



**CORNWALL GROUP
NEWSLETTER FOR
December 2018**

We have arrived at that strange time of the year when when the only colour in the garden seems to come from Christmas decorations. So far I haven't seen any houses glowing with winter lights but it is only a question of time. The winter solstice is only a couple of weeks away and then the evenings will start to get lighter. It will take a while for the difference to show but I am always pleased to know that it is happening. I like to think that the glowing houses have played a part in driving the darkness away.

Already there are hints of the colour and spectacle of spring and there is still time to plant tulips. They don't last very long but they provide a hit of strong colour to kick-start the sunshine of summer. Most of the retailers will be selling off stock for the next week or two to make space for plastic Santas and glitter-clouds of flying reindeer so there are some bargains to be had. Tulips will be fine if you plant them now, daffodils are a bit dodgier.



***Prospero autumnale* .**



***Scilla lingulata* .**



***Crocus speciosus* .**

With a bulb spectacular offering hope for the coming season there are some early starters that give us a foretaste of spring. There are plenty of small blue bulbs to bring some early astonishment into the garden. *Chionodoxa* will be in flower in the first weeks of the year, the spikes appearing out of the bare soil before the leaves are visible but there are a few small blue bulbs that will flower in the autumn and provide some caerulean cheer.

Prospero autumnale (*Scilla autumnalis*) is widespread in the Mediterranean countries. It can also be found in favourable parts of the UK. In the southern part of its range it can have long flower stems and stay in bloom until the end of November. In the UK it is smaller and earlier. I have seen it on the Lizard peninsula growing on south facing banks with only three or four flowers on the stem. It can be in flower here in July and August which is perhaps a little early to be called an autumn bulb.

Scilla lingulata has no part in such foolishness, generally waiting until October to produce flowers. It comes from North Africa and in the open garden it needs a warm dry bed, perhaps on the south wall of a house. It is hardy without any problem, but it likes to be a little drier than Cornwall usually allows, both in summer and winter. In a cold-frame or cold greenhouse it is magnificent and trouble free.

Finally there are the *Crocus* species that bloom in autumn. If you have a cold greenhouse there are many species that will prosper in pots, but only *C. speciosus* seems to survive outdoors. Like tulips, they may not have a long life but they are cheap enough to replant every year if needed. In a well drained sunny bed they will prosper. I have always wondered how they would do on top of a Cornish hedge but never got around to testing it. The picture was taken at Wisley in October where the species adds colour to the alpine meadow and is fairly reliable perennial.



***Galanthus reginae-olgae*
'Tilebarn Jamie'.**



***Galanthus peshmenii* .**



***Galanthus elwesii* November
Flowering.**

Snowdrops are another sign that spring is coming. They may sometimes flower as the ice forms on the ground but the first gardens to open in the New Year will be showing off their snowdrops amidst the woolly rustling of thermal underwear. The earliest autumn snowdrops prosper in warmer, drier climates than Cornwall. I have only been really successful growing them in pots under cover. *G. peshmenii* and *G. reginae-olgae* survive outside but flowers are a rarity. *G. reginae-olgae* 'Tilebarn Jamie' is a good selection that has grown well for me and 'Cambridge' was selected at the city's botanic garden, not for the qualities of its flower but because it was vigorous and reliable. The earliest flowering forms of *G. elwesii* bloom before the end of the year and all they ask is some sunshine, they don't grow well in the light shade usually associated with snowdrops. The Hiemalis group will all flower from December but some clones are better than others. 'Barnes' is early with large flowers, and Bob Brown at Cotswold Garden Flowers sells a form that he calls 'November Flowering' that can be relied on. Just before Christmas 'Three Ships' will flower. It is a vigorous plant and one of the best to try if you are just dipping a toe into the winter waters of *Galanthus*.

Tricia will be talking about Snowdrops at the next meeting so there should be plenty of inspiration.



