



**CORNWALL GROUP
NEWSLETTER FOR
February 2017**

Christmas seems to be an age away. Once the bright lights and shiny things have been packed away life returns to normal. I had my first daffodils in flower in time for the last meeting, but at that time of the year they are too precious to pick for the three stems competition. By Christmas I had a decent clump in flower and was prepared to harvest a couple for the table. 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation' is a remarkable thing, raised in the UK but named by the Dutch it never lets me down, producing a promise of spring before the end of the year. In the days of Rosewarne Experimental Horticulture Station near Camborne a number of seedlings from it were raised to extend the range of varieties available to the cut flower growers. For the most part they have not made it to the gardener. 'Spring Dawn' is the exception, flowering in the middle of January. It has white trumpet flowers and a primrose corona. You will find it in all the garden centres at the end of summer and it increases well. Just the thing if daffodils in December strike the wrong note for you.

Hamamelis have also been wonderful this year. The long crumpled petals catch the low sunlight and their scent spreads through the garden. Without doubt the best of them is *H. mollis*, richly fragrant, the yellow flowers start to open around the shortest day, usually following a cold snap, and they should remain in good condition into February. The hybrid *H. x intermedia* is less strongly scented but it does come in a wider colour range. If you can place it in front of a background that will show off the colour then 'Diane' is the best of the reds. 'Pallida' has the palest of primrose flowers though it can be rather stiff and upright as a young thing. 'Orange Beauty' is my favourite, the warm chromium yellow flowers bursting from a ruby calyx catch every ray of sunshine and brighten the whole garden.

The keenest of you have no doubt already scabbled around on your knees looking for the first *Pulmonaria* shoots. Some of the older selections of *P. angustifolia* can flower in January in a protected position. The newer selections come in brighter shades of blue, but you might have to wait until March. February, however is the season of the snowdrop. You will all have noticed the snowdrop madness that grips gardeners at this time of the year. Many of you will have fallen prey to it and others will ask what all the fuss is about? Surely one snowdrop looks just like another? Well, I can't explain it. Every year I seem to sink deeper and deeper into the madness. Last year the autumn snowdrops started in October and the last of the season will attempt to survive into May. All I can offer is the idea that one ten pound note looks much like another. We still like to have a lot of them!



***Galanthus nivalis* on Bodmin Moor.**



***Galanthus nivalis* .**



***Galanthus nivalis* f. *pleniflorus*.**

The Common Snowdrop that we all associate with ancient woodlands is probably not a native. It may have come from Italy originally in the company of Roman soldiers though it probably didn't spread very widely until the middle ages when it followed Christianity as monasteries were established through the country. To this day some of the best carpets of snowdrops are to be seen in churchyards where they have had the centuries to spread without disturbance. If you want to grow a carpet of your own it is best to disturb them more regularly and spread them around. Without assistance they can be incredibly slow. Lift them every three years or so and break the clumps into hand sized clusters of bulbs before replanting. If you split them into smaller pieces they seem to take a lot longer to establish and really get going. The best time for this brutal intervention has always been a matter of debate. If you go back and study the 'Gardeners Chronicle' at the end of the 19th century you will find tempers flaring amid the heated exchange of opinion and experience. Suffice to say that they will survive being divided 'in-the-green', but be certain not to damage them needlessly or leave them out of the ground too long. They can be lifted as they die down, though it is my least favourite time, or the clumps can be marked and the bulbs lifted when dormant in August, which is the approach of most specialist growers today.

If you are buying *G. nivalis* then clumps are available in-the-green from flower farms during spring. They should be planted immediately without being messed about. Dry bulbs are also available from September in all the shops but they have often been dried in warm air to get the weight down and make them easier to store and pack. Snowdrops hate dessication and a proportion of dried bulbs will already be dead. Standing them in a saucer of water for 12 hours before you plant them gives them a chance to rehydrate and improves the success rate. Some of the specialist growers are now offering dormant bulbs in late summer, but they are lifting them, packing them in moist peat and sending them straight out, which is the most successful approach.

Double snowdrops are very widespread. They don't have the elegance of the single flower but they do make good clumps in the garden, the flowers are held open in poor weather and they last much longer. Purists will find that though they don't have such a firm place in the heart they certainly deserve a place in the garden.



