

Plant Heritage

National Council for the Conservation of Plants & Gardens



SUFFOLK GROUP JOURNAL

Autumn 2012



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Front and back photo: Sue Wooster's gold medal winning display of Alpine Campanulas at Hampton Court.

Cover design by Sally Geeve, www.sallygeeve.com.

Thanks to Nicola Hobbs for layout.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

MAGGIE THORPE

It is with deep regret that I announce the death of our dear friend and member Robert Shepperson on Thursday 24th May. He was our Propagation Officer for over ten years and led a very successful team of members selling plants at our plant fairs. We are planning to plant a tree in Worlingworth churchyard in his memory.

This is my last letter as I retire at the end of the year and look forward to a final fling at our AGM on Sunday 18th November. Benedicta Chamberlain has kindly invited us to use her barn at Moat Farm, Otley, for this event and Clive Boyce has agreed to give a talk on his plant hunting travels in the footsteps of Butch Cassidy. It should be fun and lunch will be provided as usual and again we ask members to bring those wonderful puddings.

Pauline Byford is also due to retire at the AGM. She has been a wonderful Membership Secretary for as long as I have been Chairman and is so well known by members. However, the good news is that Hilary Drain has agreed to take over from Pauline and is looking forward to meeting everyone.

We were so lucky to have had a lovely day for our Spring Plant Fair at Helmingham since when it seems to have rained non-stop. You may have noticed a great change at Helmingham in that the gate and car parking were managed by Helmingham staff rather than Plant Heritage members. This made more of our members available for our own plant stall, the free plant, questionnaires and membership, all of which took place in a 'left-over' wedding marquee. Members kept asking me if we would always have a chandelier in our marquees! The end result was good but the public numbers were down and therefore the profit for Plant Heritage considerably less, £2600 plus amazing plant sales of £1200.

It is always great to be able to report on RHS Gold medals among our members. Roger Harvey of Harvey's Garden Plants won a gold medal at Chelsea and Sue Wooster of The Bellflower Nursery won gold at Hampton Court – you can read her account of the experience on page 15. Congratulations to both - and to Mickfield Hostas on three gold medals this summer at RHS Harrogate and Malvern, and BBC Gardeners World, and a silver-gilt medal at Tatton Park.

There is to be an inevitable rise in subscriptions next year, something we have fought against for some time, but rising costs make it impossible to

continue at the present rate. To assist members who pay by direct debit it will be possible to make your payments quarterly instead of once a year.

We have had some very lovely outings this year including a private tour of the Walled Garden at N.T. Ickworth Park led by Sean Reid, our Buxus Collection Holder. Next was a tour of Bradfield Woods, a Suffolk Wildlife Woodland, led by Pete Fordham after which we had delicious refreshments at Widget Finn's home. Although rather damp, in the evening light Widget's garden looked very romantic and Tim's vegetable garden a great example of 'grow your own' complete with amusing signs on the hopeful demise of horse radish plants!

The Study Day on Ferns at Anthony Piggott's Farm was a huge success. In the morning Anthony outlined the history and development of ferns and in the afternoon we were given demonstrations of spore sowing and the opportunity to look through strong microscopes at spores exploding. These days are organised to teach members the practical side of propagation and plant care.

Please don't forget to keep our Plant Fair dates free in your diaries so that you will be available to help. This autumn's date is Sunday 16th September, and the 2013 fairs are Sunday 26th May and 15th September.

SUFFOLK'S NATIONAL COLLECTIONS

AESCULUS	Framlingham	Robert Grimsey, 01728 685203
BUXUS	Bury St. Edmunds	National Trust Ickworth Park, 01284 735819
CAMPANULA	Bury St. Edmunds	Sue Wooster, 07879 644958
DIANTHUS (Malmaison)	Ipswich	Jim Marshall, 01473 822400
EQUISETUM	Stowmarket	Anthony Piggott, 01449 766104
ERYSIMUM	Walpole	Dr.Simon Weeks, 01986 784348
EUONYMUS	East Bergholt	Rupert Eley, 01206 299224
HIBISCUS	Pettistree	John Woods Nurseries 01728 745100
HOSTA	Stowmarket	Mickfield Hostas. 01449 711576
IRIS (Sir Cedric Morris introductions)	Ipswich	Sarah Cook, 01473 822400
SYRINGA	Stowmarket	Norman's Farm, 01449 781081

PLANT COLLECTIONS CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

DOROTHY CARTWRIGHT

The last six months have been challenging for Collection Holders with winter snow, early hot weather, drought followed by heavy rain but they have all done their best to care for their plants.

At the Regional Meeting of Co-ordinators in December held at the Botanic Garden in Cambridge, Mercy Morris from Plant Heritage HQ told us what the first task for the 2015 Review would be. Co-ordinators would check Collection Holders plant lists with the plants for that group in the RHS Plant Finder Book to see if all had 75% of those listed. Snowy days in January were good for doing this and I have checked all but two lists and all but one have over 75%. The longest list to check was the Hostas with 2,000 plants – fortunately many of the plant names are very entertaining! The one collection that does not have 75% has a plan to buy more plants as part of a new project. So things are looking good.

At the Spring Plant Fair, several Collection Holders brought along some lovely plants so visitors could see the variety of plants collected in Suffolk. Robert Grimsey was particularly helpful in providing flowers from his Aesculus Collection. Visitors were amazed at the variety of blooms on horse chestnut trees.

Collection Holders were very pleased to receive the plant labels which have been purchased by the Group. The colour charts are also proving very useful to check plants and to describe new plants for registration.

This year two enquiries have been received about possible new plant collections which is very encouraging.