***Narcissus* 'Rijnveld's Early
Sensation'.**



***Narcissus romieuxii* .**



***Narcissus* 'Cedric Morris'.**

Daffodils fill the late winter with colour in one form or another. Before long the shops will fill with cut flowers from the early Cornish crop and I am sure that many of you have planted up pots of 'Paperwhite' to enjoy for Christmas (if you got them planted in time).

In the garden it is well worth planting some 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation'. It isn't as robust as the large trumpet daffodils of March but it will grow well in grass or in a sunny border where the leaves won't be overgrown by other things in spring. The flowers are fantastic but you will have to live with the leaves until April if they are to prosper. No problems living with the tiny leaves of 'Cedric Morris'. It is an autumn flowering dwarf daffodil from Sir Cedric Morris' garden at Benton End. It was popularised by Beth Chatto but has never been easy to obtain. In the last few years plants have been made available. They aren't cheap but they are wonderful.

We return to the climate of North Africa for the earliest of the hoop petticoat daffodils. A number of the best forms of *N.romieuxii* are derived from a seed collection in the Atlas Mountains by Jim Archibald in the 1960's. The earliest of them will flower in December and they will still be producing blooms when the main-crop daffodils burst from the fields. It is best in a pot under cover, though I have seen very good plants grown in a bulb frame. They grow well with some spring moisture around the bulbs but they will produce more flowers if the autumn is warmer and drier. The large, pale flowers shine out of the winter gloom and carry with them a breath of the warmth of a holiday in the winter sun.

LAST MEETING

"Heritage Plants". by Chris Smith from Pennard Plants.

Pennard plants started near Shepton Mallet in Somerset in 2001. The nursery has grown a variety of plants over the years but in 2008-9 they started to specialise in edible plants, especially heritage varieties. They have now added fruit and herbs to their original range of vegetables. They attend all of the major flower shows.

The nursery is in a walled garden on a south facing slope in the Mendips and it gets a lot of weather thrown at it. They have no power on site so there is no heating. A lot of plants are grown under protection and most is grown traditionally. Chris's father and grandfather were both very keen vegetable growers. Every year Chris was given the Carters Childrens Collection of seeds. It was a good way of getting children interested in gardening and producing food.

In 1972 the Seed Varieties Act became law. It said that any variety of vegetable sold to the public had to be listed on a national register to ensure uniqueness. Testing became expensive and the larger companies all dropped the varieties that sold in smaller quantities. Some varieties that were well known and popular seem to have dropped out of cultivation. The sprout 'Peer Gynt' has disappeared though Chris is still hoping to find it. The regulations cover all the main varieties of vegetable and many older varieties are not listed on the register which makes it illegal to sell them. Garden Organic have a heritage seed library that has preserved these older varieties.



Apricot 'Moorpark'.



Runner bean 'Painted Lady' .



Scarlet flowered broad bean.

The large commercial vegetable growers use F1 varieties. These are often stronger growing and more uniform. These varieties then spin off into sales to home gardeners. This is sometimes a very good thing. Modern varieties of Tomato have excellent blight resistance, but older varieties have good flavour and are no harder to grow. They are also useful to the gardener, who may not need the whole crop to mature at the same time. The library of varieties held by Garden Organic cannot be sold because they are all unregistered so Pennard Plants specialise in intermediate cultivars that are registered but no longer grown on a large scale. Seed can be sold if it is registered on any national list, so they are able to offer 120 varieties of tomato. . Many of their cultivars come from France and Italy. There are also a lot from Eastern Europe, where growers could not afford expensive F1 seed and so maintained the older varieties. The USA also has a huge collection of heritage varieties, mostly brought there by immigrants from the UK, France and Germany.

Strawberries are an example of a plant that does not have any old varieties. 'Royal Sovereign' and 'Favourite' are about the oldest. Virus infection has weakened all of the old varieties so that they are no longer useful. Newer cultivars have firmer flesh and travel better to market. Raspberries are also affected badly by virus diseases and so they only supply the newer varieties.

