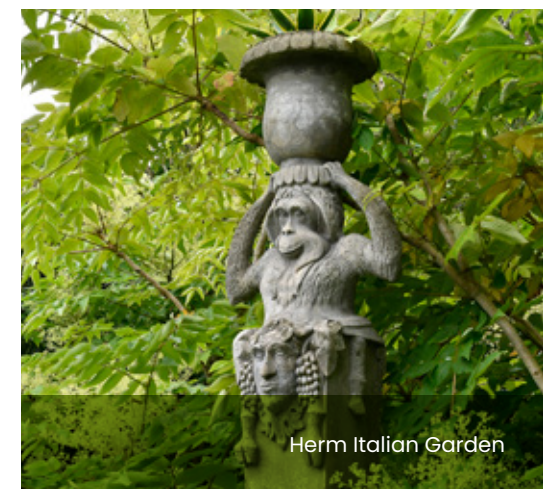
the Londonderry's were living mostly at Mount Stewart and it was during her pregnancy, that Edith began designing her garden. A beautiful child, Mairi was born on 25th March 1921. It may have felt to Edith the place itself had bestowed this gift upon the Londonderrys and Mairi grew into the most fairy-like of children. For Edith, this was the happiest and consequently, the most creative time of her life.

The plans Edith drew are scale drawings in ink. Most interesting are the sketched embellishments added later in pencil, revealing her ideas of architectural detail, some of which were never undertaken. These base plans could be given to her builder Thomas Beattie of Newtownards or to her mason, Joe Girvan or to her newly appointed Head Gardener, Thomas Bolas, onto which she could sketch out a drainage scheme like the one shown.

After the war, the latest medium was black and white photographs incorporated into affordable books. Edith had a copy of A.T. Bolton's 'The Gardens of Italy' published in 1918 and inserted between its pages is a sketch

on the back of an envelope showing measurements and architectural detail of the balustrade, a personalised design, with an acanthus leaf motif for the balusters and cement pots emblazoned with the badges of the Women's Legion or the Stewart dragon. Edith always acknowledged her influences, but always adapted them in order to personalise them.

The inspiration for the balustrade for the South Terrace came from the Water Parterre of the Boboli Gardens in Florence. The honesty of her approach



Herm Italian Garden



Ethlinn holding Lugh Margaret Wrightson



The Spanish Garden

was characteristic. As was her addition of gentle humour. The herms which mark the southern boundary of the Italian Garden, themselves inspired by those at the Upper Garden of the Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola, have the faces alternately of Circe the Sorceress with those of Odysseus's sailors in various stages of transformation into

swine, surmounted by orang u tans holding up ornate pots filled with Agaves, all in cement, running with the allegory illustrated by Edmund Brock's 'Circe and the Sirens', painted in 1925.

The re-iteration of themes connecting one part of the garden with another was a device Edith used throughout: The trefoil hedge of the Shamrock Garden was represented in a Margaret Wrightson relief in stone in the east turret of *Tir n'an Og*, (Scots Gaelic spelling), the family burial ground, depicting Ethlinn, daughter of Balor of the Baleful Eye, the grotesque Fomorian king, surrounded by a shamrock or in the Dairy, the silver fountain cooling the air is of Hermes, Odysseus's grandfather, who gave him the antidote to Circe's drug.

In 1921, twenty-one demobilised servicemen, returning to the Ards Peninsula, were employed in making the Italian Garden, in addition to her garden staff which peaked at fifteen. Between 1921 and 1935, almost exactly the years Charley held various Cabinet positions, the garden was developed by increments. Not all these additions were as precisely planned as the Italian Garden; rather they were organic additions; the Spanish, the Peace and the Mairi Gardens and were the better for it as they more relied on their planting for definition than their architecture.

The planting at Mount Stewart was also individual. Within the shelter of the garden, virtually frost-free, with its poor sandy soils, trees and shrubs grew quickly and the breadth of subjects Edith could draw, came from those parts of the World with a

Mediterranean climate: plants were sought from California, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Australia, New Zealand, The Himalaya, North and South Africa and the Mediterranean itself. Edith recognised her short-coming of not knowing what was available. She remedied this by seeking the advice of an extraordinary neighbour, Sir John Ross of Bladensburg (1848–1926), whose own garden, Fairy Land at Rostrevor on Carlingford Lough, boasted some 6500 plants in 1911, many from the Southern Hemisphere. Edith used his knowledge, his connections and his influence within the small confines of the horticultural world and like most gardeners, Sir John was generous with his plants, giving Edith seeds, cuttings or divisions of whatever she asked for.

His garden, Fairy Land at Rostrevor, boasted over 2500 taxa in 1911, many of them from the Southern Hemisphere. Sir John was indeed a serious collector, but Fairy Land was more a botanical collection than a garden. Many visitors to Fairy Land made the comment that plants were positioned after weighing up the available knowledge and planting them in the most advantageous spot for the plant concerned in the hope that it would thrive, but to no great aesthetic plan. Lady Phyllis Moore, writing for *New Flora & Silva* in an article entitled "A Letter from Ireland", said of Fairy Land a couple of years after Sir John's death:

"The trees and shrubs are planted on a hillside overlooking Carlingford Lough and the Carlingford Mountains. There is no 'arrangement'; trees are cut down and arrivals planted as they come from the nurseries."

Edith visited Sir John at Fairy Land in June 1922, with two keen gardeners staying at Mount Stewart: Lady Moyra Cavendish and Sir Raymond Green. The car carrying Edith and her guests drove in procession behind an armoured car. Northern Ireland was just over a year old, and Edith was conscious that her friends and her were potential targets, for many of the country people in South Down supported *Sinn Féin*. Sir John Ross of Bladensburg would not have invited her if there was the remotest chance of trouble, but Edith did not know. She had the presence of mind to leave the armoured car in the lane and drove through the gates of Rostrevor House, but very soon, rumours of an armoured car had spread far and wide and so, having seen the garden, they met Lady Ross for tea and "we were roundly reproved for mistrusting the district." Edith recalled that first visit in her autobiography "Retrospect" published in 1938.

"At the hall door I rang the bell. After a long pause a maid appeared, and I enquired as to Sir John's whereabouts as I knew he was expecting us, though we understood Lady Ross was away. The maid solemnly announced that "Sir John was in Fairy Land!" I gazed at her; my English guests appeared delighted at my discomfiture. Seeing something was amiss, the maid said hopefully: "Would you like me to beat upon the gong?" "Oh, please don't!" I said hastily, not wishing to add still further to the merriment. Just then a shout was heard, and Sir John's figure emerged on the slope of the hill opposite the front door, his tall spare body and kindly face, surmounted by a Sutherland tartan tam-o'-shanter made of green and blue wool, pencil and paper in hand, and microscope in his pocket....

I shall never forget the wonder and amazement of that visit, the first of many to Rostrevor, in which Sir John initiated me into the many and marvellous trees, shrubs and plants from countries all over the world, that could, with knowledge and skill, be grown by the seaboard of County Down. It is due to Sir John's encouragement and knowledge and the help he gave me, together with countless shrubs of all descriptions, seeds and cuttings that he sent here, that the gardens at Mount Stewart contain so many tender and beautiful things. It was on this occasion that I made a terrible *gaffe*, never since repeated. After viewing a succession of marvellous shrubs I innocently remarked, "I have never seen such shrubs before. It might be the gardens at Kew." The old man stopped dead, and in a strained voice exclaimed: "Dear Lady Londonderry, never mention Kew to me again. I can grow things here that Kew has never heard of! And thus I learnt!"

As her skill and knowledge increased, Edith soon realised the limitations of her gardening staff and insisted on doing certain delicate jobs herself. Her relationship with Thomas Bolas was that she was the 'Head Gardener' and he was her foreman. Edith controlled everything, buying nails to manure, while Thomas ran things day to day, making it all work. Edith spent hours poring over catalogues and much of her daily two hours of correspondence, was devoted to the needs of the garden.

Edith gardened at Mount Stewart whenever opportunity allowed, often enjoying July and August there before heading to Scotland for the shooting.

Friends like Duncan Morrison, a composer from Stornoway on Lewis, understood her need to garden and worked at her side, less active guests were nonplussed to be handed a trowel and trug and told to weed this or that area of the garden.

Sir John Ross inspired Edith to sponsor some of the great plant collectors of her time, most notable for Mount Stewart, was Frank Kingdon Ward (1885–1958). She sponsored him 10 Guineas on several of his expeditions and when the expedition administrators asked Edith to tick the kinds of plants she was interested in; alpines, trees or herbaceous perennials, she would just write "RHODODENDRONS", in red ink. Sir John Ross, perhaps because he knew his health was failing, passed on the mantle of being Edith's horticultural mentor to Herbert Maxwell (1845–1937), of Monreith, Wigtownshire, Scotland and Edith visited him at the end of June 1924. From the start, Maxwell warmed to Edith, flattered by her interest and soon he was expanding her horizons with his contacts. By 1927 he had proposed she join the newly formed Rhododendron Association and he introduced her to a new group of largely scented plants, the Lilies. On 16th September 1926 he wrote:

"The lust for lilies is a contagious disease as deadly as Rhododendronitis, from which you suffer so incurably already."

Maxwell's love of history and Gaelic he shared with Edith, master to willing pupil. In the proposed New Year's Honours List of 1932, Edith used her influence with the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald to propose Maxwell be given the Order of the Thistle. Only

after he knew she had proposed him for the honour, would he accept.