I have visited several of the Collections in Suffolk this year – *Aesculus*, *Buxus*, *Dianthus* (Malmaison), *Campanulas* (alpine), *Equisetum* and *Hostas* and hope to visit more before the winter. The Collection Holders deserve a big thank you for taking time out of their hard work to show me their collections and answer my questions.

Suffolk's National Collection holders are listed on the facing page.

PROPAGATION REPORT

ANNE TWEDDLE

Stock plant programme

The stock plant programme is working well and under the guiding hand of Ivan Dickings we held two workshops in the spring. The idea behind the workshops was for members to bring some, all or part of the stock plant they are growing, learn how to propagate it, do the hands on work, then return a piece of the plant to their garden for growing on.

There was a friendly atmosphere in the Stowupland Church hall where we held these workshops, and much repeated remarks along the lines of 'oh, so that's how you do it' with teaching interruptions of 'no don't press the compost', and 'why can't Ivan be less messy'. 'Propagating is a messy business'.

So thanks to Ivan for his tuition, and the members who brought material and made lots of new plants for us to sell.

Maggie and I have been on a short trip to Lincolnshire visiting a few nurseries, and returned with a car-load of new material some of which might be available for the autumn, if the weather picks up, or next year.

If you'd like to join our stock plant programme or add a new plant, come along to the Autumn sale and see what's on offer. We will be looking for homes for around twenty plants, some of which are rare, according to *RHS Plantfinder*. We have some interesting veronicas, veronicastrums, a lovely dwarf ligularia which would be great for someone with a damp sunny patch, Geraniums, eupatorium, sanguisorba and various others.

Come and have a look at what we have, and if there is something you would like to grow or learn more about, here is your chance. The stock plants are free for members to take, after signing up. The deal is you have the plant to grow and enjoy, and we expect you to bring material from the plant to our propagating workshops.

Spring Plant Fair 2012 at Helmingham

This major event is covered on page 13, but just a short word about our plant table. More plants than ever arrived for sale, and thank you to everyone who brought plants, sold plants, gave cheer and added to the success of the day. On the numbers front I think we did extremely well. The final takings were almost spot on the same as last spring £1,200, but

the gate was down on last spring. So my mental arithmetic says we sold more plants to fewer people, and that's a great result.

Narcissus project

The project we began in 2010, propagating narcissus bred by George Engleheart continues. I expect all the bulbs we have been growing on to be large enough for sale this autumn, as dry bulbs or in the spring potted and flowering so look out for these at events and plant sales.

William Backhouse is the next breeder we will be running a project on. We had a twinscaling session in July when six members of the stock plant group came and learned the art of twin scaling and we produced over 30 bags of scales. These will be kept cosy until late autumn, when we will pot them up. There will be five Backhouse *narcissus* cultivars, and several *galanthus*.

The cultivars we have chosen for the project are:

Narcissus 'C.J.Backhouse', 'Duchess of Westminster', 'Emperor', 'Stella' and 'Mrs Langtry'.

I will save all the tantalizing descriptions for a future journal, once the young scales are securely growing. All five cultivars are distinctly different and demonstrate the characteristics Backhouse was working on, and none are widely available. Thanks to Sarah Cook for offering *Narcissus* Mrs Langtry. If you would like to put your name on the list for a collection contact me. The collection price will be £10 which represents over 30% reduction on the commercial price (if you can find them).

William Backhouse

A little about William Backhouse taken from *The Daffodil Yearbooks* of 1913 and 1933

Born in Darlington 1807, he was a banker, and began hybridizing in 1856. It was one of his hobbies, which he did in the morning before catching his train to work. All his crossings were taken and kept in a small glass porch leading off his study. He was very interested in the natural world, having near perfect collections of British birds, butterflies and moths.

Backhouse was interested in colour, and he produced many highly coloured new cultivars. He died in 1869. Later his collection was sold, and the purchaser Peter Barr took several years to unravel the crossings, and reveal 361 new distinct daffodils. N. '*Duchess of Westminster*' and N. '*Mrs Langtry*' are still considered among the most beautiful and useful of all narcissus.

Our aim in running these projects is to make available to our members

interesting and unusual plants themed in a particular way. Plant breeders is our theme of the moment. This brings me neatly onto a new project we are getting under way.

Iris project

Those members who attended the iris study day last year at Shelley, will well remember Sarah Cook talking about Olive Murrell, an iris breeder in the 1930s and 1940s. There was a photograph of a rather timid looking lady in a white cardy. She is about to become quite big in our lives along with a gentle looking gent from Saxmundham called Chadburn. Both won RHS Dykes medals and bred wonderful iris. Our project is to track down plants they bred and re-introduce them. Currently we are in the material gathering phase.

Help is always needed, and any member who would like to be involved with this project, should let me know. We will need homes for growing on the material when we locate and correctly identify what we find. It should be very interesting and a lot of fun.

Re-introducing iris bred in Saxmundham by someone almost forgotten is a great Plant Heritage project, with a Suffolk link.

MEMBERS GARDENS OPEN - 1

If you are thinking of having your garden open next year (2013), and would like Plant Heritage to come and sell plants in your garden we would like to hear from you. It's another way for us to raise money for the group and charity, and to spread the PH message.

Get in early and book your date, as it's unlikely we can be in more than one place at a time. Please contact anne.tweddle@onetel.net, 01473 773337 or Maggie Thorpe, smece@aol.com, 01787 211346.

MEMBERS GARDENS OPEN - 2

If you would like to promote your open garden in Plant Heritage Journal, please send full details, with a short description of the garden, to widget.finn@gmail.com. Deadline for the spring edition is 1 December.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

PAULINE BYFORD

We have had 25 new members since June last year bringing our membership to 277. I was hoping it would reach 280 before I handed over to Hilary Drain at the AGM. There is the September Plant Fair to come so we might just make it. We do get most of our new members at the fairs which is not surprising as they attract so many gardeners.

