

Plant Heritage

National Council for the Conservation of Plants & Gardens



SUFFOLK GROUP JOURNAL

Spring 2013



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*Cover photo: National Collection of Lavendula at Downderry Nursery
taken by Collection Holder Simon Charlesworth, speaker at the Suffolk
Group meeting on 23 February*

Cover design by Sally Geeve, www.sallygeeve.com

Layout courtesy Nicola Hobbs

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

MAGGIE THORPE

Suffolk Plant Heritage's 2012 Annual General Meeting was held in Benedicta Chamberlain's beautiful converted barn at Otley in November.

The National Plant Heritage Annual General Meeting 2013 will be held from 26-28 April in Hampshire, full details are in the Plant Heritage Journal. If you are interested in attending, please let us know and join some of the committee who hope to attend. It will be a great opportunity to visit Sparsholt College, Longstock Park and the Sir Harold Hillier Garden.

You will be aware that there has been a slight increase in subscription rates, the result of which will mean £10,900 more income at national level which will help towards their annual deficit in running costs.

Brother UK the printing company are offering Bursaries for Collection Holders again in 2013 for the fifth year and this time they have increased their support to £2,000.

I am happy to report that we have been able to send £10,000 to our National Office again this year, money we have raised at our Plant Fairs and by selling plants totalling £4000 throughout the year. All plants were raised by you wonderful members.

A huge thank you to the team of propagators led by Anne Tweddle who have carried on the twinscaling of rare bulbs. Anne is currently researching the possibility of micropropagating rare Dyke Medal winning irises from the 1950s and 1960s, £500 for which has been anonymously donated for this particular project. Those of you who were willing to take on looking after stock plants and giving back propagated plants deserve a big thank you too. This system works really well – please come forward to join the team. We held three very successful propagation technique events led by Ivan Dickings when members brought plants and donated the new ones for Anne to grow on. All this work is central to the remit of our Plant Heritage charity, conserving garden plants in danger of extinction. One very interesting fact is that 46% of plants listed as endangered are in the hands of Collection Holders.

Thank you to Widget Finn, editor of our Suffolk Journal, a truly professional and excellent magazine which members tell me they love receiving and who use it as their bible of events and interesting information

about plants. Do send in articles and photographs to Widget. She also likes to have details of members' gardens open days. Thanks to Ann Somerville for all the advertisements she has managed to procure which help to cover the cost of printing the journal.

Plant Fairs at Helmingham are evolving in many different ways of which members may not be aware. This year Helmingham Estate has taken over more of the organisation and work involved on the day including the gate, the car parking and the laying out of pitches for which they now take 75% of the profit. This has meant less work for us but of course less income too. Even at only 25% we have received over £5,000 from the two Fairs this year. Helmingham hopes to grow the event to a much bigger affair but have guaranteed a presence for Plant Heritage.

There are however mixed feelings amongst committee members about this intended growth as in the past we have kept it strictly to specialist nurseries. However, it is felt that we should keep a presence there making sure Plant Heritage is in the public eye and particularly Collection Holders who exhibit there free. Then we should be looking to take part in other different events where we might sell our plants, particularly those which we have brought back from the brink of extinction. 44% of our plants are sold outside our Plant Fairs.

We also need to thank Sarah Cook and Jim Marshall who are brilliant at finding rare plants which they hand over to Anne and the team for propagating. Study Days have been very successful and although not money raisers, we consider them to be a very important part of Plant Heritage work as a means of education on specific types of plants.

Widget Finn has masterminded the Helmingham Plant Fairs for many years, co-ordinating everything with Helmingham, and Ann Somerville has been hugely successful in obtaining publicity in national and local media. Thank you both for such a wonderful result. They both intend to retire at the end of 2013.

Thanks to Annabel Thorogood for managing our website – if you feel you have anything to add, please let Annabel have it, particularly interesting photographs you have taken during the year at any of our events or study days.

Pauline Byford is retiring as our Membership Secretary. She has held this post for longer than I can remember. She is so well known to members who will miss her cheerful disposition. Thank you Pauline. We are delighted to welcome Hilary Drain who is taking over from Pauline.

Idrone Brittain is also retiring from Committee duties and we thank her too for all her help, especially the distribution of the free plants. We're pleased

to welcome Patrick Palmer who was co-opted to the committee earlier in the year.

Events are now being handled by Sue Hamilton-Blyth who has already put together the speakers for 2013. Welcome to Sue who has made a wonderful start as well you know from the list in the Journal. Sue does not want to serve on the committee but would be happy to hear from anyone if they have heard or know of particularly good speakers or gardens to visit.

Our present treasurer, Lynn Cornforth, is retiring and we thank her for all she has done for us over the last three years. I am delighted to report that Justine Corney is returning to be our treasurer again and we welcome her knowing that our finances will be in such safe hands.

As most of you know, I am retiring having completed ten years as Chairman and am handing over to Susan Burton and Jim Marshall as joint vice-chairmen.

LETTER TO MAGGIE THORPE, CHAIRMAN, SUFFOLK GROUP

10th October 2012

Dear Margaret

I have just been told that the Suffolk Group have donated £10,000 to Plant Heritage funds this year. Needless to say I am delighted by this very generous donation. It will be a huge help to our cause and I hope others will follow your lead.

I wanted to write not only to thank you and the Suffolk Group for this but also to thank you on a personal basis for all you have done for Plant Heritage. I know in your time as chair of Suffolk Plant Heritage the group has gone from strength to strength and has always been most generous in the funds that have been generated for the organisation. I hope your legacy will be the continuation of the good work in Suffolk and I know you will continue to keep a close involvement.

Many thanks again and do pass on these thanks to all involved.