Apples show the opposite effect. There are 1,500 - 2,000 cultivars still grown in the UK, some going back for several centuries. The same is true for pears and stone fruits. The cultivars that survive have proved that they grow well and have good flavour. The finest apricot cultivar is still the Victorian variety 'Moorpark', a match for any from modern breeding lines. 'Peregrine' is amongst the best peaches with a stone that is easy to remove. Old varieties have often survived because they have good attributes.



Potato 'Maris Piper'.



Potato 'Pink Fir Apple' .



Potato 'Anya' .

The runner bean 'Painted Lady' dates from around 1700 but it remains a good plant and is disease free. The Martock bean was discovered in Martock, Somerset in 1952 but dates from the 12th or 13th century. It is very high in protein and can be stored through the winter. It had almost died out completely but was rediscovered growing in the

gardens of the Palace of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. It was being used as a sacrificial bean, attracting blackfly away from the broad beans. It is now back in wider cultivation, registered as a heritage or local variety which costs about £100 rather than the £1,000 when the registration scheme was introduced. The scarlet flowered broad bean is also available, though the plants have to be rogued keep only those with burgundy flowers. It is an important plant in maintaining the diversity of the gene pool for future breeding.

Older potato varieties are also under threat. Modern breeding is searching for varieties with fewer eyes and a smooth, rounded shape. Older varieties often have very deep eyes that need to be gouged out before cooking. The breeding of modern varieties is all driven by the supermarkets who need convenient, round potatoes without eyes. 'Maris Piper' is an excellent example favoured by customers. They have not been selected for flavour. In the last decade things have been changing. Breeders have gone back to 'Pink Fir Apple' which has an excellent flavour but is troublesome to grow and produces a small crop. Crossing it with 'Desiree' produced 'Anya' which is a smooth potato with a good flavour.

This was a poor year for sweet peas but there are still old cultivars that prosper. 'Cupani' arose in Italy around 1699, it was the first cultivar to be developed from the wild species. It is still available and was important in breeding the Grandiflora and then the Spencer varieties.



Sweet pea 'Cupani' .



Seakale .



Purple podded pea.

The tomato 'Black Russian' arrived in the UK between 1500 and 1600 ad. It is delicious and good for breeding but it does not produce a big crop. It is also very thin skinned so it splits easily and should be picked and eaten almost immediately so it had become unfashionable. Other plants are also subject to fashion. Chris predicts that Aubergines, Peppers and Squash will be popular next year after their performance in the hot weather this summer. The courgette shortage at the start of this season resulted in a boom in seed sales. Seakale was once popular as a fresh winter vegetable but there is now only one commercial grower remaining. However it is becoming more popular among gardeners because it is unavailable through the shops and will produce a good crop almost anywhere.

The Victorians loved vegetables that had multiple uses. The purple podded pea looks beautiful, it is unusual and crops over a long period making it useful for domestic growers but unsuitable for mechanical harvesting. The 'Lazy Housewife' bean was so called because it drops its leaves in the autumn making it easy to see the beans for picking. The Victorians grew about 1,500 varieties of potato but now only about 10 are stocked by supermarkets. About 900 are grown in a gene bank in Scotland and about 200 are grown as a seed crop. Pennard Plants have about 100 cultivars which add variety for gardeners.

Modern commercial breeding is seeking a higher yield, uniformity, especially with regard to cropping time, and disease resistance. Gardeners on the other hand often want a long season of cropping and good flavour. Old varieties almost inevitably have good disease resistance because they have survived through time. Pennard Plants have over 700 varieties of seed. They use simple seed packets which they had designed and printed for themselves with unique illustrations. They encourage us to save our own seed and to look out for older varieties which often give very good results.

THE THREE STEMS COMPETITION

Many thanks to Chris Smith for judging the Three Stems competition. The return to mild weather this month has emphasised the flowers of autumn. Jo Waterhouse brought in a head of *Mahonia* as a warning that winter was coming and *Camellia sasanqua* 'Rainbow' from John Mann gave a glimpse of the spring to come.