Galanthus elwesii.



Galanthus woronowii.



Galanthus plicatus.

There are three other species that are commonly found in gardens.

Galanthus elwesii has broad blue-grey leaves and may have a second green mark at the top of the inner petals. They have been wild-collected in Turkey for at least a century in vast numbers for sale by bulb merchants though there are moves to cultivate them as a crop and end collection from the wild. The flowers are very variable and a large number of cultivars have been selected. Some of them are soundly perennial, others less so. They do not prosper in the shady conditions that are always suggested for *G. nivalis* and should be planted out in the open where the weak winter sun can get at them.

G. woronowii is equally variable in flower but it has broad, shiny green leaves. It is commonly seen in the garden centres at this time of the year as 'bedding'. The bulbs are wild collected in Georgia and the Caucasus and they became available in the political change that went with the break-up of the USSR. They are easy enough in the garden and will cover large areas with their bright leaves. Hopefully the tide of wild imports will be replaced with

cultivated crops before long.

G. plicatus is also variable in flower but the long wide leaves are folded back distinctively at the margin. Many plants were brought back from the Crimea by soldiers fighting the Crimean War. 'Warham' is probably the best known, flowering at the end of March but they are not all late. Some of the best snowdrops for flowering before Christmas are selections of *G. plicatus*. I find it the best species for creating carpets of snowdrops in light woodland conditions. It is vigorous and also spreads by seed.



***Galanthus* 'Atkinsii' at
Rosemoor.**



***Galanthus* 'Merlin'.**



***Galanthus* 'Ginn's
Imperati'.**

The first attack of snowdrop insanity ravaged the Victorians, who were so new to the wild excesses of gardening that they had no defences. Those with money and position would tour Italy to see the wonders of classical art and civilisation and they would note the large flowered snowdrops to be found around Rome and bring a few bulbs back. Nowadays we would get a t-shirt printed, "I've been to Rome and all I got was this lousy snowdrop". The Victorians started to select for the largest flowers they could get. The population around Rome started to be referred to as "*Galanthus Imperati*" and although there are probably many of them still to be found in gardens and churchyards up and down the country, 'Ginn's Imperati' is the only one that retains the name, though it is probably a more recent collection from the vicinity of Rome.

G. 'Atkinsii' came from James Atkins of Painswick in Gloucestershire. He obtained the bulb, probably during the 1860's, from a friend but beyond that he does not comment. Others have speculated that it came from Naples. It is a vigorous plant with distinctive triangular flowers on tall stems. The picture shows it growing at rosemoor, where it is the backbone of the snowdrop display throughout the garden, but especially in the Winter Garden. It is a little unstable, and over the years it has produced half a dozen or more new names, though they don't seem to remain distinctive for long. 'Lyn', 'Backhouse Spectacles' and 'Moccas' are all variations on 'Atkinsii' that the raisers thought were distinct.

James Allen was one of the first to select hybrid snowdrops from those seeding in his garden and some of his cultivars still survive. 'Merlin' (1891) is still the commonest of them with all-green inner segments and 'Magnet' was until recently the only cultivar selected for its long pedicel, the flower dangling and dancing in the slightest breeze ('Fly Fishing' has very recently superseded it).



***Galanthus nivalis*
'Sandersii'.**



***Galanthus* 'Dionysus'.**



***Galanthus nivalis*
'Poculiformis'.**

A fresh wave of enthusiasm for snowdrops peaked in the 1930's. Growers collected together and popularised the more obscure selections from Victorian days and in the process found many new cultivars and rationalised some of the naming. Yellow snowdrops had long been known as occasional sports in populations in Northamptonshire and were grown under such names as 'Flavescens' and 'Lutescens'. They were not very vigorous, but 'Sandersii' seems to have been the best of them and replaced other names. It is still available and under the right conditions it is very striking, with yellow replacing the usual green markings and the green ovary. It needs good light or the colour is a bit dull.

'Poculiformis' is another strange form, discovered in the wild. The inner tepals are almost as long as the outer, and sometimes lose the green mark that distinguishes them. At its best it is a very pretty thing and the same flower shape has been found repeatedly in wild populations. Today there are a number of clones with assorted names that behave like this, varying in their vigour and reliability.