Edith loved both history and Gaelic mythology. In 1928, she wrote a children's book called 'The Magic Inkpot', describing the children of Mount Stewart's adventures with the *Tuatha De Danann* and their struggle against the wicked Fomorians. Edmond Brock supplied most of the illustrations. While the trefoil hedge was growing around the Shamrock Garden, Edith proposed a whimsical narrative in topiary, describing the Stewart family's arrival in a curragh and an unsuccessful hunt in which the huntsmen with their bows and arrows, propel the children in push-chairs in pursuit of the White Stag that takes the souls of the dead to *Tir n'an Og*, the Land of the Ever Young and the intervention by the Devil, who disrupts the hunt and rescues the stag. All they bring back is a skinny hare on a pole. In collaboration with Edmond Brock, the twenty-four figures depicting the narrative are drawn from a facsimile copy of Mary Tudor's Psalter, a present from her Aunt Milly, signed, "From Mummy 2, Christmas 1917."

Edith adopted what she described as "the Modern Style" of gardening. A planting style, where all the latest introductions from around the world and the best of the horticultural trade were planted in a natural way, as if it could have been a natural flora. Plants from Chile grew next to those of China and a best-selling hybrid, to look like the flora of some magical, enchanted isle. But it was the Rhododendrons which made Mount Stewart special. Edith had sponsored many plant explorers, but one, Frank Kingdon Ward, became a staunch ally and friend.

Frank and Jean Kingdon Ward stayed at Mount Stewart for nine days in May 1954. Frank was researching and writing an article, "Rhododendrons at Mount Stewart" for the Gardeners' Chronicle, which was published on 31st July 1954:

"Recently I had an opportunity to see the famous Mount Stewart Rhododendrons in Northern Ireland. Mount Stewart is one of the few "stately homes" left, and we could ill spare it. Rhododendrons do wonderfully well there, although, of course, they suffered horribly during the last war, and also during the particularly brutal spring of 1951. In this favoured spot they grow faster than they do anywhere else, thus making nonsense of the collector's reports of their size in the field. Owing to years of neglect they formed a jungle of tropical luxuriance, and it is indeed remarkable that in recent years Lady Londonderry should have carried off so many first prizes at the Royal Horticultural Society's Annual Rhododendron Show, where the standard is high and the competition high."

Today, Mount Stewart is a delight to visit, and Edith's Garden is still packed with unusual and exotic plants. The Rhododendrons are the principal feature. Edith's influence is very much alive and well in her beloved home and garden. Mount Stewart is a garden of the imagination, and it is hard to compare it with any other early Twentieth Century Garden. There is a richness not found in other gardens. It was and remains Edith, Lady Londonderry's legacy, an eloquent monument to an exceptional woman. ■

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Bryn Terfel and Aggie White
winning a medal at Harrogate 2015



Growing Prize Winning Blooms

Christopher White

I've been growing dahlias for 40 years and there is nothing like going to the shows. I first saw the wonderful dahlia blooms when I was 16 and had started going to shows with my grandfather and auntie. I got chatting to some of the dahlia growers and they gave me some tubers and that's how it all began.

How I propagate my dahlias today

I dig up my dahlias around Christmas and put them into the greenhouse on gentle heat. I find that the dahlias mature, swell up, and the tubers start sprouting better and quicker. Dug earlier, they seem to take longer to rejuvenate. I keep them in crates on top of a layer of compost with grow lights



Dahlias rooted 17th May 2013



Aggie White (Giant Decorative)



on top and soil heater cables. My family tease me about the fact that it's warmer with the dahlias than in the house!

Propagation

Material for cuttings usually appears at the end of February/early March. I prepare a compost mix of one-part Perlite, one-part horticultural grit and two-parts compost. I use clear recycled grape containers so I can see through the clear plastic when the cuttings have rooted.

I take 2-inch cuttings from just above two leaves using a new Stanley blade or very sharp knife. I take off the bottom two leaves leaving the top two, and usually using rooting powder I place the cuttings into my compost mix. Usually, 10-15 cuttings are in each container and I prepare up to 5,000 dahlia cuttings per year in this way.

The cuttings take about 3 weeks to root and are potted on into 4-inch pots, usually in late April/early May. The carefully labelled pots are placed in poly-tunnels.

The plants are hardened off from mid to end of May in cold frames. Meanwhile

the final planting area is rotavated and a mix of blood and bone meal and hen pellets are worked into the soil. I then put down black Mypex where the paths will be and automatic watering hoses where I want the lines of plants to be.

The dahlias are usually planted out the first week in June or when the risk of all frost is over. I usually pinch out the dahlias in the first week of June. I use 2" square stakes for support usually late June/early July. Giant dahlias are my speciality and these are usually growing in 2 litre pots before planting out. Typically, I would grow approximately 20 varieties with 12-20 plants of each variety. The goal is to have two stems on each plant each producing flowers over 10 inches - the size of a big dinner plate.

About July I start de-branching two selected stems on each plant and removing any other branches or side shoots. I also disbud, leaving the top bud in position, and removing all the other buds around it. The plant will then put all its efforts into growing one flower at the top of the stem.

Feeding

I feed the dahlias once weekly from the

week after they're planted through June, July and part of August.

Pests and diseases

Common pests include caterpillars, greenflies, blackflies, etc. and I usually spray the dahlias every 10 days to control such pests and diseases. I normally stop spraying around mid-August to avoid spray damage to the flowers. To avoid pest resistance, I tend to use a different spray each month.

Going to the shows

I love going to the shows. The Irish Dahlia Society show in Wexford, the Naul Horticultural Show, which I have chaired for over 30 years, and several other shows countrywide. But by far our big show of the year is in mid-September in Harrogate in the UK.

Preparing to go to Harrogate

For each different giant class, I cut over 20 blooms, flowers half opened so they'll last and usually no sooner than 48 hours before judging. For the long journey by sea and road to Harrogate they are very carefully supported in old milk crates in 2 litre bottles with the tops cut off

with flat 7 up or sugar in the water to keep them fresh. We drive straight from Holyhead to the show grounds in Newby Hall on the day before the Harrogate Show. On arrival, we put the giants in individual vases for the various classes. In the past, I've received one best exhibit in giants, best bloom in giants, and overall best giant exhibit at Harrogate.

New varieties

I'm very proud to say that I have bred two varieties of dahlias, one an orange giant decorative dahlia named Aggie White after my late mother. It has won double gold at the Leeds trials, and best in show at many other shows. Louis White is the second I bred in honour of my father, who is hale and hearty at 93. It's a yellow giant decorative variety. It's been part of the gold medal exhibits at the Chelsea Flower Show during the pandemic and both dahlias have won medals at Harrogate for being the best new sport. I show all dahlias. I have also taken prizes in other classes over the years, not just the giant variety.

Dahlias are my life. I hope you have enjoyed my article. ■

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Angela Jupe

Angela Jupe's death on the 4th May 2021 was a great loss to Irish gardening and her many friends. Angela trained as an architect in University College Dublin and while gardening was her first love, the option wasn't there to pursue a career in horticulture, so architecture beckoned. She worked for IDA Ireland for several years in a largely male dominated industry but wasn't afraid to make her opinions known, never afraid to say it as she saw it, to see the bigger picture and encourage folk to make leaps of faith!

Gardening became her career later in life, working as a garden designer for many years. While officially retired, she always had a few projects running right up to the day of her death. In her lifetime she bought and sold eight period properties, restoring them with her well-trained eye, adding her unique flair and transforming them into beautiful and functional homes and gardens. In 2004, at a time when most people would be thinking about retirement, she bought Bellefield, near Shinrone in Co. Offaly, primarily because it featured a walled garden which is every serious gardener's dream, but also for its unique charm and array of outbuildings. She transformed this near-derelict site into a charming garden, full of her signature touches. A Fantastical Folly, with its reclaimed copper roof, sits proudly in the centre and a sunken garden with a glasshouse and pond area are all made from reclaimed materials – Angela was interested in salvage long before it was on trend.

When she died, Angela bequeathed Bellefield to the RHSI, an extraordinarily generous gesture. She was passionate

A Gardener's Legacy

**Some background
to RHSI Bellefield
and some plans for
the future**

**Paul Smyth and
Philip Hollwey**

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about practical gardening skills and it was her wish that the garden would be a place of learning and a centre of horticultural excellence. We are now the proud owners of Bellefield estate comprising the house, outbuildings and gate lodge together with 28 acres of land including a walled garden and a small woodland garden, grazing land to either side of the avenue and a plantation of Alder adjacent to the large protected Cangort Bog. Angela's wishes are being made a reality by the work of RHSI volunteers under the expert guidance and enthusiasm of head-gardener Paul Smyth. Paul knows the garden well from his time there with Angela and is helped by Judith Doherty who has been working in the garden for many years, ensuring continuity as the volunteers tackle the job of bringing the garden back into shape after a few years of minimal maintenance. Angela achieved an enormous amount at Bellefield. However, the garden, like most, was never a finished product and because it has no specific style or period from the past to be referenced or recreated, allows ample scope to expand and the liberty to embrace new ideas across the varied ecology of the site, always learning in the process.



Expect a dynamic and changing garden at Bellefield.

The plan is to create a focus for Irish gardeners with an emphasis on education in its broadest sense. As many of you who have visited will know, the day includes a tour from Paul, always pointing out the challenges and failures as well as the successes and plans, explaining that the garden will be a changing place with a commitment to an organic approach. Don't expect closely mown lawns at Bellefield, many are full of spring bulbs and the grass is left to grow for all or part of the summer, encouraging wildflowers to naturalise and benefitting the already abundant wildlife. In one area of the walled garden, a playful, chequerboard lawn entertained visitors in 2023 with squares of long grass contrasting with mown strips between. New for 2024 is a no-dig vegetable garden which is already a point of real interest to visitors and part of having a dynamic garden where we can introduce ideas, debating and learning from the failures as well as the successes.