1st. Jo Waterhouse.
Mahonia 'Charity', Astrantia 'Moiria Reid' and Aconitum carmichaelii .



2nd. John Sirkett.
Nerine undulata .



3rd. Brian Hiley.
Salvia curviflora , Cuphea ignea and Pelargonium sp.

On the display table Tricia Howard had brought in an arrangement in autumn colours looking unruffled by the recent winds. John Mann brought in a trug of fallen leaves that showed the effect once the wind had passed through. Some very beautiful colours from both of them, showing that it has been a remarkable year. Nina Paternoster brought in a beautiful pure white *Nerine bowdenii* 'Alba' without the slightest hint of pink.



Autumn colours from Tricia Howard.



Nerine bowdenii 'Alba.



Autumn colours from John Mann.

OTHER EVENTS LAST MONTH

The best year for autumn colour that I can remember has dragged me out and about. If you have visited any gardens or gone to garden events please write in and let us all know about it.

Roseland House. 20th October 2018.

Charlie Pridham held an open day at the end of October to show his National Collection of *Lapageria*. It was a wonderful opportunity to see the range of cultivars grown and the collection is going from strength to strength. Charlie is hoping to add to it in spring when he travels to the USA to pick up a collection of plants from California. When the plants are established it will probably be the most significant collection of *Lapageria* in the world.

Lapageria rosea is a climber from Chile with amazing large trumpet flowers in autumn. They are exacting in their requirements but where they are suited in Cornwall they can put on a remarkable show. More details and pictures of the National Collection can be found on the

Roseland House website.

www.roselandhouse.co.uk



Lapageria rosea
'Caupolican'.

Lapageria rosea
'Huglett's White'.

Lapageria rosea 'Pink
Panther'.

Lapageria rosea
'Beatrix Anderson'.

Westonbirt. 2nd November 2018.

Bright colours from all the hedgerow trees accompanied me up the motorway to Westonbirt. I have never seen oaks colour so well, beech trees have turned astonishing colours and there are sycamores and field maples with bright yellow leaves. Bright light at Westonbirt had brought out the crowds, I have never seen the treetop walkway so crowded or so many dogs running around in small circles. The light was amazing, the colour was bright and the crowds were thronging. If you are considering a visit next year then the last week of October and the first week of November are usually good, the latest news is posted on the Westonbirt website. Westonbirt hold the National Collection of *Acer palmatum* cultivars and the wide range of cultivars are now reaching a decent size, adding a bright selection of autumn colours to the established display from trees that have been planted for a century or more.



Acer palmatum.

Taxodium distichum
'Pendens'.

Acer palmatum.

Wisley. 2nd November 2018.

In a perfect world I would have set out to Wisley after a good lunch at Westonbirt (and they can deliver a very good lunch at Westonbirt). Time never permits. The price to pay for visiting both places in a day is a packet of sandwiches (from a well known service station supermarket) and a late cup of hot chocolate at Wisley. However, it is worth the inconvenience. The autumn colour at this time of the year is magnificent and there are spectacular plants in leaf and fruit throughout the garden.

Nerine, *Petrocosmea* and autumn snowdrops brought colour to the alpine house and the first hardy orchids and *Crocus* hinted that spring is coming. The new tropical garden has seen its first frost for the year, the bananas are wrapped for the winter and the blackened *Canna* are a sign that summer has ended even if winter hasn't yet arrived.

Building work is progressing well on the new entrance to the garden. The RHS hope to have it open by next spring and the new facilities look impressive. Last time I saw it, the buildings were still a network of shining steel beams and the whole complex was the most remarkable piece of garden sculpture that I have seen. It couldn't last, the low complex of buildings is nearly complete and the grey roofs nestle comfortably into the tree line. The sparkle of summer has gone but the future looks good.