The middle part of the 20th century also saw the start of deliberate hybridisation. H. A. Greatorex in Norfolk crossed *G. plicatus* with *G. nivalis pleniflorus* and raised a series of tall growing double flowered plants that he named after Shakespearean heroines. 'Dionysus' is one of the series, though the name is a little suspect. They are all very similar with three perfect outer tepals and a tidy rosette of inner tepals, quite unlike the untidy mix of spare parts found in the double *G. nivalis*.



***Galanthus* 'Walrus'.**



***Galanthus* 'Primrose Warburg'.**



***Galanthus* 'Duckie'.**

A third wave of enthusiasm for snowdrops struck in the 1950's and 60's. Margery Fish's involvement at East Lambrook Manor is well known, along with E. A. Bowles, Frederick Stern and most of the great gardeners of the time. Their diligent searches and documentation helped to ensure that cultivars named in the previous century were maintained and recorded. The current wave of Galanthomania (we have a name now) has been running for about 20 years. I like to think that it coincides with cappuccino-mania and represents an appreciation of the best things.

Hundreds, probably thousands of new cultivars have been named. Many follow the older themes, large flowers, strange shapes, extra tepals and the like. A few are uniquely 'ours'. 'Walrus' took double snowdrops in a monstrous direction, the narrow tepals have green tips and splay out wildly. A number of other selections have been made that are more extreme. 'Primrose Warburg' added to the range of yellow cultivars. She has nicely rounded flowers but would be difficult to distinguish from a single bloom, however in the garden she is vigorous and quite remarkable, showing up the frailty of earlier yellows. 'Duckie' from Alan Street at Avon bulbs has a good large flower but behaves rather oddly. The flattened outer segments flare outwards distinctively. Once again, there are more extreme manifestations available under other names.

Remarkable new varieties continue to appear. 'Godfrey Owen' was discovered by the late Margaret Owen and named after her husband. It has six outer tepals as well as six inners, all arranged with geometric precision. For all its peculiarity it looks just like an ordinary snowdrop in the garden until you suddenly notice the difference.

The latest enthusiasm is for virescent snowdrops, a vague term for those with as much green

as possible in the flower. 'Cowhouse Green' was one of the early examples, discovered by Mark Brown in Susan Cowdy's garden in Buckinghamshire. The outer segments have a green wash over them that varies a bit from year to year. If you are finding your wealth has become burdensome, then the current assortment of astonishing virescent cultivars could provide significant relief!

'Trym' has also founded a dynasty. It has outer segments that are slightly larger than the inner, but otherwise resemble them. It came from the garden of Mrs Jane Gibbs in Bristol. The strange markings on the tepals are inherited by its seedlings and a number have been named, some more distinctive than others.

We find ourselves in a golden (and double, giant, green marked and virescent) age of snowdrops. Like ten pound notes, they are all the same. If you wish to grow a collection of the former, be prepared to lose your collection of the latter, and ten pound notes are not the limit. A yellow marked form like 'Trym' has just been unveiled and you would watch a tidy stack of fifty's vanish if you wanted one.

Fortunately, despite the mania, snowdrop growers are kindly people. Eventually it will be spread around.



Galanthus 'Cowhouse Green'.



Galanthus 'Godfrey Owen'.



Galanthus 'Trym'.

LAST MEETING

Life in the Parks. by Richard Budge.

This month we welcomed Richard Budge, Parks Manager for Truro City Council. Richard comes from a farming background on Bodmin Moor and he still owns a few acres and looks fondly on farming - his work is entirely office based now. He started in horticulture as a twelve year old, cutting grass and doing other general tasks to raise some pocket money. He went on to the Duchy College at Rosewarne to study for a B-Tech National Diploma. Towards the end of the course he applied to Truro Parks Department for a job, in order to gain interview experience. To his surprise he was offered the job which was a little inconvenient as he was still studying. The Council were helpful in allowing him to work part time while he completed his course.

He worked as a gardener from 1996-1999 and then started in management, eventually becoming Parks Manager.



