



Plant Heritage

CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

Cornwall Group Newsletter. December 2020

A very strange year. I hope everybody is keeping safe and plants and gardens are flourishing.

Annual Branch Meeting. Lost Gardens of Heligan.

January 28th turned out to be perfect timing for our Annual Meeting this year. The management at Heligan offered us the use of their facilities again and we are very grateful for their hospitality. It was also good to get to meet the people who actually maintain the collection at Heligan and hear about the challenges and triumphs of the year for them. We were lucky with the weather as well, the cloud cleared away through the morning so that we could enjoy some sunshine during the afternoon. With *Rhododendron* and *Camellia* in early flower it really felt like the start of spring.



Hardwood propagation in the meeting room .



Cornwall Plant Heritage at Heligan.



***Camellia* 'Gloire de Nantes', part of the Heligan National Collection.**

The business of the annual meeting was conducted at the start of the morning. The financial situation is looking strong. We depend on the plant sale in May for the bulk of our income and although the sum received was slightly down in 2019 it has been sufficient to cover expenditure. I would like to thank Charlie Pridham for wrestling with the banking system which seems designed to create difficulties for small groups like ours.

Caroline Stone reported that since she took over as collections co-ordinator she has been in touch with all of the collections in the county and is arranging to visit them all. The *Hemerocallis* collection at Antony House has changed its scope to "Historical" to make more sense of the collection and its location.

The Plant Nannies have had another good year, recruiting 16 new members at the Tremenheere Plant Sale and in November I went up to the Devon Group's annual meeting and recruited six more from over the border!

We are currently running with a minimum committee and new members would be very welcome. New ideas are essential to keep a small group like ours from becoming stale (and please don't feel that you have to join the committee in order to suggest new ideas).

Charlie Pridham talked to us about the challenges of his recent import of *Lapageria* cultivars from California. They are beginning to establish in his greenhouse, one or two are still not showing much new growth but the future looks optimistic. Lucy Pitman came down from head office to talk briefly about the national situation. The financial situation continues to improve, the new website is functioning well and there are many new services available (www.plantheritage.org.uk). Still time to get Christmas Cards if you are quick and help plant conservation in the process.

After an excellent lunch in the Heligan Cafe we returned to a practical session on hardwood cuttings. Propagation and distribution lie at the heart of conservation and these sessions help to improve our skills and spread propagating material around. It is also worth reminding members that the national office organise a plant exchange every year to spread rare plants around more widely. If there is anything that you are particularly looking for or if there is anything that you can offer, get in touch with them.

Plenty of hardwood cuttings were taken away at the end of the meeting and several people reported having success with plants they had grafted at last years session, so it's clear we have some skilled members. Spare plants are always needed for the plant sale, the plant nannies and for the national exchange so please keep it up!

With the low sun illuminating the gardens we were shown some of the work that has been done through the year. Many of the *Rhododendron* and *Camellia* have grown very large since they were planted and the gardeners have been working to rejuvenate some of the old plants while also keeping the essential atmosphere of the garden. It has clearly been a success, many shrubs that were cut back hard have grown back vigorously. It is a slow process but sections of the garden are already showing the benefit of careful management.

Thanks to everybody who participated and made the day such a success.

Cornwall National Collections Coordinators update. Caroline Stone.

I took on being collections coordinator for Cornwall last year picking up the role from Alistair Rivers who had done it since time immemorial. After a slow start I was planning to get round all the collections this year, but thanks to Covid 19 still have a few to make my first visit to. Things are generally looking very positive and it is a pleasure to be getting to know the collection holders. There have been some changes this year however that show the fragility of a National Collection and the importance of succession planning. In terms of specific activity:

The *Hemerocallis* collection at Antony was rescoped last year to more closely reflect the nature of the collection: it is now officially *Hemerocallis* pre 1977 (collected by Lady Cynthia Carew-Pole). Sadly, Mark Maunder who looked after the collection and had a wealth of knowledge about it has been made redundant by the National Trust in the wave of redundancies that were announced this Autumn. It is not clear who will take on responsibility for the collection.

There was one National Collection in Cornwall – *Dahlia* species – which had provisional status. The application for full status was approved earlier in the year.

Sadly, this summer Varfell Farm was sold and the daffodil operations streamlined. This meant too that there was no future for the dahlias under the new ownership. I am glad to be able to say however that the collection is safe and has moved to a new location still within Cornwall.

There have been five proposals relating to collections within Cornwall accepted by the Plant Conservation Committee this year. This is the first step to becoming a National Collection. I hope to see at least two go through to a full application soon.

The Cornwall Gardens Society has decided to have a series about the National Collections in Cornwall in their annual Journal. A different collection will be featured each year. The first was published – Charlie Pridham writing about *Lapageria*. It has been very well received. It is good to have this sort of publicity for the National Collections. There were to be two collections featured in the next Journal but the CGS have taken a decision not to publish next year's Journal. With the text and photographs already prepared for the issue it is hoped that they will be carried when publication resumes.