MIKE ALDER, CHAIRMAN, PLANT HERITAGE

A TRIBUTE TO MAGGIE

THIS IS THE FAREWELL TRIBUTE TO MAGGIE THORPE MADE BY SUE BURTON AT THE AGM IN NOVEMBER

Maggie Thorpe has been chairman of the Suffolk Plant Heritage Group for ten years. It's difficult to sum up all her amazing achievements because they are so many and so varied. Maggie first joined Plant Heritage after a *Galanthophile* outing to Anglesey Abbey that included both Jenny Robinson and Anne Tweddle. So began an association that led her quickly on to the committee and thence to be chairman. The Group could hardly have had a more brilliant person at the helm. We are inevitably a disparate group, we all have opinions, the committee consists of strong-minded people. It has been Maggie's skill to make the most of this, steering us forward with enthusiasm, diplomacy and sensitivity.

Her knowledge and experience as a plantswoman and gardener is legendary. She has, along with Widget Finn, overseen our Plant Fairs which have transformed our financial situation and raised such a fantastic amount of money for Plant Heritage. Alongside the Fairs, she and Anne Tweddle have also raised a considerable amount of money from their propagation efforts which have led to year-round plant sales. Maggie gives numerous talks to other societies, continually raising our profile. Under her leadership Suffolk Plant Heritage has truly become "top group".

What comes shining through when I talk to members about Maggie is their appreciation of how welcome she makes us all feel when we join the Group. Her warmth, her friendliness, her compassion, are qualities that are mentioned again and again. Here are some quotes:

"A day in her company is a very happy one"

"She never forgets that everyone is a volunteer"

"A very thoughtful and conscientious People Person, welcoming to all members"

"Warm and welcoming and a great inspiration"

Maggie, all this is so true. I would add that we are going to miss you and are extremely relieved that you will be at the end of the telephone when we need some experienced guidance, and that we will do our very best to see that the Group continues to travel forward, always mindful of its purpose to support the essential work of preserving and propagating plants.

THE NEW VICE CHAIRMEN'S ROLES

The Suffolk Plant Heritage Group agreed at the AGM in November that until a new chairman is appointed to replace Maggie Thorpe, who is retiring, the role will be split between two vice-chairmen.

Sue Burton who has been Maggie Thorpe's deputy for four years will continue with the traditional roles as vice-chairman and in addition will now also take over the role of overseeing the talks at Stowupland and the various visits we make throughout the year.

Jim Marshall will chair all the committee meetings and will act as the main contact with Plant Heritage National Office.

LETTER TO PLANT HERITAGE MEMBERS FROM SUE BURTON AND JIM MARSHALL

We will work closely together and concentrate on finding a permanent chairman for the Suffolk Group. We will, in addition, be focussing on the fund-raising needed to support National Plant Heritage, while at the same time encouraging the important work of propagation and conservation. We have two hard-working committees (main and plant fair) and further support from members with, for example, our programme of events and managing the distribution of leaflets for the plant fairs. We hope others will come forward to join us in this rewarding work and look forward to meeting as many of you as possible during our temporary tenure.



Jim Marshall, Maggie Thorpe
and Sue Burton.

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PLANT COLLECTIONS CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

DOROTHY CARTWRIGHT

It has been a busy year for Suffolk National Collection Holders with Open Days, Shows, Plant Fairs, Study Days and TV appearances. Anthony Pigott – *Equisetum* Collection Holder - provided a very interesting Fern Study Day for the Suffolk Group.

The Annual Collection Holders' meeting was held at Langham Hall Walled Garden thanks to Sue Wooster's kind invitation. Mercy Morris came from National Office and gave information about the International Convention on Biological Diversity and the role of Plant Heritage. Mercy talked about the Plant Conservation Committee Working Group together with Jim Marshall (*Dianthus* Malmaison Collection Holder) who is a member of this group. Collection Holders shared their experiences over the past year and discussed solutions to problems. It was a very interesting meeting and we enjoyed looking around the Walled Garden and seeing Sue Wooster's *Campanula* Collection.

Once again at the Autumn Plant Fair Collection Holders provided interesting plants from their collections for visitors to view, including *Hosta* from the Miltons and *Campanula* from Sue Wooster. Lots of people showed an interest in the Collections in Suffolk and took away information about them.

This year I have been asked by three people about possible National Collections of *Thalictrum*, *Achillea* and *Santolina*. They are working on building up their collections to the required number of 75% of the plants named in the current RHS Plant Finder Book. This can be difficult as rare plants are often 'out of stock' at nurseries when enquiries are made. If you have any unusual *Thalictrum*, *Achillea* or *Santolina* plants do contact me and, if they are ones which the collectors need, perhaps we can arrange for some propagation to be done.

I hope you all saw Rupert Eley in the autumn on BBC 'Gardeners World' showing Rachel de Thame his *Euonymus* Collection which was looking very attractive.

National Plant Collections Review 2015

Plant Heritage (NCCPG) has been going now for 35 years and over this period the requirements for new National Plant Collections have changed. Plant Heritage considers it important to ensure that all National Collections are of a similar standard and so they will all be reviewed in 2015. As a

first step, Collection Holders were asked to submit an up-to-date list of the plants in their collection to their Co-ordinator. We were asked to check the lists to see if they have the required 75% of the plants in their named collection (usually using the RHS Plant Finder Book.)

If the required 75% is not reached discussions are held with National Office to see what changes can be made. This work was started in 2012 to give Collection Holders time to make changes, if necessary. I have checked Suffolk Collections Holders' lists - and the majority have had no problem reaching the required 75%. So things are looking good for our Collection Holders.

A list of Suffolk Collection Holders is included on page 38.

