

The Scottish Rock Garden Club & The Alpine Garden Society Kendal Show 15th February 2015



For the second year the first of our joint shows was held in the Cumbrian market town of Kendal. If you haven't yet visited this show put it in your to-do list for next spring. Historically the show was started under the auspices of both the SRGC and the AGS and the first dozen or more were held in Morecambe. This was back in the days when Eric Watson, Past President of the SRGC was a very active exhibitor. He was conscious that there were no alpine flower shows in the 'far north' of England or the 'deep south' of Scotland. Growers and showers in the border counties of both England and Scotland looked to the RBG in Edinburgh as their 'spiritual home'. The other Mecca for rock gardeners is far south at Kew in London. After many years in Morecambe the show moved to the outskirts of Blackpool. The move to Kendal means a much shorter journey for Scottish members of both societies.

This winter has felt [to me] to be cold and this cold has seemed to be prolonged. I have made the journey down [and back up] the M74/M6 in all weathers. Sometimes it was so cold that the windscreen washers froze and I had to stop regularly to clean the windscreen manually. Modern cars with heated nozzles and anti freeze in screen wash have made this much less likely nowadays. On many occasions, snow had lingered in Dunblane when I left early in the morning of the show only to disappear as I neared the balmy climes of Glasgow and the M74. Until the reconstruction of the roads through Cumbernauld, the roadside banks were packed with the yellow flowers of opening daffodils. Shap Summit is always bleak and could be exciting especially if a late fall of snow arrived during the Saturday afternoon or early evening of the show. I remember once when only those who headed north right after the show made it over the summit.. The tardy members had to spend the night in hotels near Kendal.





Once the show moved to Blackpool, the final part of the route was through the flat countryside of coastal Lancashire. As the road meandered through the villages, you could count on the roadsides after Junction 33 being lined in places with King Alfred's, Carlton or more recently, Tete-a-tete narcissi. This year there was hardly a daffodil to be seen growing by the roadside! Wordsworth would have been speechless. The white flowers of the blackthorn offered the only hint that spring was approaching. This year, probably because we decided to make a short holiday out of our visit to the show, the journey south could not have been wetter. The drive along the M6 was challenging when viewed through a curtain off heavy rain and spray from trucks. Some car drivers seemed to have a divine sense of the road ahead or perhaps big BMWs are fitted with radar, as cautious drivers like I have become, were overtaken continually by other travelling at high speed.

It was a real pleasure to leave the Motorway a few miles north of Morecambe at the signpost for Kirkby Lonsdale. Our destination was the excellent Crooklands' Hotel, in the village of the same name, at the southern M6 exit for Kendal. This hostelry provides a haven with comfortable rooms and some of the best food available anywhere. Good Black Sheep Ale as well! I have to admit that the meals at Battlesteads in Wark, near Hexham, is equally good. Perhaps good food and rock gardening go together. During Friday we drove to Liverpool to visit family. We took the tourist route via Preston and Southport. There on the sea front during a break in the drizzle we saw across the Ribble Estuary, the Blackpool tower and the Pepsi Cola rollercoaster on the horizon, backed by the Cumbrian mountains. There is a lot to see and plenty to keep you interested in Lancashire, even if you don't meet the famed Lassie!. For one thing there are innumerable plant nurseries.

A ten minute drive from Crooklands takes you to Kendal. As soon as you stepped into the Hall of Kirby Kendal school you entered a different world. Show business is conducted in several rooms connected by endless corridors. I have little doubt that pupils know where they are going but for my part I must thank those who put up direction signs. The first stall was filled with raffle prizes and as usual I bought some tickets. I was unsuccessful this year but I have won prizes at this show in other years. In any case you shouldn't buy raffle tickets and expect to win. You purchase should be seen as a donation to the running of the show. Excellent close up photographs on boards grabbed your attention until you realised that many people were already buying up the best plants from the nurseries. Even then it was not easy to choose what to buy as the nurseries were spread out in three areas, each packed with eager purchasers. One would have thought that a famine of rock plants was about to begin.



With a bit of dedication and by following the signs for the show I reached the food serveries. [there was only one but my computer refuses to print the single of serveries!]