With education at the heart of the plan, volunteers get expert tuition on

seasonal aspects of gardening from Paul each week as well as guidance and advice as they work together in the garden. They are justly proud of their work and, in just one year, have done an amazing job of clearing and renovating most of the borders. Plans include hosting horticultural students on work experience placements, just as Paul did some ten years ago, helping to support the practical and skills-based element of their learning. 50 students from the National Botanic Gardens visited in January and spent a day learning how to split and divide perennials and another day recently, students from Shinrone National school spent a morning planting snowdrops – all ages catered for! Angela was often frustrated by students having excellent academic records but limited practical skills. We're keen to remedy that.

The RHSI mission is to inform and educate while inspiring a love of gardening and plants. The Coach House in Bellefield, which can seat up to 80 people, is now a venue for garden gatherings, workshops and lectures. The first of these was a one-day workshop last November comprising a series of talks and practical demonstrations on soil and composting. Learning in the company of other gardeners in the beautiful surroundings of Bellefield is proving to be a very good way to spend a day.

RHSI Bellefield is busy. 2023 saw exciting beginnings with about 2000 visitors. We had 750 visitors admiring snowdrops in February '24 and look forward to welcoming members and friends to a series of open weekends and workshops through the year. Further into the future, it's hoped

to expand the meadows and the arboretum as well as the collections of plants, especially those of Irish interest. There are more exciting developments indoors with the library expanding to include Angela's books, the RHSI library and a significant private collection.

Of the many notable plant groups in the garden (Iris, rose, daffodil, paeonie), the snowdrop collection is the most significant. Angela as a 'galanthophile' spent years scouring the Irish and British countryside for different clones. One of her better-known finds, 'Jupes Belle', grows beautifully in the lawns in Bellefield. The collection has several hundred named varieties, but also impressive are the thousands of naturalised snowdrops throughout the site, something which we are actively expanding.

The garden is open for regular weekends through the year and to groups by appointment and is centrally located within two hours of most of the population. Angela's incredibly generous act of leaving the property to the RHSI has ensured the continuation of the garden at Bellefield and allowed the society to carry out its mission for years to come, growing membership and interest in the love and art of gardening. ■

Open Weekends 2024

May 18th and 19th, June 22nd and 23rd, July 20th and 21st, September 21st and 22nd.

For further details of open days and activities in RHSI Bellefield see rhsi.ie.

This article is an edited version of one published in The Irish Garden, early Spring 2024 issue.



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H. 'Charmer'

From the Editor's Garden

**Peter Milligan and
Nicola Milligan**

I read, some time ago, that the late Christopher Lloyd when asked by visitors when was the best time to see his garden always replied "now". So, taking a spin on the great man's advice, when I came to think about the content for this article, I followed the idea of "now" and "now" in the garden, at the time of writing (end-February/early March), means snowdrops, hellebores, and daffodils as I am surrounded by many of them.

Reluctantly leaving the snowdrops and daffodils to one side I am going to focus on the hellebores as I think these can be a much-neglected plant family.

I think everyone will be familiar with the well-known *H. niger* – the Christmas Rose and this is still a strong favourite with many gardeners and can be found in many, if not all, garden centres.

However, nowadays there are a great number of excellent plants available (both species and hybrids) and a quick examination of the catalogues of specialist growers will leave most of us spoilt for choice.

We grow a number of the better-known hellebore species, e.g. *H. augutifolius* (the Corsican Hellebore) and *H. x sternii* (the Mediterranean Hellebore named for Sir Frederic Stern in whose garden the plant originated), and some lesser known or grown species such as *H. torquatus* – a species that is the subject of discussion amongst growers.

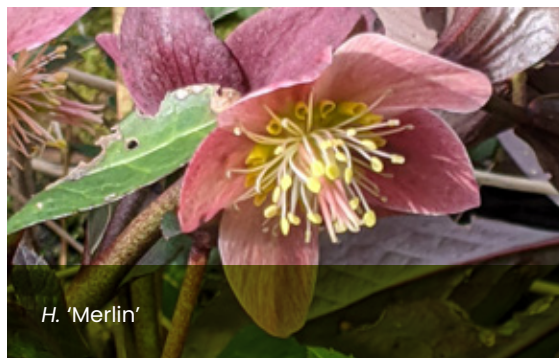
Looking at the hybrids, frequently listed simply as *H. x hybridus* in catalogues, you can select from a colour palette including whites, yellows, purples, pinks, and speckled forms



H. x hybridus 'Double Dusky Grape'



H. torquatus 'True Wild Double'



H. 'Merlin'

available as singles or doubles. Among our favourites are Harvington's 'Double Speckled Pink', from the Rodney Davey Marbled Group (Frostkiss Series) come 'Penny's Pink' and 'Charmer', from Ashwood's we selected 'Neon Shades' (Ashwood Evolution Group) and 'Double Dusky Grape' (Ashwood Garden Hybrids), and last but in no way least *H. ballardiae* 'Merlin'.

I must confess to a liking for plant species – I know that they may lack the increased height, range of colours, and an increase in the number of flowers that come with many hybrid cultivars but I love their simplicity and elegance. *H. torquatus*, mentioned above, is one of three purple-flowered species from the Balkans. Rice and Strangman (*The Gardener's Guide to Growing Hellebores*, Timber Press, 1993) say that "*H. torquatus* is a delightful but problematic plant ... this is a confusing plant both in gardens, where hybrid impostors are common, and in the wild where its status is unclear". Brian Mathew has offered a history of *H. torquatus* in his book (*B. Mathew, Hellebores*, Alpine Garden Society, 1989) but recently Will McLewin (owner of the Phedar Research and Experimental Nursery), wrote "*The name 'torquatus' is unsustainable in the light of historical investigation and extensive fieldwork*".

Mr McLewin's book (*Helleborus and the Helleborastrum Problem*, Wellesley-Cambridge Press, 2019) gives a superb overview of *H. torquatus* and many other hellebores – it is a must for anyone with a deep interest in this plant family.

I am all too aware that I am in danger of straying into a detailed botanic study on *H. torquatus* so I will stop at this point noting that we grow four forms of this beautiful plant: as listed by Mr McLewin they are torquatus Montenegro, torquatus Bosnia, and Malyi true wild doubles (ex-Torquatus true wild doubles) and a named clone 'Xiaoling'. I would urge you not to be put off by the 'troubled' history of this plant but see if you can find a nursery supplying true, wild-collected, examples and buy some. ■

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-  Enjoying free access to open weekends at RHSI Bellefield, our home in the midlands



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RHSI EVENTS GUIDE

DATE	ZOOM	EVENT	TOUR
27 Apr 2024		RHSI Plant Sale	
5 May 2024		RHSI Russborough Garden Show	
18-19 May 2024		RHSI Bellefield Open Weekend	
8 Jun 2024			Day tour (ex Cork City) to Gardens of West Cork
22-23 Jun 2024		RHSI Bellefield Open Weekend	
29 Jun 2024			Day tour (ex Galway City) to Gardens of Limerick
6 Jul 2024			Dublin Garden visit to Medina, Howth
20-21 Jul 2024		RHSI Bellefield Open Weekend	
27 Jul 2024			Day tour of Gardens of Down
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25 Sep 2024	Jon Drori - Around the World in 80 Plants		
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13 Nov 2024	Catherine Fitzgerald - Some Irish Garden Design Projects		
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Gigantic Plants of East Africa

Seamus O'Brien

One of my favourite books is the rather aptly titled *Plants with Personality*, published by the English botanist and plant hunter Patrick Millington Synge (1910–1982) in 1939 following a lengthy (August 1934–May 1935) expedition collecting specimens for the British Museum (Natural History). Synge wrote beautifully, propelling readers out of their armchairs to exotic habitats across the world and one of the most fascinating chapters in the same book, 'The Gigantic Plants of The Equatorial Mountains of East Africa' introduced a range of extraordinary plants like giant groundsels and giant lobelias, peculiar, exotic, indeed alien species, quite unlike to their rather tame relations grown in the gardens of Britain and Ireland.

In an earlier publication (1938) *Mountains of the Moon*, Synge (born into a branch of the same family as the famous Irish playwright) gave a more in-depth account of this major botanical expedition, that brought him and his party up the steep slopes of Mount Kenya and the Aberdare Range in Kenya, to Mount Elgon, a great peak straddling the borders of Kenya and Uganda, and from there crossing Mount Victoria to perhaps the most exciting hunting ground of all, the Rwenzori Range, the famous 'Mountains of the Moon' from which it was once believed that the Nile rose.

I first read *Plants with Personality* thirty years ago, picturing a monstrous, unearthly landscape. Synge's descriptive text painted an almost alien scene; grotesque peaks rising out of the mist, Rwenzori (5,109m), Mt Elgon (4321m), Mt Kenya (5199m), the Aberdare Range (4001m) and the greatest of all, Kilimanjaro in Tanzania (5895). All these mountains, soaring from the plains of Equatorial East Africa, harbour a highly interesting flora with each mountain often having its own peculiarities, harbouring endemic species found on individual mountain slopes and nowhere else in the region.

