



The Scottish Rock Garden Club Dunblane Early Bulb Display 15th February 2014

Ben Ledi from Dunblane



Winter came late to Dunblane's steep and narrow streets. In fact it arrived the day before spring started for the SRGC. As show organiser I along with my son Andrew and wife Anne prepared the Victoria Hall in Dunblane for the annual SRGC Early Bulb Display. Around 6.00 pm, as soon as we had dressed the show tables in bright white and grey patterned covers to protect the table surfaces the snow began to fall. It did not descend gradually but seemed to be attracted to Dunblane's streets by a special force of gravity. By 7.00pm most uphill roads were difficult to drive on. I know! I got stuck 3 times on a very slippery inclines, as I was driving home. Had it not been for potholes, my tyres would not have gripped the road on some hills. I eventually left the car just short of home. Well that's that for the show we thought.

Anne and I expected to entertain guest lecturers Diane Clement and Anne Wright and their husbands to an evening meal and a chat. By 7.30 we had two short power cuts. The oven stopped working, the food was prepared but uncooked and the snow kept falling. The dinner had to be cancelled, leaving our guests stranded in the Hydro Hotel. We felt bad about that but better safe and

warm than stuck and hungry. They had to fend for themselves. I on the other hand began to wonder just how far-spread was the snow. A telephone call established that there was none 6 miles away in Stirling. Still the snow fell in great big chunks. Everything was Christmassy white. I feared for the display. Who would come? How would they get here? Would we have a claim on the insurance for lost costs?



Galanthus 'Breachin Ian'

All worries disappeared with the snow at dawn. Our winter blizzard covered a very restricted area around a corridor from Comrie and Braco to Dunblane. Even Sherriffmuir had been spared. By the time I retrieved my car and reached the hall just after 8.30, the whole place was bustling. One thing you can say for members of the SRGC is that they are prompt. They must have been battering the door down as Peter opened up for them. As soon as I entered the small show hall I stepped into spring. My snowdrops and crocuses, which I set out on the Friday afternoon, had been joined by potfuls of other bulbs and plants. Over the next 90 minutes more and more arrived. A little judicious moving resulted in a great display. I did not count the plants as there is little point.

The Early Bulb Display is not a competition.

The raison d'être for the display is to allow SRGC members to share their plants with others. It is quite amazing that 90% of the species and varieties were unique, by which I mean that there were very few occasions where we had more than one example of any plant.



Education first!

Anne Wright delivered her captivating talk 'Make your own daffodils and snowdrops' in a quiet assured manner. In her PowerPoint presentation she included two videos showing just how we should prepare and cut up our snowdrops and daffodils. Using video! A first for the early Bulb! The precision of her explanation matched the care and attention to detail needed in the process of maintain sterility during preparation and propagation. The second part of her talk showed us the parents and progeny of various narcissus hybrids which she had raised. The photos showed the progeny of particular crosses. The diversity of flower forms and colours derived from particular crosses, was remarkable. The icing on the cake was that she had some of these superb hybrids for sale. The fact her table was soon sold out is testament to the quality of her lecture.

Diane Clement talked about her "Growing obsession with Hepaticas". She took a lot of care to explain the differences between Pulsatillas, Anemones and Hepaticas – it's all in the bracts and seed heads. The changes in the botanical classification of Hepaticas over the centuries were very interesting as it revealed the progress of the scientific approach and must have taken a lot of research. She took us from a time when they were regarded as Anemones to their achieving Generic status in their own right. The main part of the talk was devoted to descriptions of the main Hepatica species and subspecies. Funny how they grow in Scandinavia and Europe but are absent in the UK! Hints on cultivation were much appreciated. Finally she showed examples of mouth-watering plants cultivated here and in Japan. We were assured tho' that you don't have to remortgage the house to get started and that a lot of fun can be had with the easily bought species.



While the lectures were proceeding, a television crew from Tern TV were filming plants in the show hall. The photographer appreciated having a nice warm dry room in which to photograph.. Normally he has to ply his trade outside in a cold windy Scottish garden.