When I took on the membership I not only kept the membership record but took the money and cheques to the bank. We were a pilot group for the change when National Office took over and in the next few years we saw several changes of personnel and computer systems but life settled down. Then this year the cost of post brought another problem as we cannot afford to organise the sales by letter and have had to change to e-mails. Easier to say than do. I apologise for the problem with helpers in May. Not all the problems were caused by my lack of the necessary computer skills.

For the first time I was going to be on holiday so not going to be at the sale, and when trying to contact helpers a number of e-mails were rejected because members had forgotten to tell me they had changed their provider or address.

I would not have been able to do it in the time without Hilary Drain who is going to take over at the AGM and has the skills now needed.

I have enjoyed meeting so many enthusiastic gardeners, visiting their gardens and learning alongside experts.

GABLE HOUSE, HALESWORTH ROAD, REDISHAM, BECCLES
NR34 8NE

John & Brenda Foster

Sunday 17 February 11am-4pm SNOWDROP DAY for The National Gardens Scheme. Soup lunches and home made teas. Plants for sale. A vast collection of snowdrops, aconites, cyclamen and early spring bulbs.

Group visits welcome by appointment. Tel 01502 575298

PLANT HERITAGE SUFFOLK GROUP EVENTS 2012 - 2013

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 16 PLANT HERITAGE PLANT FAIR
10.30am-4.00pm Helmingham Hall, IP14 6EF
Members please volunteer to help

NOVEMBER

Saturday 3 Talk 'Conserving Old Varieties of Fruit Trees' by Graeme
Proctor of Crown Nurseries.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

Sunday 18 SUFFOLK PLANT HERITAGE AGM
1.00pm at Moat Farm, Otley, IP6 9PE
(by kind invitation of Mrs. Benedicta Chamberlain)

Clive Boyce has kindly agreed to give a talk entitled:
'Searching for Mountain Flowers in the Footsteps of Butch
Cassidy and the Sundance Kid'

A light lunch will be provided; members please bring
puddings as usual. To help with catering please let Maggie
Thorpe know if you intend to come: email smece@aol.com
or tel: 01787 211346

JANUARY 2013

Saturday 26 Talk 'Bulbs: Home and Abroad' by Richard Hobbs,
Witton Lane Seeds.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

FEBRUARY

Saturday 23 Talk 'Lavandulas' by Simon Charlesworth, National
Collection Holder, Downderry Nursery.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

MARCH

Saturday 23 Talk 'Harcourt Arboretum: Past, Present and Future' by
Ben Jones, Arboretum Curator.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

APRIL

Saturday 27 Members' Favourites 2.30pm.
Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

MAY

Sunday 26 PLANT HERITAGE PLANT FAIR,
10.30am – 4.00pm. Helmingham Hall, IP14 6EF
Members please volunteer to help.

JUNE

Tuesday 4 Member's Garden Visit: Sue Hamilton Blyth's garden at
22 Shilling Street, Lavenham, CO10 9RH.
6.30pm. £5 per person including light refreshments.
Booking necessary: suehamb@googlemail.com or
01787 247613

SEPTEMBER

Saturday 7 Talk 'From Diaz to Diamonds – the Floral Kingdom of
Southern Africa' by Timothy Walker, Director of Oxford
University Botanical Garden.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

Sunday 17 PLANT HERITAGE PLANT FAIR
10.30am – 4.00pm. Helmingham Hall, IP14 6EF
Members please volunteer to help.

OCTOBER

Saturday 19 Talk 'Winter Gardening: A Special Beauty' by Richard
Todd of Anglesey Abbey.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

NOVEMBER

Saturday 27 Study Day: Roses by Sarah Cook at Hullwood Barn,
Shelley, IP7 5RE
Booking necessary smece@aol.com or 01787 211346

*Lectures marked * are free to members, with £4 entrance for non-members*

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PLANT HERITAGE PLANT FAIRS

WIDGET FINN

There were chandeliers and live recorder music and a brass band. There were predatory plants and predatory birds and give-away chrysanthemums. And of course there were, as always, specialist nurseries and a magnificent array of plants raised by Plant Heritage members, and the Plant Doctor. And the sun shone.

Despite the gloomy economic climate and a dismal spring which defied all weather forecasts visitors to the Plant Heritage spring plant fair shopped till they almost dropped, then sat in the sun and enjoyed the beautiful surroundings of Helmingham Hall, the atmosphere and the music. Almost all the exhibitors reported sales as good or excellent.

A very successful programme of talks by experts about getting more plants for your money was held in the Plant Heritage marquee, including Janet Buist of Pennycross Plants on propagating salvias and Richard Hobbs of Wittons Seeds on sowing seeds successfully. These two are included in the photographs of the Spring Plant Fair featured on the centre pages of this issue.

The music for the occasion was provided by the Phoenix Brass Band and The Windbags Recorder Trio.

And now the autumn fair is coming up fast. Rose Cottage Plants have again kindly agreed to supply and part-sponsor a bag of bulbs – this time it's the dainty *Tulipa clusiana* 'Peppermintstick', coloured carmine pink and white, which makes a focal point in rockeries and borders. We'll be giving away 800 free bags of five bulbs, so tell your friends and get there early!

If you can spare an hour to help during the day please contact Pauline Byford (01284 762628 email pabyford@btinternet.com) or Hilary Drain (01206 263223 email hilary_drain@hotmail.com). Helpers get free entry to the fair.

There'll be a tempting mix of plants, garden sundries and entertainment, and the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful Helmingham gardens. Let's hope that, as the forecasters are predicting, summer starts in September!