PLANT HERITAGE SUFFOLK GROUP EVENTS 2013

JANUARY

Saturday 26 Talk 'Bulbs: Home and Abroad' by Richard Hobbs of
Witton Lane Seeds.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

FEBRUARY

Saturday 23 Talk 'Lavandulas' by Simon Charlesworth, National
Collection Holder, of Downton Nursery.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

MARCH

Saturday 23 Talk 'Malmaison Carnations: a favourite in Edwardian
times' by Jim Marshall, National Collection Holder.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

APRIL

Saturday 27 'Members' Favourites' PH members talk about their
favourite plants, from abutilons to *Fuschia* 'Lady Bacon'.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

MAY

Sunday 26 PLANT HERITAGE SPRING PLANT FAIR,
10.30am – 4.00pm, Helmingham Hall, IP14 6EF
Members please volunteer to help by contacting Hilary
Drain, 01206 263223 (evenings only),
hilary_drain@hotmail.com

JUNE

Tuesday 4 Member's Garden Visit: Sue Hamilton Blyth's garden at
22 Shilling Street, Lavenham, CO10 9RH. 6.30pm.
£5 per person including light refreshments.
Booking necessary: suchamb@googlemail.com or
01787 247613

SEPTEMBER

Saturday 7 Talk 'From Diaz to Diamonds – the Floral Kingdom of
Southern Africa' by Timothy Walker, Director of Oxford
University Botanical Garden.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

Sunday 15 PLANT HERITAGE AUTUMN PLANT FAIR,
10.30am – 4.00pm, Helmingham Hall, IP14 6EF
Members please volunteer to help by contacting Hilary
Drain, 01206 263223 (evenings only),
hilary_drain@hotmail.com

OCTOBER

Saturday 19 Talk 'Winter Gardening: A Special Beauty' by Richard
Todd, head gardener at Anglesey Abbey.
2.30pm. Stowupland Village Hall IP14 4AL *

NOVEMBER

Wednesday 27 Study Day: Roses by Sarah Cook .
10-3.30pm. Hullwood Barn, Shelley, Ipswich IP7 5RE
£10 including lunch. Booking essential.
Contact: sarah@malmaisons.plus.com 01473 822400

Lectures marked are free to members, with £4 entrance for non-members*

MEMBERS' FAVOURITES

SUE HAMILTON-BLYTH

On Saturday 27 April our Stowupland Village Hall event will be 'Members' Favourites.' Several members will be talking about their particular choice of plant, illustrated with photographs taken at (we hope!) the optimum season, depending on the plant.

Rather than something from her own garden, Anne Tweddle has chosen to talk about the planned Plant Heritage iris project, showing us photographs of the cultivars she and Sarah Cook will be propagating and telling us about the breeders.

Patrick Palmer will talk about his abutilon trees, which have travelled from garden to garden with him and which some of us will have seen when his garden was open.

Anne Worledge has chosen a favourite rose; Linda Draper's choice is *Fuschia* 'Lady Bacon' which was the free plant at the Helmingham Plant Fair a few years ago; Jo Pugh will be talking about *Trachelospermum jasminoides*; Rosie Osborne has chosen a Japanese acer as it looks through all four seasons; Widget Finn will talk about the favourite people in her garden; and my own 'favourite' is foxgloves.

The talks by members was Maggie Thorpe's idea and we hope that it will become an annual event. So please come and hear about the current crop of favourites and give some thought as to what you yourself might be able to talk about – I will be hoping to book you for next time!

SUFFOLK PLANT HERITAGE IRIS PROJECT

The Iris Project, briefly outlined in the last newsletter, continues to evolve. However the theme of reintroducing medal-winning iris cultivars remains at the heart of the project. The breeders we are looking at are all British and all won medals with their introductions.

Anne Tweddle will be talking about the Iris Project in the 'Members Favourites' event at Stowupland Hall on Saturday 27th April. We are currently in the collecting material phase. Any members interested in being more closely involved, please get in touch with Anne Tweddle 01473 737337 anne@tweddle1.co.uk

HELMINGHAM PLANT FAIR: SUNDAY 26 MAY

WIDGET FINN

Planning and preparation for the next spring plant fair at Helmingham Hall begins almost as soon as the previous autumn fair is over. The free plant needs checking on – is it organised, ordered, what arrangements are there for growing it on, potting it up and delivering to the site on the day? Which new nurseries should be invited, what new attractions will there be, how can we provide an interesting day out for visitors?

Then there are the leaflets to be designed, the press releases written and sent out to those national publications who set a deadline five months before they hit the news stands. And all this before Christmas!

From the beginning of the new year the plant fair committee's activity increases with regular meetings to check on progress, report on which exhibitors have taken advantage of the 'book early' offer, discussions on the layout of the ever-enlarging site, plans for 'added attractions' like the mini-workshops, enrolling holders to exhibit their Plant Collections and putting the second round of publicity is put into action. Meanwhile many thousands of leaflets are distributed to garden groups, parishes and local organisations, events organisers, shops and public places wherever we can spot a leaflet- or poster-sized gap. Most importantly, throughout all this activity you our members are sowing, growing and nurturing plants which will make the Plant Heritage stand a major attraction at the plant fair.

By the time The Day actually arrives, we like to feel that the only detail which we haven't organised or planned is – the weather. And that, unfortunately, is out of our hands!

So what is in store for the 2013 spring plant fair? We have a free plant – or rather 800 of them – which has special links for the Suffolk Group. As you'll read elsewhere in the Journal it's *Penstemon* 'Connie's Pink', named after our recently-retired president Ivan Dickings' mother, and has an RHS AGM (Award of Garden Merit). The free plants will be given out at the Plant Heritage tent, so get there early to be sure of yours. The Plant Doctors, as usual, will be available to give their diagnosis – and hopefully, cure – for your plant health problems; as always there will be a magnificent choice of unusual and familiar plants on the Plant Heritage stand, and of course elsewhere as well. Some of our local National Collections will be on display, and we're planning a series of free mini-workshops and demonstrations on a range of gardening topics. There will

be music and dancing – you can even learn to jive – good local food and lots of stalls selling garden accessories.

Bring along your friends and family – and if you can spare an hour to help you'll get free entry. Contact Hilary Drain 01206 263223 (evenings only) or hilary_drain@hotmail.com We look forward to seeing you there!

MEMBERS' GARDENS OPEN

Gable House, Halesworth Road, Redisham, Beccles NR34 8NE

John & Brenda Foster

Sunday 17 February 11am-4pm Snowdrop Day for The National Gardens Scheme. Soup lunches and home made teas. Plants for sale.

A vast collection of snowdrops, aconites, cyclamen and early spring bulbs. Group visits welcome by appointment. 01502 575298

The Place for Plants, East Bergholt Place, Suffolk CO7 6UP

Twenty acre garden and arboretum described as a 'Cornish garden in Suffolk' and renowned for its collection of camellias and magnolias and many rare and unusual trees and shrubs many seldom seen in East Anglia. Best visited in the spring as the garden gently slopes towards ornamental ponds. A specialist plant centre has been established in the Victorian walled garden.