This is certainly the case with the giant groundsels and giant lobelias. Synge pointed out that all these mountains stood out like islands from the surrounding warmer plains, islands with a peculiar vegetation, a relic flora more widespread in ancient times. Plants there behaved in an entirely different manner to their counterparts in other alpine regions of the world. Not for them to cower as dwarf mats and compact cushions, on these



Afrocarpus gracilior Ndare forest
Kenya Jan 2023.b

high African peaks plants seemed to have gone mad and instead the early explorers met groundsels with woody swollen trunks 7 m tall, while lobelias appeared like giant blue and green obelisks up to 9 m high.

Synge found it fascinating to stand on the Equator, yet with conditions as cold as a really cold day in Britain or Ireland. In *Plants with Personality*, he included images of one of his Kenyan porters alongside the giant column-like inflorescence of *Lobelia gregoriana* subsp. *sattimae*, found only on the Aberdare Range, and the towering spike of *Lobelia wollastonii* alongside giant groundsels, with the silhouette of the Rwenzori peaks in the distance.



Blue pool Ngare Ndare forest
Kenya Jan 2023

That was enough for me, I was determined to one day visit the same mountains, though it was to be 30 years later in January 2023 when the dream was realised. Our port of entry was Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, from where we travelled northwest to visit the Brackenhurst Arboretum, giving us a good introduction to many of the plants we were likely to encounter during our travels. This included *Rosa abyssinica*, a vigorous climber then bearing white dog-rose like blossoms. It has the distinction of being the only rose native to Africa.

Ngare Ndare forest is located nearby and we were to spend several days exploring this pristine piece of unspoiled Afromontane Forest near the foot of Mount Kenya. To reach it, we crossed the Equator from our base and we were to cross the Equator eight times during the course of our travels. It was a strange sensation to criss-cross from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere on such a frequent basis.

The forests of Ngare Ndare have acted as a vital corridor to elephants for centuries and in drier places the canopy was almost entirely formed by the African olive, *Olea europaea* subsp. *cuspidata*. In more open area the fever tree, *Vachellia xanthophloea*, formed wide spreading flat-topped trees with distinctive yellow bark (it is one of the few trees where photosynthesis takes place in the bark). The tree has a tendency to grow in swampy regions and early European settlers associated it with malaria, not realising that mosquitos spread the fever, not the trees supported by the swamps.

The red pine or East African juniper, *Juniperus procera*, formed large trees soaring above the forest canopy to 30 m in places though the most impressive of all these sylvan giants was *Afrocarpus gracilior*, the East African yellowwood, a podocarp relative that in these forests formed mammoth trees 40m overhead and with trunks of enormous girths. Abel, our guide through these forests, carried a rifle

at all times; botanising is not entirely safe in a region inhabited by elephants, leopards, rhinos and wild buffalo, indeed beneath one of the East African yellowwoods we found the bleached skull of an elephant.

Beyond lay the blue pool, a perfectly blue sheet of water, replenished from a spring that bursts through a cliff directly behind, having travelled 35 km underground from the rapidly retreating glaciers on Mount Kenya. On the cliffs that fringed the pool grew sheets of a delicate maidenhair fern, *Adiantum incisum*, while the banks of a nearby stream were flanked by the pink-flowered *Impatiens sodenii*.

Regati Conservancy lies to the south-west of Mount Kenya and receives higher precipitation. We spent several exciting days exploring its rich Afromontane rainforest vegetation. The forest composition here was quite different to that of Ngare Ndare, with mature forest skirted by swampy vleis (beloved by elephants) and with extensive areas of species-rich meadows on the edges of the many rivers and streams that drained the area.

Most of the trees here were new to me, one of the most impressive was a 60 m giant, *Aningeria adolfi-friederici*, with a massively buttressed trunk. We were lucky to have Michael Kagwanja Weru with us as our guide. Michael, who has co-written a field guide to these forests has a deep understanding of the forests and we learned much from him.

It was good too, to encounter *Podocarpus milanjanus*, one of the most dominant trees in these moss-



Crotalaria agatiflora Mount Kenya Sirimon
Route to Old Moses campsite.



Aningeria adolfi-friedericii Regati
Conservancy Kenya Jan 2023



Delphinium macrocentrum Mount Kenya
Sirimon Route to Old Moses campsite



Dendrosenecio keniensis Mackinders
Valley to Old Moses



Helichrysum chionoides Mackinders
Valley to Old Moses



Impatiens tinctoria subsp.
elegantissima Regati Conservancy
Kenya Jan 2023

clad woods, with female trees bearing embryonic fruits and while males bore upright tassel-like pollen cones. Ferns were everywhere abundant and, in the swamps, balsams abounded, the commonest of these, the pink-flowered *Impatiens rubromaculata* grew alongside *Geranium arabicum* and *Gunnera perpensa*, the latter I had last seen in the Drakensberg mountains in South Africa several years previously.

The best of the balsams from this area, however, is a giant that we grow in the herbaceous border here at Kilmacurragh, our stock having originally come from Beech Park, the Shackleton Garden in Clonsilla. *Impatiens tinctoria* subsp. *elegantissima* forms a large multi-stemmed perennial up to 2 m tall, emerging from *Dahlia*-like tubers. During summer (in our climate) it bears myriads of large white orchid-like blooms, purple-splashed in their centres, each with a 9 cm long spur to the rear. It has always been a favourite of mine and so it was very exciting to wade out into streams to see it close up, fringing the edges of currents.

Ultimately it was time to climb Mount Kenya. Baboons emerged from thickets at the entrance to the National Park, while zebras brayed just like donkeys. It was a long hike up the steep slopes under a baking sun and we contended with both altitude and dehydration. We had plenty of interesting plants to keep us distracted however, and on the edge of a forest dominated by *Juniperus procera* and *Podocarpus milanjanus*, we found gems like the white-flowered *Protea caffra* subsp. *kilmandscharica*, the staircase plant *Leonotis ocymifolia* (carrying successive whorls of orange



Impatiens tinctoria subsp. *elegantissima*
Regati Conservancy Kenya Jan 2023

blossoms), scattered plants of *Kniphofia thomsonii*, *Hypericum revolutum* and the rather showy *Habenstretia angloensis*, though the most beautiful of all plants on these lower slopes proved to be *Delphinium macrocentrum*, a perennial of about a metre tall, bearing Cambridge-blue blossoms suffused with jade. Native to the Kenyan highlands and northern Malawi, if the hybridisers ever get their hands on this glorious species who knows what they might achieve.

The African rosewood, *Hagenia abyssinica* marked the upper limit of forest growth, giving way to a scrub of *Erica arborea* and alpine moorland beyond. I was immediately transported back to Helen Dillon's Ranelagh Garden on seeing this tree. Extremely rare in European gardens, Helen grew it among aralias where its distinctive peeling bark made it stand out. With it grew *Crotalaria agatiflora*, a large shrub bearing masses of spectacular yellow pea-like blossoms over dusky silver stems and foliage.

We had now reached the subalpine region where many temperate plants find refuge from the baking climate below. One of the most beautiful of these was a plumeless thistle, *Carduus keniensis*, a strikingly handsome plant with bold architectural foliage and masses of purple blossoms on ferociously spiny stems.

We slept that night at Old Moses Mountain Camp, an evocative name for what was really a very basic large wooden shack perched at an altitude of 3300 m and this hut was to act as base camp for our ascent of Africa's second highest mountain the next day. We were glad of the break, it had been a steep ascent in often high temperatures, though the views from the camp were spectacular. Below us lay the vast Kenyan plains, above us were the plug-like peaks of Mount Kenya with her many snowfields and glaciers. What lay between interested me most. After a three decade wait it was in these moorlands that I would finally meet the giant groundsels and giant lobelias of Equatorial East Africa.



Lobelia gregoriana and *Lobelia telekii*
Mackinders Valley to Old Moses



Zebras by entrance to Mount Kenya
National Park



Me on Mount Kenya

That night we shared bunk-beds in a dorm with hikers of several nationalities. We had been forewarned about nocturnal visitors – rats – which happily never happened and we were up at the crack of dawn, trekking slopes that had recently been devastated by natural fires. Ice cracked beneath our feet, heavy frosts had fallen over night and it seemed strange to encounter such a scene in this part of tropical Africa.

Sunlight was just rising across the mountain as we made our way through dense thickets of *Erica arborea* and I still remember the excitement of the group on finding the scarlet-red flowered *Gladiolus watsonioides* in full bloom. Native to central Kenya and northern Tanzania, it is found on Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya and the nearby Aberdare Range where its preferred habitat is *Erica arborea* scrub.

Above there we were into tussock grass moorland and there we met the first of the giant groundsels, *Dendrosenecio keniensis*, bearing gigantic cabbage-like rosettes with brilliant silvery leaf undersides. These rosettes had closed tightly through the night, protecting the plant from the extremes of cold. The silvery hairs

also protect the plant from excessive sunlight and ultraviolet light. It was a remarkably similar scene to how the New Zealand Mountain daisies, the celmisias, grow in tussock grass in the Southern Alps of the South Island, and similarly use silvery hairs to deflect sunlight and UV rays. *Dendrosenecio keniensis* is found only on Mount Kenya and was one of a number of remarkable endemics we were to encounter that day.

Then came the giant lobelias, even more exciting. *Lobelia gregoriana* is native to the mountains of Kenya and Uganda and is best described as an obelisk of overlapping jade bracts sitting over a rosette of purple-edged strap-like leaves. It made a truly remarkable sight and I think the only other plant I've met that can match its exotic appearance is the giant rhubarb of Tibet and Sikkim, *Rheum nobile*. It was named by the Kew botanist Edmund Gilbert Baker (1864-1949) for the explorer John Walter Gregory (1864-1932) who collected it on Mount Kenya in 1893.