Top: Sarah Cook's display of the National Collection of Tall Bearded Irises - Sir Cedric Morris won a 'Large Gold Medal' at the Suffolk Show.

Left: Rachel de Thame interviews Sue Wooster for BBC TV at Hampton Court.

Below: Roger Harvey's assistant Jan Cavell with the Chelsea Gold Medal.



BELFLOWER NURSERY GROWS FOR GOLD: A ROCKY ROAD TO HAMPTON COURT 2012

SUE WOOSTER

In a mad moment in mid August last year I persuaded my husband, Simon, that it would be a good idea to apply to exhibit in the Floral Marquee at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show 2012. The last time we staged a display of Alpine Campanulas was in 2009 in Plant Heritage and it felt like the time was right to attempt to try our hand in the Big Marquee. As Jim Marshall had said at Helmingham last year, “Time to get out of your comfort zone!”

So we put together a sketch and notes explaining our idea for the display, which would be a naturalistic representation of areas where campanulas grow in the wild – alpine scrubland, scree and meadow – and in contrast, a cultivated border planted with herbaceous bellflowers. Not only would this ambitious exhibit be squeezed into a background site measuring 90 square feet, but also it would have an elevation of three feet from front to back. What would the RHS make of this?

In early October a letter from the RHS arrived apologising for the delay in reaching a decision on our application, but that we would be hearing shortly whether we had been allocated space. Finally, a big fat envelope plopped through the letterbox. We had got in – stand FM29 was to be ours. After a glass or wine or two that evening to celebrate (??), in the cold light of day the realisation dawned with an equal measure of excitement and doom that Bellflower Nursery really would be exhibiting at Hampton Court 2012.

The area of alpine scrubland was to include *Pinus mugo* and *Juniperus communis*, both fairly elusive according to The Plant Finder, but luckily a local wholesale nursery came up trumps with specimens which really did look windswept and somewhat misshapen. Perfect! We had spent a very soggy weekend in early March in the Lakes tracking down areas where wild juniper grows to take photos and find inspiration.

Simon had invented a way of displaying the campanulas which would avoid the painstaking process during Build Up of stuffing round all the pots with scrunched up newspaper, plastic and basically any rubbish you can find in the bins that other exhibitors were throwing out. After two or three dummy runs in the back garden before the show, we decided his

framework would work, though it did require more planning on my part (and less dithering over which plant went where!).

Out of the blue in April came a phone call from a BBC researcher asking whether a film crew could come to The Walled Garden during June to make a piece about preparations for the show and how I was feeling about exhibiting in the Floral Marquee for the first time.

Sure enough in mid June, on the only sunny day of the month, a BBC crew came for a whole day to make a five-minute film. Nervous or what! This was all new to me, but somehow Stig (Jack Russell Terrier who co-starred) and I got through the day. By then my nerves were in tatters, what with filming AND preparing for the show, with only two weeks to go!

So we made it to Hampton Court, in the pouring rain, building the display over three days (just!), with more filming, this time with Rachel de Thame, on the Day of Judging.

Rachel is lovely – she calmed my nerves by chatting about her father who grew many alpine campanulas and she had very happy childhood memories of them. It was like catching up with a good friend you hadn't seen for a while.



After the interview (and a few retakes!) it was time to check the display for all those little details that you know the judges will be looking at – labelling, faded flowers, pots showing. We dragged ourselves away to make way for judging, exhausted but relieved to have got everything finished on time.

Tuesday morning dawned dull and damp, and we made our way to the display in trepidation. This year the medal had been left at the back of the sales table inside what I thought was just a feedback form for exhibitors. I looked inside and called Simon over, as I couldn't bear to do this alone. A Gold Medal! It hasn't sunk in even now and I am still quite emotional when anyone mentions it.

With any award, there has to be a speech and all I can say is I could not have done this without Simon, Joe my son (his brother Will is in New Zealand at the moment so he has an excuse..) and friends who gave their time and support. Thank you all! Hampton Court was an exhausting but an amazing and unforgettable experience this year.

www.bellflownursery.co.uk, campanulas@btinternet.com, 07879 644958

NATIONAL PLANT EXCHANGE

ANNE TWEDDLE

The National Plant Exchange is something you might not have heard about. We as a group should be more involved with it and you as individual members too. It's an annual event, and the build up to the actual exchange begins about December, finishing with the physical exchanged in May at the National AGM.

Individual members can participate and this is done through me, as the co-ordinator for Suffolk.

The Plant Exchange has two parts, OFFERS & WANTS.

OFFERS are plants YOU have, and are prepared to share. Their availability must be two nurseries or less in the current Plantfinder. WANTS are plants YOU want. Their availability must also be two nurseries or less in the current Plantfinder

The lists of Offers and Wants from each group are circulated. Then comes the interesting bit, where we look through the offers, and make a list of what we might like to grow for the group, or you might like to grow in your own garden. The same is done with the wants, so we look to see whether there is anything on the list we have and could make available.

There are a couple of hurdles to stride along the way. The first is because you WANT something, you might not necessarily get it. (Where have I heard that before?). By the same token because you OFFER something there is no guarantee someone will want it.

The physical exchange of plants takes place in May at the AGM, which will be held in Hampshire in 2013. So the final hurdle is ensuring your OFFER plants can be got to the AGM and your WANTS can be got back.

The 2012 Exchange brought several plants to Suffolk, and to my surprise and delight it included a hardy chrysanthemum which has been designated by the Threatened Plant Project with a red label, as Threatened in Cultivation. There were 29 such plants designated at the exchange this year.

If you would like to be on the distribution list of WANTS and OFFERS, please let me know. I can only do this via email, as the lists are quite long.