Open 1st March to 30 September – closed Easter Sunday

Admission £6, children free (open to RHS members under the free access scheme except Sundays, please refer to RHS member manual). Various charity openings. Queries 01206 299224 www.placeforplants.co.uk

The Laburnums, St. James, South Elmham IP19 0HN. Jane Bastow

An acre of extensively planted garden, including three ponds and two glasshouses. Stalls including a large plant stall and all day BBQ. Teas. Brass band concert in the afternoon.

Saturday 11 May from 10am - 5pm. Entrance £2. Children 50p in aid of air ambulance. Queries 01986 782413.

Barton Grange, Water Lane Worlingworth IP13 7PE Nick Cook

Stunning four acre wildflower meadow and gardens

Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th June open 10am - 5pm

Adults £2.50 children free in aid of Suffolk Wildlife Trust and local church restoration fund. www.wildflowermeadow.org

Smallwood Farmhouse, near Bradfield St. George, Bury St. Edmunds
IP30 OAJ Tim and Widget Finn

A three-acre garden combining traditional, contemporary and quirky styles. English cottage garden planting contrasts with a modern gravel garden and ancient meadow.

Sunday 16 June 11 am – 5pm in aid of the National Gardens Scheme.

Group opening with Smallwood House. Joint entry £4.50

Sunday 23 June 11am-5pm in aid of the British Red Cross. Entry £4

Queries: widget.finn@gmail.com 01449 736358

The Gardeners' Friday scheme offers a route through West Suffolk countryside to carefully selected gardens from early April until the end of September. The gardens taking part are:

The Lucy Redman Garden and B&B, Rushbrooke IP30 0ER.

Thatched cottage with ¾ acre quirky plantsman's maximalist family garden full of unusual plants, and includes a 20m Celtic Knot sculpture planted with 200 Sempervivums and Camassia, and willow tunnel.

Open 10am-5pm Fridays*. Queries 01284 386250. Entrance £2.50

The Walled Garden, Langham Hall IP31 3EE

Three and a half acre Georgian walled garden. Also home to Langham Herbs and Sue Wooster's Bellflower Nursery and her National Collection of Alpine Campanulas

Open 10am-5pm Fridays. Queries 07879 644958. Entrance £2.50

Wyken Hall, Stanton IP31 2DW

Four acre garden created by Kenneth and Carla Carlisle around an old manor house. The series of garden rooms include herb and knot gardens, old fashioned rose garden, maze and kitchen garden, wildflower meadow and seven acre vineyard.

Open 2-5pm Fridays*. Queries 01359 250287. Entrance £4 (£3.50 con)

The Fullers Mill Garden, West Stow IP28 6HD

Seven acre garden on the banks of the River Lark, created by Bernard Tickner over the past 50 years, combining light dappled woodland and a plantsman's paradise of rare and unusual shrubs, perennials, lilies and marginal plants.

Open 2-5pm on Fridays*. Queries 0870 803 0248. Entrance £4

* *Contact direct for details of opening on other days.*

The national directory of Open Gardens, launched two years ago by garden volunteers, has grown to include over 600 town and village open garden events. See WWW.opengardens.co.uk

HAPPY 35TH BIRTHDAY PLANT HERITAGE

With the National Collections at the heart of the charity, National Office has arranged to celebrate Plant Heritage's thirty-fifth birthday by holding 35 National Collection Open Days throughout the year. It will be a wonderful way to raise awareness of Plant Heritage, raise funds and encourage members to make more use of their local collections.

In Suffolk the National Collections participating and hoping for your support, are:

* Saturday 1 June *Iris* (Sir Cedric Morris) Sarah Cook, Hullwood Barn, IP7 5RE

* Friday 28 June *Dianthus* (Malmaison) Jim Marshall, Hullwood Barn, IP7 5RE

* Sunday 30 June *Campanula* (Alpine) Sue Wooster, Langham Hall Walled Garden IP31 3EE

Why not make it an excuse to visit a few collections further afield? The first opening is Saturday 24 March, *Saxifraga* at Waterperry Gardens near Oxford (OX33 1JZ). Next, and much nearer, is the marvellous *Hyacinthus* collection of Alan Shipp on Monday 1 April, (9 Rosemary Road, Waterbeach, Cambs CB25 2NB) which is a good opportunity to choose hyacinths for your 2014 pots. All the best cultivars are in the collection and also many beautiful unusual ones.

There are also three collections in Kent. Sue Martin (who came speak to us about her Geums) is opening on Sunday 19 May. The *Eucalyptus* Collection at Lullingstone Castle is on view on Sunday 23 June. The *Lavendula* Collection at Downton Nursery is open on Saturday 29 June with a guided tour at 3pm, which is an opportunity not to be missed, especially as the Collection Holder Simon Charlesworth is coming to talk to our group on Saturday 23 February.

There are lots more Collection Open Days all over Britain to visit on your holidays! For more information look on the Plant Heritage website: www.plantheritage.com. Full addresses and postcodes are in your National Plant Collections Directory.

Deadline for your articles, photos, ideas for the Autumn 2013 Journal is 15 July. Send them to widget.finn@gmail.com or ring 01449 736358

PLANT HERITAGE COUNCIL MEETING REPORT

ANNE TWEDDLE

The third Council meeting of 2012 was held in London in November. Sue Biggs, director general of the of RHS, gave a presentation on her vision of the future. (My report is printed on the next page). Finance, Membership and the Threatened Plant Project were just three of the subjects discussed.

Finance

The 2012 deficit is expected to rise to around £50,000. Group donations are down, there have been no legacies and grant-making trust donations are down too. Groups have given £35,000 in 2012, of which just under half came from two groups (Suffolk £10,000, North West £6,000). Suffolk have been far and away the largest donor to date, giving £38,000+ from 2006-2012.