Growing with it at higher altitudes was the curious *Lobelia telekii*, then bearing 3 m tall flower spikes covered

in long, thin silvery, hairy bracts, reminiscent of *Echium wildpretii*. Plants consist of a single rosette which grows for several decades, then flowers and dies. During our visit thousands of plants were in bloom alongside those of *Lobelia gregoriana*, a bizarre, almost alien scene. Both species bore innumerable blue blossoms among rosettes of bracts and approaching the summit area they painted a surreal picture, punctuating extensive swathes of tussock grass and growing alongside another giant groundsel, *Dendrosenecio keniodendron*, yet another Kenyan endemic. In places this species formed fat trunked 'trees' up to 8 m tall and like the lower-growing *Dendrosenecio keniensis*, it too closes its leaves at night to protect itself from freezing temperatures.

Rising higher, the giant groundsels and giant lobelias gave way to several species of *Helichrysum* including *Helichrysum chionoides*, an exceptionally handsome shrub bearing masses of its everlasting blossoms that close at night. Patrick Millington Syngé sent back consignments of seeds to

various gardens in Britain and Ireland following his East African Expedition and stated that it was Glasnevin that was most successful in raising and flowering his helichrysums, while it was Andrew Kenneth McDouall (1870-1945) who first grew his introduction of *Impatiens tinctoria* subsp. *elegantissima* and *Hypericum revolutum* out of doors at Logan in Scotland. Glasnevin also received seeds of the giant groundsels and giant lobelias at this time from a member of the Grove Annesley family, from Annes Grove, Co. Cork, who was then based in Kenya.

Ultimately, beneath the peaks of Mount Kenya we met the rather pretty stonecrop, *Sedum ruwenzoriense*, sheltering on moss-clad stone outcrops and cliffs. Mount Kenya was an exciting place to botanise, but this visit was just a taster; in January 2024 we visit the Rwenzori Range, the Mountains of the Moon, on the borders of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to encounter a new array of endemic giant lobelia and giant groundsel species. And so, the tale continues... ■

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Drawn from Nature

The Flowering of
Irish Botanical Art

Patricia Butler

During the last twenty years or so while carrying out research relating to the subject of Irish botanical illustration, I was astonished to find Ireland did not possess a Society of Botanical Artists. Today, I am delighted to say that the Society (ISBA), established March 2014, is flourishing with a healthy membership.

However, it would appear this was not always the case. There is little evidence of botanical illustrators working in this country until the foundation of The Dublin Society, (25 June, 1731) formed to 'improve husbandry, manufacturers, and other useful arts'. This resulted in members determined to raise standards of agricultural practice. In order to tackle and improve crop cultivation, the Society began to publish a number of statistical surveys and pamphlets relating to a wide variety of crops: saffron, hemp, etc., botanical portraiture playing an important, functional and practical role.

As early as 1732, one of the earliest plant portraits, a small competent hand-coloured engraving of *Potentilla anglica* (trailing tormentil) by Co. Kildare born artist, James Gwin (Gwin) (1700-1769) appeared in the Society's pamphlet relating to tanning [1]. Here, the artist conveys information in as highly scientific and accurate a way as possible and demonstrates the vital necessity for accuracy in plant portraiture. The latter is essential as botanists require as much visual information as possible in order to help them to name and identify the plant in question.

Born in Blackrock, Co. Dublin in 1869, field geologist and artist George Victor Du Noyer demonstrates how important these skills are as seen in the first publication to arise directly out of the Natural History Section of the 19th century Ordnance Survey of Ireland [2]. This contained eight pages of plant portraits devoted to the botany of the parish of



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Templemore, hand-coloured in watercolour by Du Noyer and included the narrow small-reed *Calamagrostis lapponica*.

Botanical art was and is being used today in a wide variety of fascinating and practical areas including the field of design. Dublin born, William Kilburn, (Capel Street, 1745–1818) succeeded in combining both botanical portraiture and design and made a vital contribution to scientific botany and illustration. Invited by botanist, William Curtis FLS (1746–99) to contribute a number of copper-plate engravings to his *Flora Londinensis* (London, 1775–98), Kilburn executed a substantial number of hand coloured, life-size plant portraits. Forced to desert the world of botanical illustration for the more profitable business of calico-printing, Kilburn's feeling for naturalism did not desert him as displayed in his outstanding 'working designs for textiles' [3] which today form part of the V. & A. collections, London.

One of the most fascinating aspects which came to light while carrying out research for my book was the lack of recognition for female botanical artists. Throughout the 19th and into the early 20th century, women, because of their gender were largely confined to working on the margins of academic and

scientific institutions with substantial numbers being drawn to the world of collecting and illustration. Botany was looked upon not as a profession but as a hobby and saw keen female amateurs relying on their observational skills rather than any type of strict, formal scientific training.

Algologist and bryologist, Ellen Hutchins (1785–1815) who lived an isolated existence in Bantry, West Cork where she died in 1815 aged only thirty made a valuable contribution to a number of leading 19th century publications including J. Sowerby and J.E. Smith's well known *English Botany* [4] but received little public acknowledgement. Others were pleased to see their work in print but did not actively seek recognition. The Hon. Mary Ward's (nee King) (1827–1869) ('Ireland's first Lady of the Microscope') studies of insects, fish scales, bird feathers and plants resulted in three publications and all carried the somewhat mysterious attribution 'The Hon. Mrs W'.

'A Woman of Substance', Lady Edith Blake (nee Osborne) 1846–1926 possessed no formal art training in either botany or art yet succeeded in leaving a remarkable legacy. Born in Clonmel, she eloped with, and married Captain Henry Arthur Blake (18140–

1918), a man considered by her family to be highly unsuitable. Later, he went on to have a distinguished career beginning with his appointment as Governor of Newfoundland in 1887. Each new 'territory' saw Lady Blake avidly recording the botanical beauty of native plants. Frequently, she despatched seeds and living specimens to Kew as did Lady Charlotte I. Wheeler Cuffe (nee Williams) (1867–1967), whose husband Sir Otway served as a civil engineer in the British Colonial Service. While travelling through remote regions in Burma, this intrepid traveller recorded several hundred botanical paintings which were later presented to Glasnevin (1926). A keen gardener, Cuffe was invited to undertake the design, construction and initial management of the botanical gardens at Maymyo, (now the National Kandawgyi Botanical Gardens), Burma; her aim: 'to have a garden of all the beautiful indigenous flowers, trees & shrubs' [5].

Today, Ireland is fortunate to enjoy the work of some of the finest botanical artists in the world, the ISBA providing a welcome platform. Poet and naturalist Michael Viney writing in the *Irish Times* (2003), when celebrating the 80th birthday of his close friend botanical artist, Raymond Piper remarked:

How extraordinary it is, in the age of photography, that precision of this sort should still have such power. 'Boy!' commanded Piper's night-school teacher, 'make the line live. Give it shape, thick to thin to suggest shape and volume. Give it vitality – make it speak! [6] ■

'Drawn from Nature. The Flowering of Irish Botanical Art' is available from all good book shops.

Notes

- [1] William Maple, *A Method of Tanning without Bark*, Dublin: published by A. Rhames for The Dublin Society, 1732.
- [2] *Memoir of the City and N. Western Liberties of Londonderry, Parish of Templemore*. Colonel Colby. Dublin, 1837.
- [3] *Book of Designs for Printed Textiles*, Title (on spine): 'Kilburn's Designs'. Date: c.1787/1792, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.
- [4] Amongst Ellen Hutchins's contributions were: (a) J. Sowerby & J.E. Smith *English Botany*... 36 vols (London, 1790–1814); (b) Lewis Weston Dillwyn, *British Confervae, or, Coloured Figures and Descriptions of the British plants referred by Botanists to the Genus Conferva*. (London: W. Phillips, 1802) (c) Dawson Turner, *Historia Fuci, sive ... Plantarumfucorum ... et Historia*. 4 vols, Latin and English (London, 1808–1819) etc.
- [5] Letter from Lady Charlotte Wheeler-Cuffe to Baroness Pauline (Polly) Prochazka (no date) as quoted in E. Charles Nelson, 'Mount Victoria, Spring, 1911' in *Shadow Among Splendours*. Lady Charlotte Wheeler-Cuffe's *Adventures Among the Flowers of Burma*, 1897–1921 (Dublin: NBG Glasnevin, 2013), p.110.
- [6] Michael Viney, 'The Orchid Man', *Irish Times Magazine*, January 11, 2003, p.10.

List of Illustrations

- 1 Title: *Potentilla anglica* (Trailing Tormentil)
Artist: James Gwim (Gwin), (1700–1769).
Courtesy, National Library of Ireland.
- 2 Title: *Calamagrostis lapponica* (Lapland Reedgrass)
Artist: George Victor Du Noyer (1817–1869).
Engraving from *The Templemore Memoir* (Appendix, 2nd ed., Dublin, 1837, plate 4.
Courtesy, National Library of Ireland.
- 3 Title: *Leontodon taraxacum* (*Taraxacum officinale*), Dandelion
Artist: William Kilburn (1745–1818).
Copperplate engraving hand-coloured from an original watercolour drawn for *Flora Londinensis*.
Courtesy, National Library of Ireland.
- 4 Title: *Dendrobium thyrsiflorum* and *Coelogyne huettneria*
Artist: Lady Charlotte Isabel Wheeler Cuffe (nee Williams) (1867–1967).
Watercolour. Inscribed in watercolour 'ON HILL OAK LEIKTHO APRIL'
Courtesy, National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin.