Truro City Council are responsible for allotments, cemeteries, parks and gardens, the town centre displays, summer entertainments, sports pitches and play equipment in four parks. Services are delivered by the Parks Manager, three Head Gardeners, a propagator, eight gardeners, three Park Attendants, a Skate Park Attendant and a Sexton.

Every year Truro enters South West in Bloom and the city is judged against towns of a similar population in the South West. The winner of the South West Group goes on to represent the region in the national finals. The Parks Department support a number of community events through the year that are held in the city's parks and open spaces. In addition Richard's job includes serving on a number of other committees.



Richard is particularly pleased to have the bandstand in Victoria Park, which is used every week between May and September. The Parks Department produce all of their own annual bedding, up to 360,000 bedding plants and in addition they buy in about 40,000 Wallflowers. This has been done in the nursery in Boscawen Park but they are now moving to the Nursery in Idless Valley. They have started growing plants for other Local Authorities as well. They are looking at longer term plantings of perennials and shrubs to reduce the costs, and an experiment with wildflower meadows this year was very well received. There are about 1400 hanging baskets put up every year around the city and they all have to be watered. This is done with a water bowser and would be a health and safety risk to the public so they are now watered every other day. Two workers are hired to do the job, and they operate from midnight until 8.00am to protect the public from trailing hoses and other risks.

Richard is keen to work with local schools on projects in the parks. He finds that amongst other benefits, it reduces vandalism.

When he started Richard had not expected the range of new skills he would need, from managing the toilets in the parks, keeping them open to meet the population's needs, to developing the Skate Park, now the third largest in the country.

Richard ended by showing us a short video presentation that showcased the diversity and quality of the work his department does.

(And I apologise for the dodgy reproduction of the pictures which is entirely my fault, the originals were lovely! J.)



The 'Three Stems' competition produced some splendid winter flowering plants. Every garden should have some of these old favourites. John Mann and Judy Watson both brought in *Iris unguicularis*, the large scented flowers are always a delight in the last days of the year. Peter Howard and Judy Watson brought in *Jasminum nudiflorum* which I remember vividly from my childhood, filling a wooden fence with drops of sunshine in the darkest days of winter and Sue Lake brought *Prunus subhirtella* 'Autumnalis', a wonderful small tree that will produce its delightful flowers from November through to March depending on the weather.



1st. Peter Howard
Jasminum nudiflorum
Mahonia x media
Narcissus 'Avalanche'

2nd. Sue Lake
Mahonia x media
Prunus subhirtella
 'Autumnalis'
Solanum laxum 'Album'

3rd. Judy Watson
Camellia (I think it's
 'Narumigata')
Iris unguicularis
Jasminum nudiflorum

Pam Dormand and Peter Watson both brought groups of *Camellia* flowers which served as a reminder that spring is on its way, and someone (sorry, I didn't get who) brought the most delightful snowdrop.



Pam Dormand.

Peter Watson.

***Galanthus* 'Faringdon
 Double'.**



***Fuchsia* from Sylvia
Henderson.**



Christmas arrangement.



Sylvia Henderson brought in a charming *Fuchsia* for identification. Perhaps someone can help. It is a lovely thing and looks to me like one of the newer interspecific hybrids and it would be nice if someone can put a name on it.

A Christmas arrangement served as an introduction to the social, and a lovely selection of food brought in by the members. I hope you all enjoyed it as much as I did.

The Christmas Lunch.



Tricia writes: Although the weather was dismal with mizzle and it was difficult to see the splendid beach view, those members who came to the Christmas lunch at The Cove in Maenporth had a really good time. The food was exceptionally delicious and I have never had such lovely crunchy roast potatoes in a restaurant before. It was also great to see out treasurer Jo Waterhouse looking well after her hip replacement. Thanks to Sue Lake and other committee members who organised this festive lunch with quiz and raffle.

The January Walk.



Conifer woodland.



The Bold Walkers (and their dogs)...



...on the trail.