The evenings are drawing in and as the garden darkened that cup of hot chocolate started to look very appealing. I spent the last hour of daylight cradling it in my hands and watching the sunset glinting between the panes of the glasshouse. Days are dark but the garden is still bright.



Autumn colour.



The new entrance nearing completion.



***Ginkgo biloba* 'Princeton Sentry'.**

British Orchid Council Congress. 4th November 2018.

With the weather cooling (and the rain pouring on the day) it was a perfect time for a major orchid show. It try to show the hardy orchids when I go to these things but in reality much of the joy of orchid growing lies in walking into a warm greenhouse on a cold day. This congress was held at Writhlington School where a remarkable Orchid Project introduces pupils to gardening, cultivation, ecology and biology in a very innovative way. The congress benefits from the enthusiasm of the pupils and the excellent greenhouse facilities.

The nations orchid societies gather to put on displays. I can't pick a favourite but Bournemouth Orchid Society had staged an excellent example. Among the flowers, *Pterostylis x furcillata* had me salivating. It had been brought by Akerne Orchids from Belgium, perhaps they will have one or two to spare next time! *Cymbidium tracyanum* was as inconveniently sprawling as a large orchid can be and quite magnificent as a result. Plenty to dream about as the garden slips into the sludgy season.



***Pterostylis x furcillata* from Australia.**



Bournemouth Orchid Society stand.



***Cymbidium tracyanum* from the Himalayas.**

Autumn Trip to Dorset and Somerset by Tricia Howard.

As soon as our garden closed on the 15th Oct we enjoyed a short break in Dorset, and across the border into Somerset. Fruits and berries were in abundance with the low sun casting shadows and illuminating the autumn leaves. The weather was good with misty mornings and warm afternoons. Our first visit was to **Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens** on the coast by Chesil Beach. The original large mansion no longer exists, but the walled garden survives today. This part of the Dorset coast has an especially mild climate and the gardens are sheltered by hills in the north and evergreen oaks. The gardens contain a rich selection of plants from the Mediterranean regions with semi wild woodlands along with palms, tree ferns, and a national collection of Hoheria, a New Zealand tree in the mallow family. Two plants which stood out at this time of year were the *Koelreuteria paniculata* with lovely yellow toned leaves and the amazing bright magenta fruits on the *Callicarpa americana*.



Callicarpa americana.



Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens.



Koelreuteria paniculata.

A couple of miles from the Cerne Abbas Giant was the **Minterne Gardens**, with a collection of Himalayan Rhododendrons and wonderful landscaped gardens in the manner of Capability Brown. The first Rhododendrons were planted at Minterne following the Ernest. H. Wilson expeditions to the Himalayas in the 19th century with many more added from Forrest, Rock and Kingdon Ward expeditions between 1900 and 1938. The 27 acres offer beautiful views with lakes streams and cascades with stunning autumn colour from the many Acers.



Minterne Gardens.

Just across the border in Somerset is the iconic cottage garden **East Lambrook Manor** created by the late Margery Fish. It surrounds an old manor house built with the lovely warm local stone. The garden has a rustic feel, with little winding paths amongst the many plants. Some of her favourites were Snowdrops and Hellebores and an area by the ditch has been replanted with a selection of these, under a multi stemmed *Betula jaquemontii*. The garden has been given a Grade 1 status and is now in the hands of Gail and Mike Werkmeister. The nursery is well run and still includes many of her favourite plants, including lots of hardy Geraniums I brought a *Lamium orvala*



East Lambrook Manor.

A completely different style of garden was the **Mapperton Terraced Valley Gardens**. These Italianate formal gardens and Jacobean manor house are set in a deep combe amongst tumbling hills. Amongst the topiary were many stone ornaments, water features and we were surprised to come across a 1920 swimming pool. The lower gardens contained a mature arboretum with views and walks.