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A Watershed Moment at Bloom 2023

Joe Eustace, student designer, talks to Mary Hackett

Journal readers may remember that in the Spring 2023 Journal we featured Joe Eustace, a UCD student who was designing his first Bloom Garden for last year's show. As promised, we asked Joe how the entire experience worked out for him.

"Bloom 2023 was a watershed moment for me. I know a lot more about building a show garden having had the chance to talk to experienced designers. The importance of thinking on your feet, of being flexible and openminded in a stressful situation, I've really taken those things on board. Nicola Hayes mentored me from the beginning, and I learned so much from her when we were at Bloom about constructing a physical garden from a plan, how to talk to the press and public and how to get the most from the five-day show.

Bord Bia's support was outstanding. They funded my 2023 garden, ran digital marketing workshops for us before the show and were there for designers and exhibitors all the way through.



Joe Eustace

I sourced my plants from a variety of Irish nurseries. I was in Germany on my Erasmus placing until just before the show, which was a bit nerve wracking. Some of the stock I imported from European nurseries was too immature to be used but Schram's, Tully's, Woodstock and Campbell Plants in Maynooth among others found me great plants for the garden".

Joe will graduate from UCD with a degree in landscape architecture in May 2024. Subject to sponsor support, he's hoping to have another garden in Bloom, this time with an emphasis on recycled and reimagined elements, partially inspired by Dermot Foley's Bridgefoot Street Park in the Dublin Liberties. The future may include working with leading Irish garden designers and possibly further study abroad, to widen his knowledge.

We at RHSI wish Joe well and will continue to follow his design career with interest. ■

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The build team from left: Grzeg, Karl, Billy, and Jamie. Mike yet to arrive.

A Chelsea Flower Show Wish Fulfilled

Karl Flynn

We all have our 'tick box' lists and I am happy to have achieved many of mine (with some exceptions, such as playing on the wing for Manchester United and reaching the summit of Mount Everest!). This year I managed to tick off another wish which was to help with the construction of a garden at the world-famous Chelsea Flower Show and to be able to see other gardens under construction and the processes involved. It was also an opportunity to see the gardens and exhibits at the completed or near completion stage before the huge crowds descended on public opening day May 23rd, 2023.

I had helped pteridologist (fern expert) and designer Billy Alexander at Bloom with a few small fern garden builds based on his renowned Kells Bay House and Gardens in Kerry for which he successfully won many gold medals over the years. He had previously won Royal Horticultural Society gold medals at Hampton Court and Chelsea in 2021. This led to the opportunity this year for myself and three others to help him with a larger



Day1: arranging the key tree ferns and adjusting heights



Day1: arranging the key tree ferns and adjusting heights



Day2: Mike building the low stone wall



Day3: shaping the pool, lining, and filling with water

than usual exhibit (100sq/m floor area) in the Chelsea Flower Show Great Pavilion.

The inspiration for his garden exhibit came from the Irish landscape, and in particular the wild surrounds of Co Kerry. The design was to simulate a Kerry bog, along with a myriad of fern varieties and native sphagnum moss amidst small peaty bog pools. Offsetting this, were large ancient rocks typical of the Iveragh peninsula landscape in Co Kerry.

I offered my help for six days prior to the show opening, Sunday to Friday. An early Sunday morning flight to Heathrow, the London tube to South Kensington and a short walk to the Royal Hospital Chelsea grounds delivered me at the main gate by 10.00hrs. Met up with Billy and his fulltime gardener Grzeg who had arrived earlier by ferry, to start unloading their container containing the fern collection for the exhibit. Billy had completed the necessary Brexit paperwork and the phytosanitary certificates and thankfully no problems arose. The rest of the Kells Bay Chelsea build team arrived the next day, Jamie on loan from the Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall and stonemason Mike from Kerry to build the low stone wall winding its way through the garden.

We immediately got to work positioning and arranging the key large tree ferns and as necessary readjusting them under the guidance of Billy and his vision of what he wanted to achieve. Over the following long and tiring 12-hour days the garden exhibit began to rise out of the large bare plot of lawn within the Great Pavilion. Multiple pallets were used to form the basic framework to achieve the required variations in level for Billy's landscape design. Due to the

size of the exhibit additional pallets and other materials were begged, borrowed, or donated by other exhibits on site. I was impressed by the camaraderie between those working on the various garden exhibits. Most seemed happy and willing to share unrequired or excess materials, preferring to recycle or repurpose rather than dispose of them to the various waste skips on site. That said, I found myself making numerous trips to the many waste skips on site to source additional materials.

During short work breaks, early mornings, and late evenings, I got the opportunity to walk around the Royal Hospital Chelsea grounds and see other gardens in development. The quality of the crafts-persons and landscapers working on the various gardens was exquisite. The plant material everywhere was perfection with every damaged leaf or imperfect flower removed. A case in point, and my favourite exhibit (Kells Bay exhibit aside!), was the Japanese Biophilic Garden Otsu - Hanare designed by Kazuyuki Ishihara with his large team of helpers who spent all day everyday clipping, picking any bit of debris from the moss mounds used all throughout the exhibit and removing all individual dead pine needles from the many shaped pine trees...all removed using chopsticks!

After we finished on the Friday Billy continued to fine tune his design vision, pruning, watering, and feeding his precious tree ferns over the weekend until he was satisfied that he had achieved the perfection required to achieve a Chelsea gold medal when judging commenced early on the following Tuesday morning. The previous day the newly crowned King Charles and



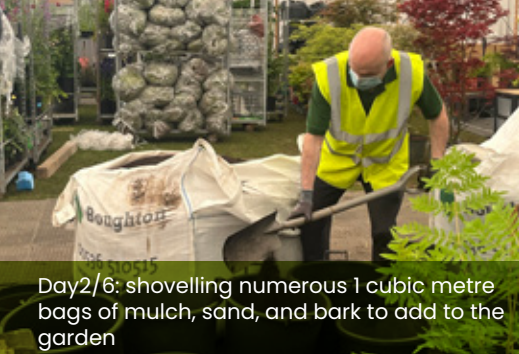
Day3: shaping the pool, lining, and filling with water



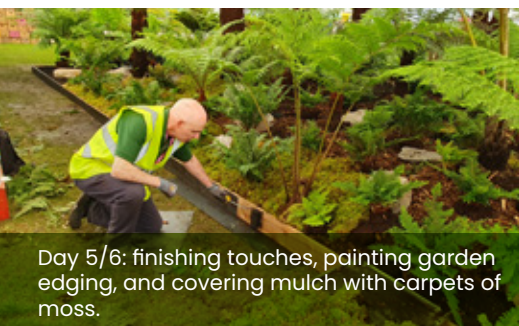
Day3/4: bringing the undulating landscape design together. Karl adding bark mulch to bulk up the beds



Day4/5: Karl removing dead or damaged fronds before planting



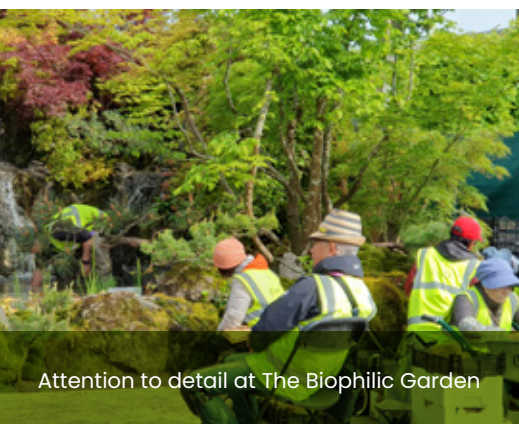
Day2/6: shovelling numerous 1 cubic metre bags of mulch, sand, and bark to add to the garden



Day 5/6: finishing touches, painting garden edging, and covering mulch with carpets of moss.



Day6: near completion, from left Grzeg, Jamie and Karl



Attention to detail at The Biophilic Garden

Queen Camilla stopped to view the Kells Bay exhibit and chat with Billy which was a great honour for him.

Designers who submit a garden to any RHS competition are asked to include a design brief in advance setting out their aims, including a description of the garden, its purpose, its function and an overview of the key plants and features. The judges then assess how well executed the garden is against this brief. They use criteria spanning five different categories: ambition, overall impression, design, construction, and planting. The Chelsea flower Show awards gardens in one of four categories – gold, silver-gilt, silver and bronze. Silver-gilt is an extra class of medal in between silver and gold that gives the Flower Show panel an extra way to recognise gardens in certain specific categories. Confusingly, bronze winners do not actually win a physical medal, but winners in the other three classes do. Many medals are awarded but there is no guarantee of a medal. Gardens are judged on their own merits and not against each other.

I was back home in Howth when Billy texted our build team to announce that the Kells Bay Garden exhibit had achieved the gold medal standard. A while later we heard that the garden was also awarded Best Exhibit in the Great Pavilion...a remarkable double achievement for this Irish garden exhibit and garden designer Billy. I was proud to be a small part of his success (and which almost compensated for not getting to play professionally for my beloved Manchester United!). ■

A version of this article appeared in the Howth and Sutton Horticultural Society's Summer 2023 Ezine.