Presenter Carol Baxter[in the striped jumper] talked to SRGC members during the day so that she could get a flavour of the event for the Beechgrove Garden programme on BBC TV.



Tern TV filming Anne Wright for The Beechgrove Garden



Iris Ney and me. Funny how my chins have grown. I think this is an optical effect!

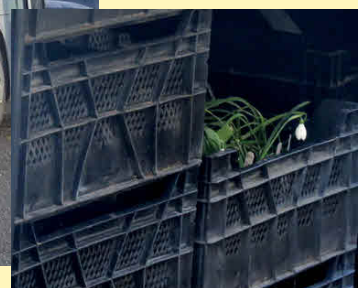
Just after 10.00am Iris Ney, the German garden designer arrived with her coach party of German and Austrian Galanthophiles, who were on a garden tour of Scotland. When they arrived I welcomed them with a hearty 'Guten Morgen! Willkommen in Dunblane.'

I directed them to the Bulb Display but they hurried in the opposite direction to find the plant sales. Although they numbered only about 25 persons, they bought lots of bags of plants.



The photograph just below shows the purchased bulbs & plants stowed away in crates in the storage compartment of the bus.

Let's hope that their purchases grow well in Germany and Austria.



The Bulb Display was once again a great success with potfuls of bulbs coming from all the airies. Most numerous were Galanthus forms, with a goodly number of Narcissus, Iris reticulata cultivars and Crocus species. All the nursery stands had interesting bulbs in flower on their sales stands. It is great for new gardeners to see their purchase in flower rather than buy a green shoot or even a brown bulb!

Members always like to see something new. In recent years snowdrops have grabbed the headlines and the imagination. However like 'the good life' people get used to what they already know and search for something different. As so often in the past this year's novelty was brought by John and Helen Amand. Their **Iris reticulata 'Blue Eyes'** drew a lot of attention. Seemingly misnamed,



it has large well proportioned flowers with dark velvet purple coloured falls, style arms and standards. The falls are marked with a central bold yellow line flanked by white striations. By misnamed I mean that the violet colour does not photograph well and the picture shows the flowers to be dark blue when viewed from above. Perhaps it was named from a photograph. In another photograph, taken outside in daylight, the plant is being carried by Ian Young and it looks bluer in this picture as well. A Google search for it produces no hit for this plant.

Like Anne Wright, John was able to satisfy customer demand as he had some Iris reticulata 'Blue Eyes' for sale on his stand. It would be great if every time we fancied a plant in an SRGC show we could just go out and buy it there and then.

Alongside 'Blue Eyes' were her cousins Katharine Hodgkin, Sheila Ann Germaney, George, Cantab, Clairette, and, winogradowii. Every colour but red!



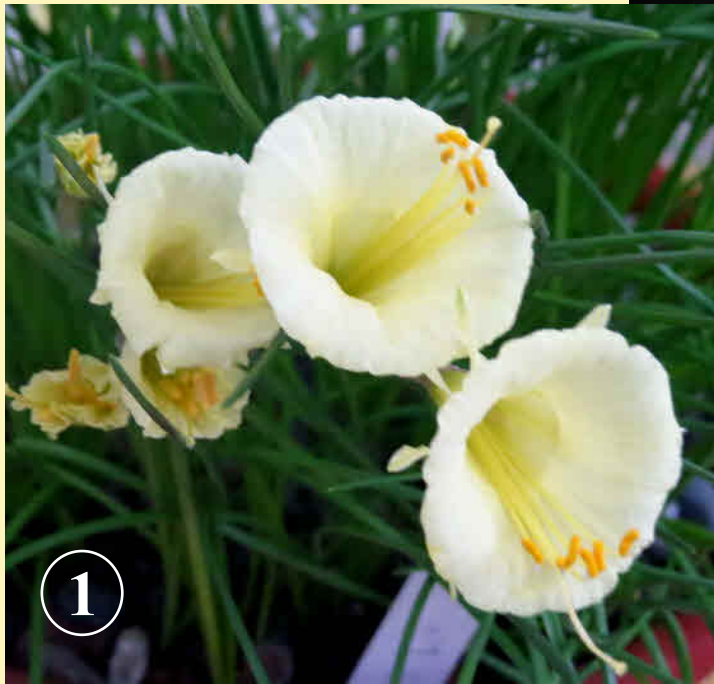
When each variety is given an appropriate amount of space on the bench, members could appreciate each one.