Michael Alder confirmed that expenses are well controlled coming in slightly under budget, making the deficit a product of reduced income. The 2013 Appeal hopes to raise £500,000 and this will go into reserves to help with future deficits.

Threatened Plant project

The National Office website has a number of pages about this project, and anyone interested should read them. 305 genera are now listed. Expert assessment is under way.

Membership

The National membership stands at just under 4,000. Analysis has established that when members are recruited locally they are more likely to stay as members.

- * 25% of membership is held by three groups, Devon, Suffolk & Hants.
- * Ten groups make up more than 50% of membership.
- * 14 groups have 100 or more members.
- * Suffolk are in 2nd place with 258 members, Devon 1st with 546.
- * Suffolk membership fell in 2012 by 6%.
- * Suffolk fell from 1st place in number of new members recruited in 2011 to 8th place in 2012. We had 19 new recruits.
- * The Suffolk target for 2013 is 274.

SUE BIGGS PRESENTATION

Sue Biggs, Director General of the Royal Horticultural Society, came to the November Plant Heritage Council meeting in London. She spoke to us for about an hour, largely about future plans for the RHS. She made it very clear from the beginning that Plant Heritage and the RHS are complementary organisations, and both have positive futures.

The RHS is a hundred times the size of Plant Heritage, with PH membership round 4,000 the RHS membership is expected to pass the 400,000 mark by the end of 2012. Her vision for the RHS is based on a £27 million spend over the next 5-7 years. The money will come from £18 million from the sale of the Westminster Halls and £9 million from an appeal to be launched in 2013. Some of the projects are

- * Major upgrade of the website
- * Lindley Library - expansion of facilities
- * Hyde Hall - development of a 60 acre perennial meadow
- * Wisley infrastructure improvement
- * regional group
- * a new urban garden

Core funding will be used to develop holidays and bursaries. The bursary budget is to be doubled from 2013 and expanded to cover three areas: overseas expeditions (used currently mostly by Kew), cultivated plant projects and training

Sue Biggs was accomplished, competent and enthusiastic. Everyone appeared pleased with what she said and how she said it. It is undoubtedly a big task to achieve the appeal, and launch all the projects successfully.

THE THREATENED PLANT PROJECT

ANNE TWEDDLE

Plant Heritage's Threatened Plants Project (TPP) aims to:

- * identify all known cultivars in British and Irish horticulture, with

volunteer help, starting with Plant Finder data since 1987 and calculate which have become rare and threatened today

- * search living collections' plant records for threatened cultivars to find those still alive and well

- * ask experts, including Collection Holders, to assess Plant Heritage Value for each, using a new checklist to document garden, historical and economic merits

- * develop conservation plans with partner organisations for the most worthy cultivars

and, not least:

- * contribute to fulfilling the UK's obligation under the Aichi Biodiversity Target 13 for conserving plant diversity of cultural and socio-economic value.

The project has to date listed over 300 genus and all their cultivars. Of these several have been through the 'expert' stage and on to 'develop conservation plans'.

The 2012 National Plant Exchange delivered us several plants which had been deemed as 'endangered in cultivation'. This is a definition which has arisen from the TPP. We have already propagated some of these, and the remainder will be propagated in spring 2013. All these plants will be available for sale at our events and plant sales.

The sale of these cultivars will give you an opportunity to take part in conserving these endangered plants. Remember all these cultivars have been examined by an expert in the genus and are deemed to be of garden, historical or economic merit.

PLANT HERITAGE NEWS

**FOR AN UPDATE ON WHAT'S HAPPENING AT
NATIONAL OFFICE VISIT THE CURRENT ISSUE OF
NEWSLINES ON THE WEBSITE
WWW.PLANTHERITAGE.COM**

**TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE SUFFOLK
GROUP'S ACTIVITIES VISIT
WWW.SUFFOLKPLANTHERITAGE.COM**



Above: *Campanula patula*, part of Sue Wooster's National Collection (page 31).

Below: Lavenham, South Africa, visited by Sue Hamilton Blyth (page 22)



Above: Downderry Nursery, National Collection Holder for *Lavendula*;
Right: *Lavendula* 'Richard Gray',
Far right: *Lavendula* 'Night of Passion'.
Photos Simon Charlesworth. Article page 26





FruitID variety page featuring St Edmund's Russet (page 35).

Below left: *Penstemon* 'Connie's Pink' (page 28);

Below centre and right: *Abutilon vitifolium*, photos courtesy Tanya Hamilton. Article page 29.

FROM LAVENHAM SUFFOLK TO LAVENHAM SOUTH AFRICA

SUE HAMILTON BLYTH

When planning a recent holiday in the Western Cape of South Africa, I anticipated days of long walks through various nature reserves enjoying the late spring flowers of the indigenous Fynbos vegetation. Much as I love gardens and gardening, there is nothing quite like seeing something growing in its natural environment, especially if – as is often the case in South Africa – it does not grow anywhere else. I particularly enjoy the process of searching for the best places to go to see what is at its best at any given time and arranged short trips to different wilderness areas.

As well as this, a high priority was a day at the wonderful Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens – which must surely rank as one of the most fabulously situated botanical gardens in the world, on the slopes of the Table Mountain range. And just for fun at the planning stage of our trip I decided also to google ‘gardens open near Cape Town October/November’.

To my delight I found that the last two days of our trip coincided with an annual Open Gardens weekend in an area just north-east of Cape Town called Elgin. And to my amazement I saw that one of the gardens that would be opening was called Lavenham. This I could not miss!

We spent the last two nights of our holiday in a b&b in the Elgin area, itself with a garden open for the weekend, and first thing on the Saturday morning we arrived at the beautiful house and garden named Lavenham and sought out the owners, Norma Bridgman and artist Bert Touwen.

Norma told us that the then owners of a local apple farm had built the house in 1947. They had been travelling in England the year before, and when they returned to South Africa they decided they wanted to live in an English-style cottage and to name it after their favourite English village, Lavenham. The house they built is a chocolate-box thatched cottage, not at all in the style of houses in Lavenham, but one can surely understand why they didn’t attempt to construct a higgledy-piggledy timber frame house!