There is an annual meeting for Collection Coordinators from the South-West (which seems to have a rather wide definition I thought since it includes Hampshire and the Isle of Wight). It was held at Stourhead last Autumn. And in January I attended a national meeting for Collection Coordinators at Birmingham Botanic Gardens. This was a very useful meeting – not really so much for the content of the meeting but for the opportunity to meet other coordinators, extract phone numbers, make useful connections, pick up information on other collections, and generally swop experiences. We also were taken into the working glasshouses to see the National Collection of *Cyclamen* held there with some quite beautiful specimens with fascinating foliage. We also had an on-line Collection Holders meeting in November. Held over two days there were keynote talks from the RHS's Tim Upson and Fergus Garrett of Great Dixter. A lot of good topics were covered during the meeting. There was an extremely good update on plant health from the RHS's Dr Jassy Drakulik that I particularly enjoyed and talks from several Collection Holders. Two break-out sessions were held which I felt was rather adventurous; they did go quite well in fact!

Of course, Zoom has become the order of the day and I have done a number of talks on Zoom through the year. It started with one for Plant Heritage talking about the herbaceous peony collections that I am building up. These on-line talks have proved extremely popular for Plant Heritage and have become an on-going feature. They are being used to raise money for bursaries for the National Collections but have also attracted a lot of people who are not members of Plant Heritage and have proved good publicity for the organisation.

Plant Heritage has managed to keep operating well throughout the restrictions this year. I am told there has been a record number of enquiries about starting a National Collection and the Plant Conservation Committee has been kept busy. There are some new initiatives planned by Head Office which should result in people feeling more connected with the National Collections and as a Collection Holder I look forward to taking part in the first phase of these. As a Collections Coordinator I hope to get back on track with visiting the Collections in Cornwall soon and look forward to a less disturbed year next year.

Committee members.

The committee is currently running with three members. In a small group like ours this isn't a major problem but we would benefit from new members, new ideas and possibly a little help from a group secretary. We meet a couple of times each year to put together a program of events to interest the members and raise money for conservation both nationally and in Cornwall. Please get in touch if you feel you could volunteer a little time.

National Website. www.plantheritage.org.uk

This year has seen a wide variety of restrictions and many activities have had to be suspended. The program of events for Cornwall Plant Heritage was suspended while we considered what was possible. In recent months organisations have started to put together online activities to engage members, particularly Zoom meetings. For those of you unfamiliar with Zoom, it is an online platform that allows individuals to join in with a video conference call. It is now possible to hold meetings over the internet and to listen and participate in presentations. We haven't managed to organise anything at a local level but there are a range of meetings coming up that can be accessed through the national website:
www.plantheritage.org.uk

Some events are free, others have a small charge to help cover the costs involved. Zoom meetings are easy to enter. If you e-mail the group organising the meeting you will be sent an electronic link that you can click on to join the meeting. If you have not used Zoom before you will have to download the app which will be offered to you when you click on the link for the first time. Full details and access are available through the National website but meetings coming up include:

"Happy Plants, Happy Minds" , Organic gardening by Nicola Hope, organised by the Gloucestershire group.
Saturday 12th December, 2.00pm.

"Snowdrops - why all the fuss?" by Alan Briggs.
Saturday 12th December, 2.30pm.

"Once seen never forgotten" by Don Witton, organised by the North East group.
Saturday 9th January 2021, 2.30pm

"Magnificent Magnolias" by John Anderson, Keeper of Savill Gardens.
Thursday 14th January 2021, 6.30pm.

"Bamboos" by Helen Chen.
Thursday 21st January 2021, 4.30pm.

"Beautiful Buddleja" by Peter Moore.
Thursday 28th January 2021, 6.30pm.

***Primula* 'Red Paddy' by Caroline Stone.**



As a National Collection holder I really hate it when I lose a plant from my collection, and when I found I had lost all my plants of *Primula* 'Red Paddy' from my collection of Double Primroses I was particularly upset. Only a few years ago I had had plenty of plants – so many that I had happily sent some off to the national Plant Exchange. I didn't expect when I started asking around to get a replacement plant that no-one would have it. I felt this was utterly disastrous. 'Red Paddy' is one of the older double primroses. It came from Daisy Hill Nurseries in County Antrim in around 1897. It has a smallish crimson flower with a white laced edge to the petal; it is really quite distinctive. I have always felt it was one of the core plants in my collection.

How could I have lost it? Eventually I got in touch with Ros Smith at Rosewarne. A few years ago 'Red Paddy' had been micropropped in the labs at Rosewarne and some of the plants had been available for sale. I felt I was clutching at straws, but I wondered whether any of the plants had been left unsold. Her reply "You can relax! I have more ticking over in the growth room – they will have to be put into rooting jel and weaned off so they won't be ready until autumn at the earliest." I was astonished and delighted.