It was good to see so many people on the January walk in Idless Woods. Everyone seemed to have survived Christmas and turned out looking fit and sprightly. Low cloud had kept temperatures up but fortunately it didn't rain, and the path through the wood had a good hard surface without much mud to be seen (although those who had dogs to clean off might not have felt the same). Idless Woods were originally managed as a forestry plantation by the Forestry Commission and were planted with a blanket cover of softwoods for timber production. In recent years the amenity and wildlife value of the woods has become more important and as the blocks of timber are removed, they are being replaced with native hardwoods in mixed plantings. Many of these are still quite young but in time it will develop into a large and complex native woodland. The mature conifer woodland still remains in many areas and it has a unique, if slightly sterile appearance.



Euphorbia amygdaloides



The Hawkins Arms.



He knows there was a delicious lunch on the table above him.

It was good to see *Euphorbia amygdaloides* growing in the woods. We often grow the purple leaved form of the Wood Spurge in our gardens. The green leaved form can be just as lovely and they both make good companions for spring bulbs if you can tolerate them wandering around a bit. It was growing with *Blechnum spicant*, the Hard Fern. It is another good garden plant though there are surprisingly few selected forms when you consider the number of *Dryopteris* and forms that have been named over the years.

After a couple of hours on our feet we returned to the cars. The trip to Zelah was made more complicated by the closure of the direct road, but it was easy enough to return to the A30 and follow it to the Hawkins Arms. The staff managed to cope with us descending on them admirably and the chef produced some very nice food. A meal in good company rounded the morning off splendidly.

Thanks to Sue for organising it all



OTHER EVENTS LAST MONTH

For a couple of months in winter around the solstice, gardens are dark but there have been some unexpected pleasures.



Miscanthus sinensis



an illuminated Cherry Tree



and *Acer griseum* glowing blue in the winter.



The Winter Garden ...



...in its changing colours...



...overlooked by an Octopus.

Winter Illuminations, Rosemoor. 26th November 2016.

Late in November I found myself in Devon late in the afternoon and decided to drop in and see the illuminations in the Winter Garden at Rosemoor.

Unfortunately most of the garden was roped off. I would have liked a chance to look around in the dark when gardens can be a wonderful mystery but I accept there are safety implications.

The paths were outlined with lanterns, leading to the Winter Garden. The illuminations slowly changed colour and revealed the different shapes of the trees with startling brightness. My favourite effect was caused by a dense patch of white fairy lights threaded through the Yew hedge. They were lighting a clump of *Miscanthus sinensis* to sensational effect. I would plant more *Miscanthus* just so that I could light them up like this in winter and make full use of the feathery flower heads before the New Year turns them to wind-blown straw.

Acer griseum always looks good when low sunshine catches the peeling bark. I'm not sure that it was as good when it was blue, but it was certainly impressive. Neon pink was fun as well and it wasn't an evening to dwell too long over good taste or the stoic dignity of an old tree. I hope the staff had as much fun putting the lights up, it added unexpected life to the Winter Garden. The most unexpected life was probably the glowing octopus watching over events. It didn't occupy me for long but I'm glad I went.



Heligan Lantern Trail. 5th December 2016.

Heligan opened a couple of times in December for an evening by lantern light. Choirs in the Cafe and in the garden kept the large crowds entertained and it was fun to see a familiar garden at night.



Eden. December 2016.

Mant thanks to Pam Dormand for sending in some pictures from the Eden light spectacular, which looks like it was a good event.

COMING EVENTS

If you know of events coming up that might be of interest to the members please let me know so that I can include them. cornwallhps@gmail.com

Hardy Plant Fair. Saturday 6th May 2017.

Note from Charlie.

Date for your diaries. I know it only seems 5 mins since we held the last one but organisation is well on for the next. I am looking for a volunteer who uses the new Waitrose east of Truro by the Park-and-Ride to:

- a) ask if we can put a banner up at their site the weekend before the sale and:
- b) if that's possible, do the putting up and taking down of the banner.

Failing that, do they have a notice board that a poster could be put on and would anyone be prepared to do that?

We need to do a lot better with publicity. Numerous people turned up on the Sunday last year and others missed it completely. It's down to you as I am never around on the run up so know I won't be able to do more than the two banners I currently do.

Cornwall Garden Society Lecture.

Tuesday 7th February, 7 for 7.30. Alverton Manor, Truro.