HELMINGHAM PLANT FAIR SPRING 2012





Photos courtesy Maggie Thorpe,
Peter Kendall and Matthew Long.



PLANT HERITAGE NATIONAL COUNCIL REPORT

ANNE TWEDDLE

The most recent Plant Heritage Council meeting reported on our finances, subscription changes and a number of other items.

We began somewhat differently with a presentation by Mike Buffin, Chairman of the Plant Conservation Committee (PCC). It is through this committee that the applications for National Collections come. Mike was the curator at Hilliers Arboreteum and works now for the National Trust. His role as chairman of the PCC is vital in the organisation as it pulls together all the botanical aspects of Plant Heritage. Mike spoke to us about a major step forward in cultivated plant conservation. This step forward has come out of a change in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 (Kyoto) and the Aichi Targets.

The change is 'cultivated plants' have for the first time been specified. Prior to this species conservation either in the wild (in-situ) or in botanic gardens (ex-situ) have been the province of conservation. Cultivated plants have been somewhat out in the cold.

Cultivated plants fall into Aichi Biodiversity Target 13, Strategic Goal C:

'By 2020, the genetic diversity of cultivated plants and farmed and domestic animals and of their wild relatives, including other socio-economically as well as culturally valuable species, is maintained, and strategies have been developed and implemented for minimizing genetic erosion and safeguarding their genetic diversity'

Plant Heritage is the best placed organization to respond to this challenge though it's not alone by any means. The RHS, National Trust and other bodies are interested in becoming partners in meeting this challenge by 2020. These are very exciting days now and in the future for the role of Plant Heritage in developing the strategies to meet this challenge. Mike talked us through how Plant Heritage should respond to this challenge. The Threatened Plant Project (TPP) already underway, is central to it all. You can read about the TPP on the national website at www.nccpg.or.uk

A subscription increase is on its way which will be effective from November 2012. Individual membership is increasing by £3 from £25 to £28 while joint membership will increase from £40 to £44.

For members paying by direct debit quarterly payment is possible. Should you like to move from annual to quarterly payments, please contact the Suffolk Plant Heritage membership secretary Hilary Drain. Phone 01206 263223 or email hilary_drain@hotmail.com

Nationally our finances are pretty much on course. There will be a small deficit at the year-end, unless we receive an unexpected legacy or donation.

Clive Boyce, a former President of the Alpine Society, is the guest speaker at the Suffolk Plant Heritage AGM on Sunday 18th November. His talk, intriguingly, is called 'Searching for Mountain Flowers in the steps of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.'

TRAVELS WITH ALPINE FLOWERS

CLIVE BOYCE

My interest in alpinism was sparked by an article in *The Sunday Times* many years ago by Clarence Elliott writing about “the window sill orchid” - *Pleione*. He referred to his friend Walter Ingwerson who grew several species of *Pleione*. I wrote to Clarence Elliott for more details and this led to a visit to Ingwerson’s alpine nursery at Gravetye, next to Gravetye Manor, made famous by William Robinson, and very close to Wakehurst Place. I had never seen many of the *Gentians*, *Soldanellas*, *Androsace*, *Pulsatilla* and *Lewisia* amongst many others. I was captivated by the jewel-like quality of these treasures and by the way they were grown in tufa, venerable old stone sinks and in beautifully presented clay pots.

I well remember visiting East Lambrook soon after and sharing my new enthusiasm with Margery Fish. She asked me if I was a member of the Alpine Garden Society - I had to admit I wasn’t but this was remedied within a few days. I straight away joined the East Kent Group of the AGS and this was a revelation. Members included Hilda Davenport-Jones (who introduced *Helleborus* Potter’s Wheel), Elizabeth Strangman, Richard Gorer, Jack Elliott, Paul Furse, Kit Grey-Wilson and the Sissinghurst gardeners: Sibylle Kreutzberger and Pam Schwerdt. This was inspirational

and one learnt very quickly. Wonderful plants were exchanged and 40 years later I still have a few survivors with these names on as source. I dread losing any of them.

We (for I usually dragged my late wife and two young daughters along) made many visits to the other great alpine nurseries including: Joe Elliott in the Cotswolds, Stuart Boothman at Maidenhead, Robinsons at Swanley, Jack Drake at Aviemore; all alas no more.

One of the early lessons I learnt was the value of seeing plants in the wild. We had many lectures on plant exploration. It was the heyday of introductions of *Dionysia* from Iraq and Iran, of *Oncocyclus* Irises from the Middle East with Jim Archibald, Brian Mathew, John Watson, Kit Grey-Willson and Paul Furse among others to the fore. I just had to see these treasures in their natural habitat.

I have been fortunate to visit quite a few of the great mountains of Europe, Asia, New Zealand and the Americas and finding many exciting plants. Seeing the likes of *Jankaea heldreichii* on Mount Olympus, *Viola cazorlensis* in Andulsia and *Cypripedium calceous* by the hundred in the Dolomites has no substitute. My family benefitted from some very good mountain holidays.

My talk for the AGM will be about some plants I have seen in the Rockies of Wyoming and Colorado and in the Southern Andes of Chile and Patagonia. These are places which were frequented by Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and I thought it might add interest to include a little of the background to the development of the Wild West to my talk hence "*Plant hunting in the footsteps of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*".

THE COURTS, HOLT

ROSIE ANSELL

The National Trust market their garden, The Courts, as "Wiltshire's best kept secret" and, indeed, travelling along the High Street at Holt, a village between Melksham and Bradford on Avon, you would never know that it is there. At seven acres it is considerably smaller than another Wiltshire garden belonging to the Trust - Stourhead landscape garden.

The bones of the garden, including hedges, a temple and a conservatory, were laid out in the first decade of the twentieth century by Sir George Hastings but the planting was developed in the 30 years after 1922 when it was owned by Major Clarence Goff and his wife.