And to my delight a package containing little plants arrived this Autumn. I have carefully planted them into several different locations in the garden as well as pots in the greenhouse, using two different potting medium for the pots. I am determined to ensure I don't ever lose the plant again. When they have grown on a little I will be sending some of the plants to trusted primula lovers, again hoping to disperse the risk. How can I express my gratitude to Ros? Certainly, she should be elevated to sainthood – a medal would not be sufficient to reward her for the work she has done at Rosewarne over the years. But all I can say is a million times over – thank you Ros!

Annual Meeting.

Under normal circumstances we would hold our annual meeting at the end of January. Unfortunately that will not be possible this year so we were looking at ways of meeting electronically to deal with the necessary business. This would not have been ideal but the group has done very little during the year, our financial position has hardly changed and there is little to report, so we might have been able to muddle through. Fortunately it appears that a Covid vaccine will become available during next year. It is too early to speculate, but it appears that we may be able to meet again by summer. I am therefore proposing that we put the annual meeting off for a few months this year and hope that we can meet together for tea and cakes!

If anyone has any comments or opinions, please get in touch. Plans are very tentative at this stage.

If we are able to meet in early summer then I hope we will be able to offer a program of events for the remainder of the year. If I could type with my fingers crossed, you can be sure that is what I would be doing!

Christmas and Spring.

The dark nights have arrived. As I write this the rain is thundering down as heavily as I have seen all year. The garden looks saturated and dreary. Christmas will present a series of challenges and no doubt a few frustrations but the New Year is looking a bit more promising.

Already there are signs of movement in the garden. *Narcissus* 'Cedric Morris' has produced a single flower. It is thought to be an autumn flowering form of *N. asturiensis* ssp. *jacetanus*. It was collected from a roadside in Spain by Basil Leng who gave it to Cedric Morris. Morris gave a bulb to Beth Chatto who introduced it to commerce. It has not yet be re-found in the wild.

Unfortunately it is not very fast growing and very few come on to the market each year. If you are able to obtain one, cherish it! It is a very special thing that teeters on the edge of success in cultivation.

The first of the snowdrops have also produced flowers. *Galanthus reginae-olgae* is an autumn flowering species from Greece. I don't succeed with it outdoors, though it might grow at the foot of a south wall. I think my garden is too moist and shaded to suit it, it survives without flowering (and snowdrops without flowers are not quite as enchanting). It does prosper in a cold greenhouse and produces flowers in October. *G. peshmenii* comes from Turkey and in my garden it fails to flower at a similar time. Under glass it is easy and divides into decent clumps quite quickly. Both species are well-known in cultivation and prosper where a suitable position can be found.

Galanthus elwesii is more tractable. Originally discovered by H. J. Elwes in Turkey, it was available as wild collected bulbs for decades and these bulbs had a reputation for being short lived. Now bulbs are produced commercially in cultivation and have been selected for persisting well in gardens. They prefer a more open position than the common snowdrop and have broader blue-grey leaves. The flowers are very variable and a large number of cultivars have been named, some more distinct than others! At this time of year it is the Hiemalis Group that attract attention. The name is used for a loose assemblage of plants that are distinctive in flowering before Christmas. *G. 'Barnes'* is one of the best, a vigorous plant with a large flower. *G. 'Peter Gatehouse'* flowers a couple of days earlier in my garden but all of the Hiemalis Group are good, bringing the promise of spring to the last dark days of the year.

The best of the early snowdrops is 'Three Ships'. Thought to be a selection of the Crimean Snowdrop, *G. plicatus*, it flowers in the days before Christmas. I find it vigorous, well able to match the vigour of the common snowdrop, and the burst of blooms before the festive season help to carry the garden through to the return of the spring sunshine.

Finally there is a splash of colour from *Narcissus* 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation'. Raised by F. Herbert Chapman in Sussex around 1943, there are no records that reveal its parentage. The winter flowering habit is almost unique among large trumpet daffodils and it was used extensively by Rosewarne Horticulture Station to produce early flowering cultivars for the Cornish cut flower market. It is still the earliest flowering cultivar available and I can't understand why it is not more widely grown. It is slowly

slipping out of commerce and genuine stock might take a while to locate but daffodils in December are a delight. It will continue to flower until the end of February. Some of these winter flowering bulbs take a while to settle down. *Narcissus* 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation' starts to produce roots very early in the autumn and they should be planted as soon as they are available, preferably in August. Plants that are still dry in September or October will take a year or two to settle in and may not flower as well initially. A little bit of brightness in the garden brings remarkable cheer to the darkness of winter!



Narcissus 'Cedric
Morris' .



Galanthus 'Three Ships' .



Narcissus 'Rijnveld's
Early Sensation' .

Hope to see you soon.
John Sirkett.

cornwallplantheritage@gmail.com