A particularly fine selection of *Iris reticulata* was brought by Carol and David Shaw. This was *Iris* *Reine Immaculee*. Members of the Joint Rock thought it might be a hybrid between *reticulata* and *histrioides*. It has wide lips and style arms, the latter being slightly twisted. Ian and Carole Bainbridge rescued some bulbils from the collection left by Michael Northway and gave some to David and Carol. They have brought this old hybrid back into cultivation. Great to see an old variety restored to its rightful place. It was introduced to cultivation by Walter Blom & Sons, the bulb company and little has been seen of it since. He registered it in 1953 as a selection of *Iris histrioides*.



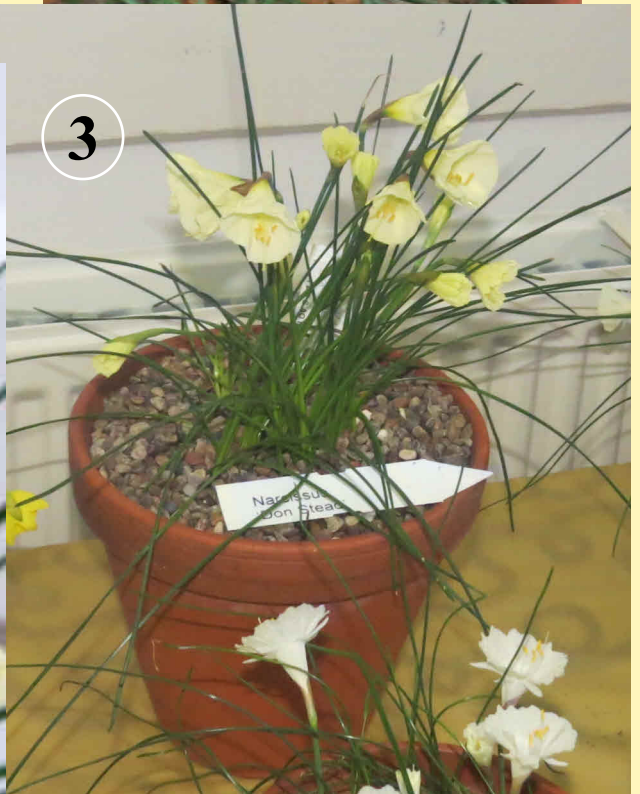
The other genus which contributed to many colours was **Crocus**. As usual the Brookfield Prize for Best Crocus Grown from Seed was won by Jean Wyllie. The Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh brought pans of several different bulbs including some nice crocus species, including *C. angustifolius* [1] from Ukraine, *Crocus tommasinianus* 'Lyn's Pink' [2] introduced by local enthusiast, Lyn Bezzant. *C. angustifolius* was a very striking selection with deep golden open orange flower striving to cover the still to open buds showing their dark red brown backs. The leaves were still shorter than the flowers. *Crocus korolkowii* [3], *C. aff sieberi*, a clone distributed by Rannweig and Bob Wallis, *C. versicolor* from the Maritime Alps [5]





Narcissus

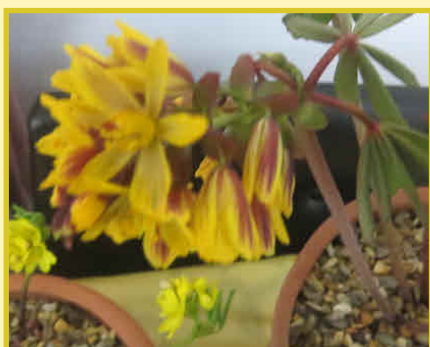
Narcissus varieties were mainly bulbocodium or romieuxii types including the splendid hybrid 'Don Stead'. N. Cantabricus[2] has pure white upright facing flowers, romieuxii [1] has pale primrose flowers with a rolled edge while Narcissus Don Stead its a right angles on its stem.