The Orangery.**Mapperton Gardens.****The Swimming Pool.**

We also visited **Durslade Farm** to see the Piet Oudolf garden, which John wrote about last month, **Stourhead** with breath-taking flaming, autumnal colour trees reflecting in the lake, and **Forde Abbey Gardens** with England's tallest fountain. A really memorable trip and came back with a few more plants as well !
Tricia Howard.

**Durslade Farm.****Stourhead.****Forde Abbey Gardens.**

COMING EVENTS

Gardens are asleep now until the first snowdrops appear so there isn't much happening except Christmas events. Brace yourselves, Santa's on his way.

RHS Rosemoor Christmas Food and Craft Fair.

Saturday 15th, Sunday 16th December .

"Last minute food, gifts and decorations" is the way the RHS have described it.

The winter glow illuminations are switched on at 4pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 15th Nov - 5th Jan.

The winter sculpture exhibition runs in the garden from 17th Nov - 24th Feb.

Check website for details: www.rhs.org.uk

Please would you let me know of any garden shows, open days or other events that may be of interest to our members so that I can include them in the next newsletter.

If you are planning to attend an event please check the details for yourself. I try to verify them all, but I might make mistakes!

All other content gratefully received.

cornwallhps@gmail.com

Cornwall Group HPS Renewal.

Renewal of membership to the Cornwall Group is due on January 1st, I have attached a renewal form with the details for your convenience. Bring it to the next meeting if you can.

John.

New Year Walk.

Saturday 5th January, starting at 10.30 hrs.

The New Year Walk will be at St Newlyn East on Saturday, 5th January 2018, starting at 10:30hrs. Meet at the Pheasant Inn car park (www.thepheasantinnnewquay.co.uk) (Satnav: TR8 5LJ). This is a easy-moderate grade walk of about one and a half hours and good walking shoes or Hiking Boots are recommended.

A circular walk from St Newlyn East through the woods of the Lappa Valley where the Steam Railway now encompasses what was one of the most famous mines in Cornwall during Victorian times and the riverbeds are still stained red. The walk features broadleaf woodland in the Lappa valley and remnants of a once-thriving industrial heritage now recolonised by nature.

Lunch will be at the Pheasant Inn where well behaved dogs are welcome.

For committee members there will be a meeting following lunch.

Any queries, contact Phil Gadd, Tel: 01726 817396

NEXT MEETING

Christmas Social.
Tricia Howard will talk on "Galanthomania" .
Wednesday 5th December 2018 .
Ladock Village Hall, 7.00 for 7.30.

Please bring some food, sweet or savory, suitable for a finger buffet. Nina will be there to serve both alcoholic and non-alcoholic mulled wine to accompany the food and we look forward to seeing as many members as possible. As the food tables will take up most of the room there will be no plants for sale, however any plants on the display table will be most welcome and the 3-flower competition will take place as usual. Also please bring a raffle prize. Seasonal items, chocolate, wine as well as plant related items would be very acceptable.

Tricia will give a short talk on snowdrops and the winter garden beforehand.

ADVANCE NOTICE

Saturday 15th December 2018 .
Christmas Lunch
Trenython Manor, Tywardreath, PL24 2TS.
12.30 for 1.00pm.

Saturday 5th January 2018 . 10.30 am.
New Year Walk.
St Newlyn East.

Wednesday 6th February 2019 .
A.G.M.
and Sarah Chester from the RHS will talk on a "Taste of China".
7 for 7.30pm, Ladock Village Hall.

Christmas Festive Lunch.

Saturday 15th December, 12.30 for 13.00 hrs.
Trenython Manor, Tywardreath. PL24 2TS. (<https://www.trenython.co.uk/>)

If you would like to come and haven't yet booked a place you should contact the Vice Chair Phil Gadd (immediately), to see if there are any places available.

tel: 01726 817396

e-mail: phil@gaddabout.com

Please let me have any items that may be of interest to the members so that I can include them in the next newsletter. News items, visits, photographs and upcoming events especially welcome. Please let me know if I drop any clangers!

John Sirkett cornwallhps@gmail.com

Happy Christmas