There have been several owners since then, several of whom, including Norma and Bert, have made a point of coming to Lavenham Suffolk when on visits to England. So they were as delighted as we were that in turn we had visited them.

As with many properties in the hilly Elgin area, Lavenham has wonderful views over the surrounding landscape. Local vineyards abound, as do fruit

farms, framed by the Overberg mountain range and the neighbouring Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve.

Lavenham's garden wraps around the house on different levels, with winding lawns, mature trees and a variety of plantings in herbaceous borders, secret 'rooms', a rockery alongside a stream, and an orchard where Bert Touwen has his art studio.

Everywhere you look there is colour. And the striking thing to a visitor from England is the combination of plants all in flower at the same time. The last of the hellebores and camellias still looking good, huge waist-high clumps of *Geranium madarensis*, irises and asphodelines, fuschias, foxgloves, gazanias, hydrangeas, rhododendrons and azaleas, ornamental prunus, nicotiana, *Lychnis coronaria*, eschscholzia, proteas and leucadendrons, giant *Echium* in a variety of colours (mostly *wildpretii*). Texture is given by aloes and yuccas, restios and grasses, tree ferns. All this in an environment that abounds in oak trees, eucalypts, towering pine trees, Japanese maples.

Oh, and roses. Amazing roses. In every garden we visited the roses were at their peak of perfection and Lavenham was no exception. Shrub, climbing and rambling roses, species roses and miniature roses. I have never seen so many, and I will always remember their scent wafting around us in the gorgeous sunshine.

One could never garden in quite the same way here, for lots of reasons. The climate is the most obvious one, with practically never a frost and extremely hot dry summers. There are never any restrictions on watering and every garden we saw had numerous standpipes and hoses. Space is abundant and labour is cheap!

And one of the key features of the Western Cape in particular is that everywhere you go there are very small pockets of microclimate and terroir. These lend themselves not only to the most varied indigenous floral kingdom in the world but to gardening with extraordinary combinations of plants (as well, of course, to a delicious variety of wines!).

We had a feast of flora on our trip. The wild flowers and plants are what really touch my heart most deeply. But the weekend at the Elgin open gardens was a wonderful finale. And finding Lavenham South Africa gave me a real kick.



REMINDER 1: My garden in Lavenham Suffolk will be open to Plant Heritage members and their guests on Tuesday 4 June at 6pm.

REMINDER 2: Timothy Walker, botanist and Director of Oxford University Botanical Gardens, will be giving us a talk entitled 'From Diaz to Diamonds' on the Cape floral kingdom of South Africa on 7 September.

See events listings in the journal for details of both (page 11).

THE WALLED GARDEN, ICKWORTH PARK

HILARY DRAIN

We had a fine, warm day for the Suffolk Group visit to the Walled Garden at Ickworth. We set off having met Sean Reid, Outdoor Manager, at the West Wing. En route we passed the old estate church which still belongs to the Hervey family. It has been made watertight and pigeon proof and the windows are currently boarded up for security. Having secured English Heritage funding it will be committed to opening several days per year to the public in the future. It is hoped that this will coincide with some of the National Trust event days.

Mentioned in Pevsner, the origins of the church are 13th century. There is some lovely stained glass which is early 14th century and a medieval wall painting of a whole length figure, probably the angel of the Annunciation.

The Walled Garden that we see today is much larger than the original at some five and a half acres. Consisting of vines, fruit trees, allotments (maintained by two local schools) and a wild flower area with beehives, sponsored fruit trees and a newly dug cut flower border only partially planted. Some greenhouses remain as does the boiler house.

Within this Walled Garden is the summer house and walled garden of the original house, in front of which is the canal, all a distance away from the house that we know today.

An old fruit record book was discovered, giving the complete planting plans of 1889 and 1927. This led Sean to the idea of some restoration, which National Trust has now incorporated into a 5 year plan for this area.

The vineyard will go in February, the orchard will be expanded, gravel paths reinstated, renovation of the surviving greenhouses and reinstatement of the missing ones. The summer house will also have some

attention and this plus the smaller original walled garden, with the addition of marquees, is being considered as a possible wedding venue.

Sean also mentioned the area between the Walled Garden and the Italianate gardens. It includes remains of the medieval village and it is hoped to give more information and paths to walk along to be able to appreciate this more. Some of us stayed at the end to have tea and cake outside the Orangery. I later discovered that the newly installed stone steps from this area onto the lawn cost a massive £9,000. They do look lovely though and will be used by brides in their wedding photographs in the years to come.

Fruit trees needed for the Farther Garden

Pears: Duchess d'Angouleme, Glou Morceau, Buerre Rance, Princess, Doyenne Boussoch, Conference, Charles Earnest, Passe Crassane, Marechal de la Cour, Chaumontel, Emile d'Heyst, Durondeau, Beurre de Archon, Winter Orange, Bergamot Esperen x 2, Josephine de Malines, Beurre Clairgeau

Apricots: Moorpark x 3, Hemskirke

Plums: Goliath, Orleans, Kirke's x 2, Primate x 2, Green Gage x 4, Jefferson x 2, Cox's Emperor

Apples: Hector Macdonald x 2, Charles Ross, Mon Incomparable, Rival, Hawthornden, Bramley's Seedling, Blenheim Orange, Lord Burghley



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Simon Charlesworth of Downderry Nursery and National Collection Holder for Lavandulas is giving a talk to the Plant Heritage Suffolk Group on Saturday 23 February at Stowupland Hall. Here is a taster to whet your appetite!

A WORLD OF LAVENDER

SIMON CHARLESWORTH, NATIONAL COLLECTION HOLDER LAVANDULA

Lavender's fragrant and evocative. Definitely.
Lavender's blue dilly dilly! Well, not necessarily.
Lavender's quintessentially English. Not really.

If you thought you knew lavender, think again. It has gained almost mythological status in some quarters with its long and illustrious history of uses. Lavender is prized by gardeners, aromatherapists and perfumiers. There are few plants to match its breadth and depth.