The flower garden occupies about half the site among the clipped hedges of yew, box and holly. Lady Cecilie Goff believed that you should not be able to see everything from one viewpoint so there are surprises round every corner. She was also a plantswoman who established the colour schemes for the garden still followed today.

Around the house are lawns and topiary while the south east corner contains the Lily Pond, a formal area, and the Dye Pool, which is much more informal with an emphasis on foliage and texture. From the temple the Temple Borders, planted in yellow and purple, lead back to the house lawn, which is separated from the main lawn by a yew walk. A flight of steps, flanked by yellow and blue borders, leads to the sundial lawn, backed by a yew hedge.

The conservatory by the house is occupied by tender and exotic plants and the large kitchen garden contains herb borders, an apple tunnel and pear espaliers. Beyond the yew hedges of the formal gardens there is also an orchard where there are long grass and wild flower areas for bees and



butterflies. This acts as a transition area leading to the arboretum, which occupies the remaining area and was added by Moyra Goff after 1952. It is full of magnificent trees, thanks to the high water table - lime trees edge the garden on three sides and the cut leafed beech (*Fagus sylvatica* var. *heterophylla* 'Aspleniifolia') is particularly stunning. It is a beautiful and tranquil space and the varied planting means that there is interest at every season, with a winter garden, spring bulbs, and autumn colour.

We had an excellent lunch at the café (not run by the National Trust) but one word of warning – there is no dedicated parking and the nearest village car park was full when we arrived so you may need to go further away to find somewhere to park. For the energetic there is a mile long walk across the fields to Great Chatfield Manor, another National Trust property.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/courts-garden/

BLAKENHAM WOODLAND GARDEN

RUTH PRIOR

Blakenham Woodland garden near Ipswich is like an oasis in a chalky area as it has quite different soil – green sand. It is surprising to find magnolias, rhododendrons and azaleas growing so near chalk pits which have been excavated since Roman times. The garden is on the hill top. Following the brown signs you enter a sloping field and drive up to a gate on the woodland edge where there is an honesty box for payment.

This year I visited with friends from Yorkshire in June and we were the only people there that morning. Previously I have gone to see the bluebells or the hellebores, spring bulbs and early flowering shrubs such as camellias.

It was a beautiful morning and though we'd had days of rain. I reckoned it would be alright to visit taking into account its situation on a hill top. I remembered having seen roses and *Cornus kousa* there but not seen them in flower, so off we went.

It was enchanting and we wandered along delighted to find gems flowering at every turn in the path. The sunlight shafted into glades, highlighting wonderful groups of shrub roses and climbers festooned through trees in full flower. The scent in the air was lovely. There is a clever mixture of cultivation and wild.



Blakenham Woodland Garden:
above Shrub Rose,
right Campanula Latifolia Alba.



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Clumps of red campion and frothy cow parsley edge the path and then *Rogersia* flowers rising above with their shapely leaves and huge drifts of the stately *Campanula latifolia* var. *Alba* flowering almost five foot high beside the mown grass path. Some plants have discreet labels but some don't or are too difficult to locate. Some things we knew and others not but nevertheless we spent an enjoyable morning soaking up the atmosphere.

One interesting feature which makes sense of the geology is a descending spiral of grass with a circle of the chalk bed rock exposed at the lowest point, the upper layers being crag sand. It is one of many artistic displays in the wood adding to the pleasure of the visit.

John Hare. MP for Sudbury and Woodbridge, bought the wooded hill next to his house in 1951 and turned it into a woodland garden, planting it with unusual trees, shrubs and flowers. When he left politics in 1982 John Hare became Viscount Blakenham and treasurer of the RHS. The garden is a map of his horticultural friendships, with erodiums from his neighbour the great Suffolk plantsman Oliver Wyatt, a rhododendron from George Aberconway's garden at Bodnant, azaleas from Sir Eric Saville who directed the royal gardens at Windsor.

When John Blakenham died in 1982 the garden was made into a charitable trust to ensure the survival of his remarkable collection

*Blakenham Woodland Trust, Little Blakenham, Ipswich IP8 4LZ
Open 10am – 5pm 1st March – 31 July
Entry £3
[www..blakenhamwoodlandgarden.org.uk](http://www.blakenhamwoodlandgarden.org.uk)*

ADVERTISING IN THE JOURNAL

Anyone who is interested in advertising in The Suffolk Group Journal, should please get in touch with Ann Somerville on 01284 728622 or email annataldgr@tiscali.co.uk

MALMAISON CARNATIONS

JIM MARSHALL

Having a break from exhibiting the National Collection of Malmaison Carnations this year has given Sarah and me time to consider various aspects of their growing.

All dianthus are prone to virus infection, but many of the lovely historic cultivars of garden pinks seem to be able to live quite happily with the viruses. However Perpetual and Malmaison carnations do not, causing poor growth and flowers and also difficulty in propagation. This has resulted in us having to resort to meristem culture and molecular testing to obtain virus free stock.

Once free of all viruses – a process which can take up to three years – each cultivar needs to be maintained in a laboratory on a year by year basis. This can be a costly process, with, for each cultivar, meristem initiation costing about £150, virus testing £50 (although much cheaper if there are

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enough cultivars to warrant sending the material to Spain) and overwintering in the laboratory about £150 per year. The whole process therefore cost about £350 in the first year, with ongoing maintenance costs of £150 before buying the comparatively cheap plantlets.