Nearly there!

Inside the show hall, spring had well and truly sprung. Members of AGS and SRGC were mingling and chatting. The benches were literally packed with pots and pans full of the most exquisite brightly coloured rock garden plants. I know many had been lovingly tended in alpine houses but this did not diminish the combined effect of bringing together plants grown by talented exhibitors from all over the country. It is the diversity of species and varieties which distinguishes our shows. These are special plants!

What is that special something?

It is that they are compact, floriferous, delicate, low growing and mainly hardy. They are certainly show stoppers.



I mentioned that there were scarcely any daffodils by the roadsides this year. The same cannot be said for the show. This year the Narcissi were spectacular. I coveted many of the varieties on the benches—and I do mean varieties. Margaret and Henry Taylor and Anne Wright had brought along their wonderful hybrids. What dedication and care must be needed to improve on the species. Indeed the variety of Daffodils available in mind blowing. In recent years more and more dwarf hybrids have been appearing. Difficult to choose a favourite but up there with the best was Anne's 'Trumpet Voluntary'. The label says it was grown from AGS seed sown as *N. eugeniae* in 2002. Quite a find. The flower proportions are reversed and it has this huge fringed



trumpet almost hiding the petals and the whole thing about 10 inches tall. If that is not enough there is its exquisite

shading from pale to dark primrose as you travel ever deeper into the cup. It must be unique. *N. eugeniae* has a more traditional daffodil form and is rich yellow. Trumpet voluntary has inherited its flared trumpet and primrose colour from another parent maybe *romieuxii*? As for *N. eugeniae*; it is a small golden yellow daffodil with a fringed trumpet



The season is a good one for seeing daffodils which otherwise might be past.. Narcissus species and hybrids in the show, included the following.

- N. bulbocodium* var *citrinus*
- N. alpestris* - High altitude form
- N. cantabricus*
- N. cyclamineus*
- N. Jim Lad*
- N. incurvicervicus*







Colchicum szovitsii

Iris reticulata 'White Caucasus'

Asarum campaniforme

Crocus heuffelianus 'Carpathian Wonder'

Crocus tommasinianus 'Claret'

Bulbocodium vernum



Tommy Anderson's immaculate medal winning 6 pan entry

- Left To right, top row first
 Saxifraga Allandale Ghost
 Narcissus cyclamineus
 Saxifraga cumulus
 Saxifraga Allandale Jin? Or Jim?
 Eranthis hyemalis
 Saxifraga Allandale Charles

The Allandale saxifrages have been bred by Ray Fairburn. They are very popular in Northern England. Hartside nursery are building up a collection of them.



Ian Kidman's *Dionysia curviflora* almost covered with flowers. A rare sight indeed. Some growers struggle to get half as big a cushion with any flowers.

- Dionysia termeana*
Dionysia tapetodes Peter Edwards

Below is a view of Section 2, what is casually called 'the beginners' section'. These plants show that there is a great future for the shows. The standard of most of the plants in these classes was very high.



DIONYSIA TERMEANA



DIONYSIA tapetodes 'Peter Edwards'



Dionysia curviflora hybrid







Anne Vale from Braintree made my day with her inspired miniature gardens. One was non-competitive. Both combined childhood memories with modern rock gardening. The scale was that of the Hornby Dublo style OO gauge. Each planter featured a tiny house with surrounding garden tended by tiny figures. Anne let her imagination run wild with the 'hard' design but when it came to planting she chose with care. A tiny *Daphne petraea* became a tree, *Androsaces* in bloom were roses, out of bloom—shrubby hedges and a 'trumpet' *Dionysia* became a clump of Day Lilies. I was less sure about the white cobbles but everything was in its place and nothing was out of scale or out of place. I could see that this would appeal to youngsters as well as to the young at heart. My thoughts were confirmed when I spoke to a young mother whose 5 year old daughter enthused about the wee gardens. If our club wants to attract young members we need to think 'outside the box'. Let's get Anne to design a table top garden for the SRGC for Gardening Scotland!





Primula allionii

Anna Griffith

Scimitar

Joan Hughes

Stephen

Judy Burrow

Chivalry

Sandra Burrow