As a Scientific National Plant Collection of *Lavandula* we are custodians of these beautiful and bountiful plants. Our aim is to improve understanding of their nomenclatural complexities, optimize cultivation techniques, including pest and disease control, and breed lavender to obtain new hybrids with different facets for its multifarious purposes. Here's a wee nosegay to ease you into the world of lavender.

Taxing taxonomy - How the great gamut of lavenders hangs together.

Lavender is a member of the mint family known as *lamiaceae*, formerly referred to as *Labiatae* or *lipped* flowered on account of the upper and lower lips of the flowers. The genus *Lavandula* has eight sections and 39 species ranging from the blindingly obvious to the amazingly obscure and just plain weird!

Who am I? - A brief guide to the lengths we go to in identifying lavender.

The key is observation, observation, observation. Morphological characteristics are generally easy to spot. A hand lens providing the necessary intimacy in those hard to pin down cases. Tangentially, oil components can provide a useful tool in identification when morphological analysis is not possible. If one's really pushed then DNA analysis can usually unlock the identification vault.

Cultivating a good relationship with your lavender - Getting the best from it.

Only three things are really needed: full sun, good drainage and a jolly

good prune.....at the right time! The last is the most important to ensure longevity of your lavender, so don't be a wuss with the secateurs. Cut them back straight after flowering. Lavender will throw a hissy fit if constantly cosseted because it loves to be ignored, cultivationally.

A brief biography - How we got from there to here.

Downderry Nursery is 22 years old in 2013. We have grown from a passion to a business, albeit a small family one. We're now the lavender growers' lavender grower, multi-award winning and the benchmark lavender nursery in the UK, exporting to 30 countries worldwide and used by various bodies when they want true to type cultivars.

Bugs and lurgies - The threats to the perfect lavender.

There are few problems for most gardeners, but a few critters that can sully a summer's scene and scent. Most lurgies are the result of poor cultivation techniques and bad weather, the latter borne stoically on the broad shoulders of experience.

Blessings - The great good lavender is to us, wildlife and beyond.

Everyone's aware of the value of lavender as an anaesthetic and antiseptic, but its benefit to us is more diverse. Wonderful for wildlife, lavender and bees are best buddies each benefiting the other. Lavender's qualities and applications are more intriguing than one could imagine.

Shenanigans - Tinkering with lavender to produce new cultivars.

At Downderry we're good at tinkering and tickling lavender to produce something better or really amazing. Most lavender cultivars on the market today are selected seedlings from open pollination. We select and breed from known cultivars carefully assessing their characteristics to draw in the required strengths to produce a more remarkable plant.

Distillation - The mystery revealed.

Some believe this involves some kind of alchemy and in a way I suppose it does. Empedocles (490-430BC) was first to propose four earthly elements – Earth, Water, Air and Fire, today solid, liquid, gas and heat. Aristotle (384-322BC) proposed a fifth, Aether or ether. Loosely this is the quintessence of something or its essence. The derivation of 'essential' in essential oil. Lavender is a volatile oil. A volatility it owes to ether.

In practice it's a rather straightforward affair as will be explained.

I hope this has given you a taste for lavender or at least raised your curiosity.

www.downderry-nursery.co.uk

PENSTEMON ‘CONNIE’S PINK’

IVAN DICKINGS

Penstemon ‘Connies Pink’ has been chosen as the Suffolk Plant Heritage Group’s free plant for the Spring Plant Fair at Helmingham on Sunday 26 May 2013.

It arose as a chance seedling, I suspect between *P. isophylla* and *P. ‘Hidcote Pink’* in our garden in 1992 and named after my mother Connie. It is erect in growth (120cm) much branched with soft pale green foliage and stands well in the winter. The slender flowers are deep pink with a white throat and the plant was awarded an AGM in the 1992/3 Wisley *Penstemon* Trial. Hard pruning is best done in the spring.

The plant is registered with the American *Penstemon* Society registration number 9401.

ORCHIDS

MARTIN WILSON

Most years, somewhere in the garden, they pop up, generally where you least expect them. Fragile and beautiful, pink and purple exotica. Their oddly blotched lip said to resemble the business end of a female bee. I refer, of course, to the Suffolk county flower the Bee Orchid *Ophrys Apifera*.

All this insect mimicry and pheromonal attraction is common in the orchidaceae. Oddly enough the Bee Orchid is self fertile so the elaborate hoax is unnecessary. Tropical orchids go to great lengths to ensure that they are pollinated by specific vectors. Darwin's orchid, *Angraecum Sesquipedale* for example, has an extraordinarily long nectary. Darwin predicted that a moth would be found with a proboscis to match and so it proved, though sadly not until after his death.

Orchids rely on producing vast numbers of very light seeds. They have no endosperm but rely on encountering a mycorrhizal fungus which initially invades the seed but then is commandeered by the orchid embryo to provide the sustenance the endosperm would provide. The tiny protocorn thus formed may take years to emerge as a leaf bearing plant to renew the

cycle. I became interested in growing orchids mainly because I was no use as a fuchsia grower. Once hooked you are forever lost in this fascinating group of plants. They are supposed to have more genera and species than any other flowering plant. Add to this their natural and man-encouraged tendency to form new hybrids and the numbers of form are truly staggering.

The Suffolk Orchid Society meets at St Michael's Church Rooms opposite the Douglas Bader pub in Martlesham on the last Wednesday of each month. Go along, they are a friendly bunch and will welcome you to your new interest. www.suffolkorchid.co.uk/

ABUTILONS: MORE RESILIENT THAN YOU MAY THINK

PATRICK PALMER

I wonder if like me you began to panic at the beginning of year when there was talk of a severe drought and as a consequence a dreaded hosepipe ban. For several years we have been warned of especially dry summers to come and as a consequence I have tended to steer away from the very thirsty varieties of plants. Even the most verdant of gardens have dry areas and these can be challenging especially when long hot summers or dry springs are experienced. This is why it is such a relief to discover a plant which is robust and versatile enough to meet the challenges which keen gardeners encounter.