The Flower Garden looking towards Lough Mask

A New Partner Garden in County Mayo

Mary Hackett talks to Frank Steffens, Head Gardener, Drimbawn Garden

Deep in Co Mayo's 'Joyce Country', in the village of Tourmakeady there is an exceptional garden. Twenty years of considered stewardship by the Wilson family, the vision of garden designer Daphne Levinge Shackleton and the hard work of gardener Frank Steffens have together made RHSI partner garden Drimbawn a glorious mix of formal and informal.

Drimbawn House was built as a sporting lodge at the beginning of the 19th century. The surrounding lands were overlooked until Doris and Ronnie Wilson of Monaghan Mushrooms bought the property. Doris has a keen appreciation of plants and planting while Ronnie's focus is more on the landscaping projects. The garden has been developed area by area, working to an overall design by Daphne Levinge Shackleton. In head gardener Frank Steffen's opinion, it is now coming into its prime. This is a garden defined by

the water that surrounds it. There's Lough Mask on the eastern boundary, a sheet of silver on a sunny day. Streams and corries create the Damp Garden, the Bog Walk and the Jungle. The Reflecting Pond was imagined by landscape architect Bernard Seymour. Grasses, sympathetic tree planting, and Bob Quinn's 'Three Anglers' sculpture enhance the aqueous setting.

Drimbawn's extravagant elegance is created on thin, acidic, Connaught soil lashed by winds from both east and west. Soil improvement is everything. "I use no artificial fertilisers here", Frank explains. "We have access to generous quantities of mushroom compost. We make our own leaf mould. Organic fertilizer including chicken pellets adds nitrogen and some bulk. I am also using mycorrhizal fungi at planting and in general mulching". You can't hurry change in this quiet place. Challenging soil and climatic conditions mean it



Bob Quinn's sculpture overlooks the lake

can take several years to settle new planting and a modification in growing conditions might take up to five years to show benefits.

For all that's it's a challenge to grow in these surroundings, there's a sense of fun in this garden. The Hazel Wood hides a maze with a teepee at its heart. A tree house on stilts, marooned in a sea of primula, overlooks the Bluebell Wood. The Jungle planted with New Zealand tree ferns, cryptomeria and pseudopanax is a riot of monsters and creepy-crawlies magicked out of fallen timber and massed tree roots. There's generous rhododendron planting, a small cherry wood and, the morning Frank and I walked the garden, they were planting a drift of crab apple trees on the western side of the avenue.

Frank compares Drimbawn's Flower Garden to the kitchen at a good house party. Everyone ends up here! Falling in terraces from the heights of the avenue to the level of the lakeshore, three sides are walled for shelter. The eastern aspect is left open, respecting

the extraordinary lake views. Within the closely planted acre, the gardening team start their season with camellias and tulips and go on to manage double borders of allium and peonies. Massed roses backed by espaliered pear trees start to bloom in May. The herbaceous borders are at their best in July and can be expected to show good colour into late September. Generous vegetable beds grow potatoes, beetroot, brassicas, legumes, and sweetcorn. And that's before we get to the tunnel or the fruit garden. The productivity is amazing.

Having planted a range of native and non-native apple trees in the orchard, Frank picks the early to mid-season variety 'Katy' as a favourite. Several efforts have been made to establish a wildflower meadow under the orchard trees. Calling upon the infinite depths of patience required of all gardeners, Frank has now seeded the grass with yellow rattle in several successive seasons and is waiting for a combination of favourable winds and visiting avians to supply interesting seed spread.

A short article cannot hope to catch all that a complex garden such as Drimbawn offers. Try to add a trip to Tourmakeady to your garden visits this summer. You will be very glad you did. ■

Drimbawn Garden, Tourmakeady, Co Mayo, Eircode F12D252 is a new addition to the RHSI's partner garden list for 2024. Visitors are welcome on open days and by arrangement. Details on the RHSI website.

Open weekend 2024 is June 8th and 9th from 12 – 5pm.



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Floral Art

Karen Robinson

No-Foam Spring Design

I found this wonderful circular piece of tree bark when out walking in the woods recently and thought it would make a great naturalistic container. I couldn't believe my luck! It was just lying on the ground. I love the moss growing on it.

I placed a number of empty spice jars inside a long low container, filled them with water and placed inside the bark.

I then placed birch and willow twigs across the design to hide my mechanics and then inserted a variety of spring flowers into the bottles. I used Tulips, Narcissus Tete-a-Tete and Hellebores

Date for your Diary: AOIFA (Association of Irish Floral Artists) Flower Festival will be held on the weekend of 29th & 30th June 2024 in Dundrum in the two churches, Christchurch Taney and Holy Cross Church Dundrum. Well worth a visit! Hope to see you there. Please check the AOIFA website regularly for what's on in your area.



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Partner Gardens

Caher Bridge Garden

We are delighted to welcome our first Co. Clare Partner Garden to the scheme. Award – winning Caher Bridge Garden set deep in the Burren, was specifically designed to gradually inch its way seamlessly out into the surrounding wild landscape over the past 25 years. It is the creation of its owner, the environmentalist and gardener Carl Wright. Wet, windy and virtually soil free, conditions here are starkly difficult, but with his deep knowledge of all that thrives in his very particular landscape, Carl has created a truly magical garden. There are thousands of plants including several notable collections – ferns, hostas, mahonias, daffodils, primulas, galanthus, brunneras, geraniums, hemerocallis. Hundreds of unearthed stones have been used imaginatively throughout the garden in beautiful walls, terraces, raised beds and ornamental structures– most notably a spectacular ‘moon window’. A pond garden in a marshy area adjoining the river next to his restored cottage is now home to a mix of wild and cultivated water loving plants. Spring bulbs fill the front garden– previously a scrub of blackthorn hazel and hawthorn. Behind the cottage are many troughs and pots full of rare and unusual plants while the land then rises with meandering paths up through the terraces of stone-faced raised beds to the woodland beyond. Here you’ll find a fernery with hundreds



of fern varieties nestling between moss and lichen covered limestone boulders. Caher Bridge is constantly expanding with new sections added yearly, the most recent being a spectacular folly with views over the Caher Valley. For good reason this garden has featured in many books and publications both nationally and internationally– it is an absolute must to visit!

Caher Bridge Garden

Formoyle West, Craggagh,
Ballyvaughan, Co Clare
Post Code: H91 H66C
Landline: 00353 65 707 6225. (No mobile!)
Email: caherbridgegarden@gmail.com
Visits: Strictly by appointment. Early April– mid October.
Half price entry to RHSI members on presentation of current membership card. Cash payment only please.



Partner Gardens

Hillsborough Castle & Gardens

We are delighted to have received a request from Hillsborough Castle and Gardens to join our Partner Gardens Scheme, and warmly them into our garden portfolio. The castle was built in the late 18th century by the Hills family and has been in the ownership of the British Government since 1925. It is now the official home of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a royal residence. Between 2014 and 2019 the castle and gardens underwent intensive restoration with the magnificently refurbished Castle State Rooms and the entire 100 acres of gardens now open to the public.

The extensive gardens, with variety and colour throughout the seasons are a delight to discover and explore. There are more formally planted areas such as the elegant Granville Garden with its glorious roses and herbaceous planting and the much older 4 acre walled garden dating back to the 1760s. Major restoration of the walled garden was required in recent years and in 2017 this commenced with a design similar to the original layout, flourishing again now with a great range of fruit and vegetables grown for the cafe along with wonderful long herbaceous borders. The famous Yew Tree Walk en route to the walled garden leads towards the romantic Lady Alice’s Temple dating from 1867.



Pathways through less formal areas pass by hazy rhododendrons, through extensive woodland areas under-planted with a myriad of beautiful spring bulbs and on through the Glen with its grotto and Pinetum. Shaded meandering streams banked by ferns and mossy stones all feed into a very fine lake, with a surrounding pathway leading back towards the castle.

So please get yourselves travel-ready over the next months and visit this truly superb new Partner Garden at Hillsborough!

Hillsborough Castle and Gardens

Hillsborough, Co Down BT26 6TY
Mobile contact: 0044 333 320 6000
email: info@hrp.org.uk
Web: hrp.org.uk/hillsborough-castle
Visits: RHSI members get free entry to the gardens, but for joint membership only one member gets free entry. Castle tickets are not included in this offer. RHSI tickets can’t be booked in advance, only at the ticket office on arrival.

Spring/Summer at Mount Stewart

Spring to early summer is a magical time in the garden, as spring bulb displays of tulips and alliums reach their finale in the formal garden, our internationally renowned rhododendron collection takes centre stage. The Rhododendron Wood should not be missed, and is ablaze with colour until early summer.

In summer, don't miss the display of 700 giant Himalayan lilies *Cardiocrinum giganteum* with its 3m tall flower spikes, crowned in pure white & crimson with highly scented flowers which bloom from June. Accompanied by thousands of oriental flowering lilies, this is arguably, the largest collection of lilies planted in a garden in Ireland.



Russborough Notes

Bernie Roddie

As the old proverb says March in like a lion out like a lamb... and that was certainly true on 1st March this year with a heavy fall of snow...Let's hope the proverb will ring true by the end of the month and favour us gardeners with some milder weather.

We finished off the year in December with our usual Christmas wreath-making day under the guidance of Denise and we were very pleased with our artistic results and exchanged photos of our wreaths and table decorations. The volunteers were then invited up to the big house for a guided tour of the house which was a real treat especially for any new volunteers who hadn't been on the tour previously and we were treated to a very enjoyable lunch afterwards.

January and February brought lots of jobs in the garden, cutting back perennials, weeding, dividing and planting up and generally getting ready for the coming garden season. A layer of bark mulch was very welcome for the herbaceous beds. The new urban garden is still under cover but we did manage to plant a hedge of *Taxus baccata* before the end of last year and marked out the general layout of the garden from the plan for planting when the soil dries out and is more manageable.