Scilla tubergeniana or **S mischtschenkoana** 'Tubergeniana' [right] is a superb early flowerer. Each of its starry six petaled ice blue flowers has a dark blue central stripe, making the flower look bluer than it really is. It flowers as it erupts from the ground, its stems elongating and a never ending series of flowers develops along the stem till it is about 9 inches [23 cm] tall. A pure white form is also in cultivation. Native to North Iran and the Southern Caucasus it seems quite appropriate that it is flowering while the Winter Olympics are being held in Sochi. Maybe the skiers are skiing over it!



Eranthis 'Schwefelglanz' [translates as sulphur-gloss, maybe shiny sulphur] shown by Ian Christie was a hit on the show bench and available from his stand. It is a much softer yellow of an almost apricot hue in contrast to other Eranthis hyemalis selections.



Leontice albertii



Ranunculus calandrinoides is a Moroccan plant which I associate with the Late President of the SRGC, Sheila Mowle. She used to show a large plant of this as well as *Narcissus waterii*. Both have white flowers, those of the

Ranunculus look too delicate to last at this inclement time of year.



Galanthus

- 1 G. Victoria
- 2 G. The Whins Yellow
- 3 G. Fred's Giant

Leucojum vernum is found from The Pyrenees to Romania. Apparently it has been naturalised in many parts of Europe including Germany. I asked Iris Ney if she had seen it in the wild but she told me that nowadays it is very rare and probably collected out of several of its old haunts.



There was a fine collection of **Cyclamen coum** on show. They displayed a wide range of leaf patterns from plain green to almost pure silver grey. Flower colour ranged from palest pink to deep magenta with most of them having a dark nose. Cyclamen coum is an excellent plant for the rock garden in winter. It seems to be almost indestructible, although I find that birds or something else likes to nibble the flowers. Glassford has a superb patch which grew from seeds in compost which he discarded. Another Winter Olympic plant, it hails from the eastern Black sea coast, round thro' the Crimea to Iran and Turkey and even down to Syria and Lebanon. The history of these places leads one to believe that C. coum is adapted to war zones! Such a wide distribution must help to explain the range of leaf and flower forms. It likes shady places in woodland in the wild. In Scotland it doesn't mind a bright spot in the garden.



Several super plants of *Cyclamen alpinum* sparkled on the bench. They had been grown from Cyclamen Society seed. I believe this plant is now known as *C. trochopteranum* since 1975. Has it been re-established as a species? It is found away from *C. coum* in Southwest Turkey, inland from Antalya. The petals of the helicopter flowered cyclamen are twisted in a most attractive fashion.



Cyclamen alpinum above and right
C. persicum on left





Margaret and Henry Taylor's excellent display of early flowering Primulas confused the people from Tern TV, who thought that the plants would have had to be forced to get them to flower in February. SRGC members pointed out that these were early flowering varieties. Among the species were *P. vulgaris* and its Eastern sub-species *P. vulgaris sibthorpii*, which is usually pink flowered. You get similar plants when primroses cross with polyanthus in the garden.

Their Petiolarid Primulas were in perfect condition. The 'Arduaine' form of *P. whitei*, is one of the most beautiful plants that we can grow. The flowers are powder blue with a green eyed surrounded by a narrow



white ring. The jagged-edged leaves have a fine dusting of farina. Margaret & Henry have crossed *whitei* with *edgeworthii* to get their own hybrid 'Tantallon'. The hybrid is reputed to be easier to cultivate. Another of their own hybrids was a nice pale pink *P. nana* x *sessilis*.

Carole and David Shaw had their *Primula allionii* in flower a month before I would have expected. To prove me wrong, Elspeth from the RBGE brought five wild clones of *P. allionii* in flower. [above left]



As it turned out, my original pessimism was unfounded. Members came from all round and enjoyed an excellent day out meeting friends and munching bacon rolls while learning more about snowdrops, Narcissi and Hepaticas. Thank you to everyone who brought plants for the display and for the plant sale; to the nurserymen for the raffle prizes; to Anne and Diane for their superb lectures; to everyone who helped prepare and serve food and drinks.
Sandy Leven