Stephen Griffith, curator of Abbotsbury, "Abbotsbury: Past, Present and Future".

Visitors welcome (£5 donation suggested).

See the website for details. cornwallgardensociety.org.uk

Cornwall Garden Society Lecture.

Wednesday 8th February, 2 for 2.30. Penventon Hotel, Redruth.

Stephen Griffith, curator of Abbotsbury, "Exotic Plants and Gardens of the Caribbean Island of St. Lucia".

Visitors welcome (£5 donation suggested).

See the website for details. cornwallgardensociety.org.uk

Higher Cherabeer garden, Dalton, Devon (near Rosemoor).

Friday 10th, Friday 17th and Sunday 26th February 2017, 2-5pm.

Garden open to see the snowdrops under the National Gardens Scheme.

See the website for details. www.ngs.org.uk

Shaftesbury Snowdrop Gala.

Saturday 11th February 2017.

Talks by Tom Mitchell, Alan Street and Lord Heseltine. Plant sales and garden visits. Part of a well organised week long event.

See the website for details. www.shaftesburysnowdrops.org

Margaret Stone, Worcestershire.

Sunday 12th February 2017. 11 - 4pm.

Margaret Stone is opening her garden for the snowdrops at the start of the HPS 60th Anniversary year.

Details in the HPS Newsletter, November 2016.

RHS Early Spring Fair.

Vincent Square, London. Tuesday 14th and Wednesday 15th February 2017.

See the website for details. www.rhs.org.uk

Cornwall Alpine Garden Society.

Wednesday 15 February 2017, 7.00 for 7.30pm.

Paul Navin from Millwood Plants is coming to talk on "India vs. West Country", it should be a very interesting evening . Visitors welcome (£1 on the door).

**St.Marks Church Hall, Sticker (beside the main car park).
(millwoodplants.com)**

Bosvigo, Truro.

Saturday 18th February 2017, 10 - 4pm.

Hellebore Day in aid of Shelter Box. Lovely food, raffle and of course lots of Hellebores for sale (don't be late or the best will have gone!).

See the website for details. www.bosvigo.com

Daffodil Festival. Mawgan-in-Meneage, The Lizard.

Friday 17th to Monday 20th February 2017.

An excellent event centred around the church, celebrating the early daffodils.

East Lambrook Manor, NGS Open Day.

Garden open for the snowdrops, hellebores and spring flowers. Sunday 19th February 2017.

See the website for details. www.eastlambrook.com

Hardy Plant Society Early Spring Plant Fair.

East Lambrook Manor, Saturday 25th March 2017.

See the website for details. www.eastlambrook.com

Gardens Illustrated Festival 2017.

Westonbirt School, Tetbury, Glos. Saturday 25th and Sunday 26 March 2017.

Many good speakers, book early.

See the website for details. www.gardensfestival.com

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.
All other content gratefully received.
cornwallhps@gmail.com

NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will start with the AGM, a chance to review the past year and look forward to the year to come. Followed by: **Peter Savage** who will talk "**All About Hostas**".

Wednesday 1st February. 7.00 for 7.30pm.

Ladock Village Hall.

If anyone would like to be on the committee please let the Chair, Tricia Howard know before the February meeting. We always welcome new committee members to keep the society fresh with new ideas and input. We only have two meetings a year.

See attached documents for the AGM - please bring them to the meeting.

Membership Renewal.

Memberships are due for renewal at the AGM. I included a form with the last Newsletter and it would be delightful to join with you for another year!

Although this may be a bit late,

Happy New Year everyone.

ADVANCE NOTICE

Wednesday 1st March 2017. 7.00 for 7.30pm.

A visit from Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers talking about "Garden Worthy Ferns".

Bob is a fascinating and engaging speaker and I am sure he will bring some very interesting plants with him.

Guests and visitors are always welcome at the meetings (£3 on the night) and this should be a very special meeting. It would be nice to have a packed hall so feel free to bring a friend.

Wednesday 5th April 2017. 7.00 for 7.30pm.

Talk by Roger Turner from Gloucester, "Lust and Loveliness in the Garden".

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, upcoming events and photographs especially welcome.

cornwallhps@gmail.com

Please let me know if I drop any clangers!

John Sirkett