The fruit rows were pruned and mulched and are now ready for their growing season. The roses along the east wall were pruned and a layer of topsoil added with additional nutrients added. Plans were made for a cut flower



Fruit Rows prepped for the New Season



The House Tour

section with annual flowers further up along the east wall and volunteers poured over the catalogues for seeds to select to provide a riot of colour in the warmer days ahead.

Work is ongoing in the composting area to replace any dead wood in the cages and smarten it up. Gravel was laid on the path in front of the cold frames which is a huge improvement instead of plodding over a very muddy path. Daphne bholua 'Jacqueline Postill' blossomed and gave off a beautiful scent in front of the curvilinear glasshouse. Snowdrops delighted and daffodils put on a colourful spring display. There are lots of tulips in pots peeping up around the garden to give much needed colour before the herbaceous beds truly come into their own. We have lots of new volunteers who are enjoying donating their time in the garden and Brendan who is with us from TUS gives lots of advice on various aspects of gardening in the potting shed when the rain just refuses to stop (which has happened quite regularly on volunteer days during February).

It will be all hands-on deck now over the next couple of months to get the garden looking at its very best in



Urban Garden under Development



Wreath Making Day

preparation for the RHSI Russborough Show on Sunday 5th May and we look forward to seeing you there. ■

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Laurelmere Cottage Garden

Cherry Sleeman

Our work in the garden at Laurelmere Cottage is in its seventh year and we thought it appropriate to set up a small committee to review our mission, vision, objectives and value statement which are as follows:

1. Name:

Laurelmere Volunteer Group

2. Mission and Vision:

- Our Mission is to develop and maintain a garden at Laurelmere Cottage and its environs, for the benefit and enjoyment of visitors to Marlay Park.
- Our Vision is to create and maintain a garden which enhances the natural environment, using sustainable gardening practices and organic horticultural techniques, and which supports and encourages a wide range of biodiversity.

3. Objective and Values:

- Our Objectives are to carry out voluntary gardening activities at Laurelmere Cottage, under the auspices of the Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland (RHSI) and in partnership with Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.
- We will provide a friendly, educational environment in which our members and visitors to Laurelmere Cottage may enhance their interest in, and knowledge of, plants and gardening activities.
- We will encourage our members to develop and use their talents, skills and experience to benefit each other and the wider community.

4. Membership:

Membership shall be open to members of the RHSI and to members of the local community. Numbers are restricted to 25 active members at present. There is a waiting list currently in operation.

Spring Programme 2024

We are grateful to Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council for a community grant for the purchase

New Compost Bins

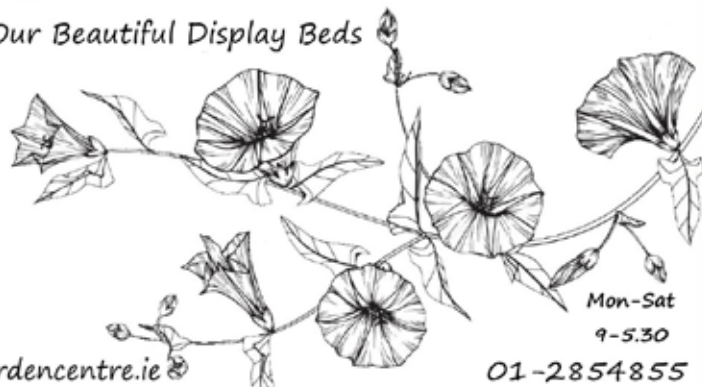
New Raised Bed

of a raised bed and additional tools. Work undertaken recently includes a review of the planting and a map of the garden to help with future planning. A large no-dig potato patch has been prepared, compost heaps turned and a new compost area developed. Fallen trees were tidied and beds weeded and dug over. Seeds have been set and dangerous trees identified in the forest area. ■

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We grow a reasonable range of daffodils (narcissus) in our garden including some old, and some not so old, Irish cultivars. One of the oldest, N. 'Lucifer', was introduced in and around 1890 by Alice Louisa Lawrenson, one of the early daffodil breeders in Ireland. We also grow N. 'Portrush' – a Guy Wilson introduction from the mid-1940's, N. 'Blarney' – a J. L. Richardson introduction of 1935, and the beautiful N. 'Colleen Bawn' attributed by some to William Baylor Hartland who also gave us N. 'Rip van Winkle' – both introduced in the mid-1880's.

While N. 'Rip van Winkle' is still available today sadly N. 'Colleen Bawn' is lost – a search using the RHS Plant Finder will provide an entry but no list of suppliers. Similarly, searches of the catalogues of some of the well-known daffodil specialists return no results.

We were given as a gift another beautiful Irish daffodil N. 'Foundling' – this is a division six (cyclamineus) cultivar with a white perianth and a pink corona – and is very difficult to find in the horticultural trade – we have only found this listed by QDaffs (USA) and Fluwel (Netherlands).

As the photograph shows this is an elegant and impressive cultivar that was introduced in 1969 by Carncairn Daffodils Ltd at that time based in Broughshane, Co. Antrim. Owned by the late Kate Reade (and her husband the late Major R H Reade) this nursery produced many fine cultivars that are worth sourcing.

So do your best to seek out this scarce cultivar, help it avoid the fate of N. 'Colleen Bawn', and welcome another Irish native back home to Irish gardens. ■



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Book Review

Orlaith Murphy

GROUNDING IN THE GARDEN

by TJ Maher

An artist's guide to creating a beautiful garden in harmony with nature

Pimpernel Press Limited

www.pimpernelpress.com



"Grounded in the Garden" offers a captivating journey through the enchanting Patthana Garden, skilfully crafted by artist and gardener TJ Maher. In this delightful exploration, the author takes readers through granite walls, lush plant life, and his profound connection to the land.

The book beautifully captures TJ's evolution from artist to gardener, detailing the garden's transformation from a private sanctuary to a shared space with the public. The author's philosophy emphasises the transformative power of nature, self-discovery, and the intimate connection between the garden and oneself. TJ provides practical gardening advice but what sets this book apart is the inclusion of so many beautiful images, most of which are TJ's own photographs, offering readers a visual feast of the garden's splendour.

TJ Maher's expertise as an artist shine through in his use of colour to

create atmospheres within different areas of the garden. TJ notes that, akin to our homes, our choices in colour set the tone and mood for individual sections of the garden. This thoughtful approach adds a layer of artistic sophistication to the practical aspects of gardening.

"Grounded in the Garden" is a celebration not just of the green haven that is Patthana Garden but also of the artistry involved in its creation. In essence, this book is an intimate invitation to connect with nature, appreciate the beauty of life's changes, and draw inspiration from the simplicity of one's garden. TJ Maher's personal journey and insights make "Grounded in the Garden" a compelling read for both seasoned gardeners and those discovering the joy of cultivating their own unique outdoor sanctuary. ■

Book Review

Noreen Keane and Peggy Masterson

DRAWN FROM NATURE by Patricia Butler

In 2020 Patricia Butler was invited by the Irish Society of Botanical Artists to curate a group exhibition of works by its leading professional artists in the National Gallery of Ireland. The exhibition, *Drawn from Nature: The Flowering of Irish Botanical Art* was Patricia's inspiration to subsequently write this superb book of the same name. Not alone is she a well-respected author, art historian, lecturer and curator but also a seasoned gardener and owner of Dower House at Rossanagh, her beautiful historic home and garden in Co Wicklow.

This book will hold huge appeal not only for those admirers of botanical art but also for anyone with an interest in Irish social history and cultural development. A stunningly beautiful production, richly illustrated and most carefully researched, it literally is the go-to reference volume for the history of botanical art and artists in Ireland from the first known botanical illustrators to the present day. The fascinating lives of many of these artists is one of the most engaging and inspiring aspects of this book. Many men feature early on, among them, early scientific botanist, naturalist and botanical illustrator George Victor Du



Noyer, and the textile designer William Kilburn. But it is the lives of female botanical artists in the 19th century that is so engrossing and their lives so well researched and recorded. The West Cork naturalist Ellen Hutchins, who died tragically young, Mary Delany, the great friend of Jonathan Swift, the widely-travelled Lady Edith Blake and Lady Charlotte Isabel Wheeler-Cuffe are among those who feature.

Modern day botanical artists, virtually all female, are also very well represented in the book with among others, works by the late Wendy Walsh and by Susan Sex – both extremely accomplished artists who have been very influential in the world of 21st century Irish botanical art. It is a great tribute to one of these contemporary professional artists Mary Dillon that her luxuriant watercolour *Tulipa* 'Black Parrot' is the image featured on the front of this highly commendable book by Patricia Butler. ■

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The National Botanic Gardens of Ireland are an oasis of calm and beauty, and entry is free. A premier scientific institution, the Gardens contain important collections of plant species and cultivars from all over the world. The National Botanic Gardens in Dublin are located in Glasnevin, just three kilometres from Dublin City Centre, and are famous for the exquisitely restored historic glasshouses. The National Botanic Gardens in Wicklow are located in Kilmacurragh, where the milder climate, higher rainfall, and deeper, acidic soils of this historic Wicklow garden provide a counterpoint to the collections at Glasnevin. The two Gardens have been closely associated since 1854. The National Botanic Gardens are open every day in both Glasnevin and Kilmacurragh, and are free to enter and explore.

Guided tours are provided daily at Glasnevin and seasonally at Kilmacurragh.



For more information see
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