Although virus free, the cultivar ‘Tayside Red’ is proving very difficult at an early stage of micro propagation - that of growing in agar, where it is prone to ‘vitrification’. I was therefore fortunate to have been awarded a Plant Heritage ‘Brother’ grant to finance investigation into why this should be. Different hormone solutions are being used for the young microplants to grow on, but so far no definite answer has been found. All the Malmaisons suffer from this problem to some extent, so hopefully if an answer is found it will make a difference to the whole collection

The micro plants, once large enough, need to be weaned from the agar solution on which they are grown in the laboratory to grow in conventional composts in a glasshouse. This should all be a comparatively easy process, however at this stage also Malmaisons can be problematic. After a recent visit to the laboratory in Dundee to see all the stages of production, particularly the weaning process, we are now doing our own weaning.

We receive the plantlets by post, in Petri dishes and immediately prick them out into specially prepared plugs (Fertiss plugs) and place them on a heated bench in a closed case. So far we have had a very good (90%) success rate and the resulting plants have been potted up and are growing on in a cold frame. Hopefully they will continue to grow into flowering sized plants ready for showing next year.

MY FAVOURITE FLOWERING CURRANT

IVAN DICKINGS

When one thinks of planting a flowering currant, the first one which comes to mind will most probably be *Ribes sanguineum* ‘Pulborough Scarlet’ which is a fine plant, but there are other alternatives such as *R.* ‘Brocklebankii’ with yellow foliage, *R.* ‘White Icicle’ long tassels of white flowers, but my favourite is *R. x gordonianum* (*R. Aureum* x *R. sanguineum*) which was raised at Shrubland Hall in 1837 by Donald Beaton and named after William Gordon the then owner of Shrubland. The flowers, in racemes, are reddish outside and yellow within giving it a

much gentler tone than *R. sang*. ‘Pulborough Scarlet’ and the foliage is smaller and slightly shiney and the habit of the plant is more relaxed and weeping, giving it a more pleasing effect, much more so than the coarse foliage of other *Ribes* cultivars and does not have the usual pungent smell.

To add interest during the summer plant a *Clematis Jackmanii* variety close by, which can be cut down in late winter, to give colour and interest during the summer. It is easily propagated by soft wood cuttings in early summer.

I am rather surprised that *Ribes x gordonianum* isn’t in the current *Ribes* trial at Wisley.

BOOK REVIEWS

MAGGIE THORPE

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO SAVING SEEDS BY ROBERT GOUGH AND CHERYL MOORE-GOUGH

Published by Storey

ISBN 978-1-60342-574-2 \$24.95

For those of you like me who enjoy growing from seed, this book is the greatest help imaginable. Robert Gough and his wife Cheryl are both Professors of Horticulture at Montana State University and the only difference in their writing about seeds is the odd reference to one’s yard and a few names such as flats when they mean seed trays and heirloom vegetables that we would call heritage vegetables!

That apart, it sets out to explain very clearly the mysteries of seeds, how to store them, germinate them and grow abundantly to suit our needs. There is a very helpful chapter on extracting and cleaning seeds and one tip I suggest we all follow with very fine seed – rub the inside of a plastic cup with a nylon stocking or other synthetic cloth. Pour uncleaned seeds into the treated cup and rotate the cup to roll them against the sides. Trash and chaff will cling to the sides as you remove the seeds.

Part 2 of this book covers four chapters, vegetable seeds, herbs, flower and nuts and fruits and woody ornamentals and an excellent glossary explaining the terminology.

DESIGNING AND PLANTING BORDERS

BY ROGER HARVEY

Published by The Crowood Press

ISBN 978-1-84797-311-5 £12.99

This book provides a wide range of planting examples whether you are a complete beginner with a whole new garden or indeed if you just want a thorough makeover.

There are very easy to follow border planting plans for both perennials and mixed shrubs with a very helpful appendix of plants suitable for various aspects and soil types. Roger covers in great detail the best methods for preparing the site with an excellent chapter on surveying the garden and how to draw a plan.

An excellent bedside reminder of the right plant for the right place and ideas for using more unusual plants, many of which appeared on his Gold Medal winning stand at Chelsea this year and which can be bought at his Nursery, Harveys Garden Plants at Thurston, near Bury St Edmunds.

OBLIQUE BEGINNINGS RESULT IN HAPPY ENDINGS

PATRICK PALMER

As every plant lover will know there's nothing better than an excursion ending in a plant sale, only surpassed by the journey home with a boot full of plants! It was on one such jaunt that I first encountered 'Plant Heritage' and the trail towards becoming a member began.

On a cold, windy Sunday in May 2011 my wife and I embarked on a trip to Hethersett, Norfolk, knowing that our trip would culminate in a Spring Plant Fair (including specialist nurseries). Refreshments being an essential part of the experience, we were soon approached as we lingered over home-made delicacies and were persuaded to sign up as members.

At the time despite being very keen gardeners neither of us had a deep understanding of what Plant Heritage was all about but within a few days

we received a telephone call inviting us to an event and also received some literature about the Norfolk Group.

We were tempted to join the visit to a drought garden and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves coming away with a long list of 'must haves'. A problem we felt at the time, as we live in Suffolk, was that we would have to travel considerable distances throughout Norfolk if we were to become active members. Researching the National Plant Heritage website I soon discovered the existence of a very active Suffolk group right on our doorstep (how could we have missed it!).

The Suffolk Group have been equally welcoming and our transfer worked well for attending the AGM and getting to know a few of you better. We still feel we have lots to learn but I think Maggie Thorpe has already recognised my enthusiasm as I now find myself to be a new committee member (how did that happen?).

As a committee member, I hope I will be able to learn a great deal more about the organisation and to make a contribution to the most impressive success of the Suffolk Group. Helping at the recent plant sale at Helmingham Hall was a most enjoyable experience and reinforced how much there is to learn and the value of promoting plants that might have fallen out of favour or for other reasons be forgotten. I am looking forward to discovering how I can help to consolidate that success.

P.S. At one of the events next year committee members have been asked to talk briefly about their favourite plant and why it is regarded so. This has proven extremely difficult for me as it is almost like asking me to choose a favourite child, however throwing caution to the wind I have chosen *Abutilon vitifolium* but you will have to wait for the next programme to find out why!

PLANT HERITAGE NEWS

**FOR AN UPDATE ON WHAT'S HAPPENING AT
NATIONAL OFFICE VISIT THE CURRENT ISSUE OF
NEWSLINES ON THE WEBSITE
WWW.PLANTHERITAGE.COM**

**TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE SUFFOLK
GROUP'S ACTIVITIES VISIT
WWW.SUFFOLK.PLANTHERITAGE.COM**

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to these new members who have joined the Suffolk Group since our last Journal. Please introduce yourself to committee members when you come to our talks and visits events. Contact Hilary Drain 01206 263223 hilary_drain@hotmail.com to see whether there are other members nearby to share a lift to our talks and visits.

Christine Baxter, Bildeston

Melanie Berry, Darmsden, Ipswich

Suzanne Jones, Bury St Edmunds

Jane Mann, Little Cornard, Sudbury

John Morris, Nacton, Ipswich

Mr. and Mrs Margesson, Monk Soham, Woodbridge

Elaine Overnell, Little Whelnetham, Bury St. Edmunds

Angela Salmon, Hengrave, Bury St. Edmunds

Dorothy Wynn, Alpheton

TRIBUTES

ROBERT SHEPPERSON 1955 - 2012

Maggie Thorpe in her Chairman's letter pays tribute to Robert Shepperson who died in May. At Plant Heritage we all knew him as a knowledgeable and skilled horticulturalist and a talented artist.

But when he was asked to write his Propagation Officer's report for the twice yearly Plant Heritage Journal another and unexpected talent was revealed. Robert wrote fluently and poetically, and with great humour, making his contributions a joy to read and a nightmare to edit. Once he was in full flow his 'reports' expanded to two thousand or more words, and it was necessary to cut them down, but almost impossible to decide which bits of the very entertaining article to remove.

On one occasion I suggested that to save me this dilemma he could write the whole Journal himself and given half a chance he probably would have done so.

One of his most entertaining accounts was of being in charge of 850 *Iris siberica* Roanoake's Choice which was our free plant at the 2009 Helmingham Plant Fair. After several difficult moments, the vagaries of the British weather and an outbreak of fungal rot he eventually nursed the plants through to their departure on a trailer for Helmingham. "After watching the trailer disappear round the bend I turned and danced round the poly-tunnel punching the air like a teenager at a rock concert."



This is part of the address given at his funeral by Rosemary Ingate, Worlingworth Village Recorder.

'Robert's passing is such a very sad loss to many people in so many ways. We are all very privileged to have known you Robert. How lucky we are to have shared and enjoyed your creative talents with you; and we will continue to do so as we plant, walk, appreciate the natural world, gaze at your paintings and photographs and remember a gentle soul.'

MICHAEL LOFTUS 1948-2012

WIDGET FINN

Many of you will know Michael Loftus who died on July 25th and have in your garden plants from Woottens of Wenhasston, the nursery he founded in 1990.

Michael was a highly gifted plantsman whose passion for pelargoniums, particularly the Uniques and Scented leaf varieties, he inherited from his mother Pru who had also been a talented gardener. He loved bearded irises which he described as 'blowsy pantomime dames' and also specialised in auriculas, hardy geraniums, day lilies and had a large selection of general herbaceous plants.

His handbooks – he hated the term 'catalogue' – were collectors' items, beautifully illustrated, informative, literate and quirky. Michael didn't suffer fools gladly, particularly in the horticultural arena, and his strong

opinions enlivened his Plantsman's Handbook. He wrote "So often nurserymen describe mauve and purple flowering plants as having flowers of true blue, knowing the word itself is a magic talisman which will quadruple the sales of a particular plant. A case in point is *Salvia x sylvestris* 'Blauhagel' loudly puffed as a breakthrough. Rubbish! Its flowers are no more blue than my varicose veins. *S. uliginosa* is a plant to restore your faith in the meaning of the word blue. It is an utterly joyful colour with not the slightest sully to its rejoicing."

Michael Loftus was born in Suffolk. Armed with a degree in Russian he joined Neal's Yard Wholefood Warehouse in Covent Garden where he eventually took over the business. In 1989 he sold up and returned to Suffolk, starting the nursery in his garden at Wenhaston. Eventually the site grew to more than 12 acres with over 4,000 varieties of the plants which he loved.

Woottens Plants will continue, run by the dedicated team which Michael assembled led by Luci Skinner, but Michael will be missed by all who shared his passion for plants.

www.woottensplants.com

MARGARET COOK 1921 - 2012

Margaret, who was a familiar face at many Suffolk Plant Heritage events, died in May this year at the wonderful age of 91. She was well known for her interest in nature, was awarded the RSPB President's medal for volunteering and spent many years working in Wolves Wood surveying birds and butterflies. She had always been a keen gardener and married James Freeman Cook to live on a family fruit farm in Hadleigh. Margaret was a great supporter of Plant Heritage and enormously helpful to Sarah, her daughter, in searching for Sir Cedric Morris irises.

Help wanted at Helmingham!

Sunday 16 September

Volunteers are needed for the Autumn Plant Fair - at the members' gazebo, free bulb table, questionnaire stand and as 'ambassadors' for Plant Heritage helping on the site.

If you can spare an hour or so please contact Hilary Drain 01206 263223 hilary_drain@hotmail.com. Helpers get free entry

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