As long as twenty-five years ago I remember going to Beth Chatto's dry garden in Essex as I was interested in obtaining some plants for a troublesome dry area of my garden. This first visit was in late May and whilst this was not necessarily a good time to evaluate a dry garden at least it gave me a good idea of which plants had survived the previous dry summer as well as a cold winter. This was also the time when I first saw *Abutilon vitifolium* in full bloom. I was impressed to say the least and could not believe something of such beautiful and exotic appearance could survive both drought and cold. Ever since then I have grown blue and white *Abutilon vitifolium* and now count them among my favourite plants.

Although I was first attracted to Abutilons primarily for their drought tolerant attributes, recent quirks in our weather have revealed that they can also do fantastically well in rather wetter conditions. The Abutilons in our current garden have leaped ahead despite a year which has turned out to be one of the wettest in our area, making this a very versatile shrub.

Coincidentally, I am sure many of you will agree that honey fungus has proliferated this year adding to the challenges we have to face. No need to be downcast though, as it turns out that *Abutilons* are resistant to such fungal onslaughts.

This is but a short foray into the world of the *Abutilon vitifolium* which I hope will stimulate further interest as I will be talking more on this topic at the 'Members Favourites' session in April 2013. I also look forward to hearing your experiences of growing this variety.

SAMBUCUS RACEMOSA TENUFOLIA

IVAN DICKINGS

“Oh no it isn’t” “Oh yes it is”. This is the comment I often had when I was asked what the name of that Acer was when we used to open our garden. The plant in question was *Sambucus racemosa* ‘Tenuifolia’ which does look like *Acer palmatum* ‘Dissectum’ with its fernlike pinnate foliage, but is much easier to grow. It is happy in all types of soil and does prefer a spot where it is shaded during the hottest part of the day. It does have smallish panicles of cream flowers followed by red berries in the autumn but my plant didn’t because I cut the flowers off as I thought them messy.

Our original plant came from a cutting I got from the wonderful garden of Maurice Mason in Norfolk, alas no longer in existence, and it attained a height of one metre and a similar spread, a wonderful sight! I did send flowers to East Malling for several years where they were doing a breeding programme of *Sambucus* and they were hoping to get a purple form of *S. ‘Tenuifolia’* but as far as I know it was not successful.

Propagation can be done with soft or hardwood cuttings but the problem is that the plant has a very weeping habit so the young growth lays on the ground and tends to rot off. To overcome this I grafted scions onto a short stems, 23-30cm, of *Sambucus nigra* which kept the foliage off the ground and so it was much less likely to get nibbled by insects or pulled up when weeding!

We did put it though the micro laboratory at Notcutts which was very successful but we had difficulty after the weaning stage because of the contact of the foliage with the compost and it took too long to get a saleable plant. The genus *Sambucus* is very variable with many interesting and beautiful cultivars which would make a wonderful collection.

CAMPANULA PATULA: THE SPREADING BELLFLOWER

SUE WOOSTER

The survival in the wild of this charming native campanula is at serious risk. Its precarious pattern of propagation in the areas where it once flourished is causing deep concern among both botanists and gardeners. Why should this little-known biennial bellflower be coaxed back into cultivation?

In flower on our display in the Floral Marquee at Hampton Court last July and in a clay pot at Helmingham in the autumn, *Campanula patula* drew a lot of attention, proof that this was a bellflower many plant enthusiasts had not encountered before. In the wild, with fierce competition from grass on banks and verges and plants of woodland edge, it grows to no more than 15cm/6in in height, but when nurtured in cultivation it can reach 60cm/2ft. Its branching, wiry stems cope with both statures, and easily carry the delicate smoky-paleblue bells at their tips. The common name refers to its gently flaring flowers, which are lobed to half their length.

The areas where *Campanula patula* is found growing is limited to a handful of pockets along the Welsh borders and in the West Midlands. According to the charity PlantLife, it is classified as an endangered species in the UK, therefore considered facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild. It has been found growing in only thirty-seven 10-km squares in this country. The spreading bellflower is protected by law in Wales, and recently became a Priority Species under the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan.

At the National Botanic Garden of Wales, an amazing project has been launched to scrutinise the DNA of several of the country's disappearing wild flowers, including *Campanula patula*. With genetic information extracted from herbarium species of a hundred years ago, today's pattern of growth can be compared with how the spreading bellflower survived a century ago, and a recovery programme can be launched if it is found to be nearing extinction.

Whilst Plant Heritage focuses on the conservation of cultivated plants, *Campanula patula* is such a versatile, garden-worthy species bellflower, it would be wonderful to find it grown by gardeners throughout our region.

(PS - I'm hoping to have plants for sale at Helmingham spring sale!)

A photograph is included on the centre pages.

*National Collection Holder Campanula (Alpines), RHS Gold Medal Winner, Bellflower Nursery, The Walled Garden, Langham Hall, Langham, Bury St Edmunds, phone: 07879 644958
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AN RHS JUDGE

SARAH COOK

MasterChef, Crufts, Olympic ice skating, or a Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Flower Show – how often do you agree with the judges? How do the judges come to their decisions? Do they ‘get it right’?

The RHS have had panels of judges to decide on the awards – Gold, Silver Gilt, Silver and Bronze – for floral exhibits and show gardens at their shows for many years.

I have been lucky enough to be one of the judges of floral exhibits at the London Flower Shows and in the Floral Marquee at major shows (Chelsea, Hampton Court and Tatton) for several years. It is always very interesting, but also quite a responsibility to try to help the panels come to the ‘right’ decision.

During the last five years the RHS has introduced a focused marking system to help the panels, making the job somewhat easier and decisions fairer. Floral Exhibits are awarded marks under three headings. Plants, Overall Impression, and Scale of Endeavour, 4 for excellent; 3 (very good); 2 (good); 1 (satisfactory) and 0 for poor. Therefore for each exhibit there could be a maximum of 12 marks (or a minimum of 0!)

Before judging begins we are expected to have a good look at the show, especially the exhibits we are to judge as well as the rest, to get an overall impression of standard. There are usually six judging panels (five judges including a chairman) in the floral marquee, each panel judging the different types of exhibit (i.e herbaceous plants, cut flower or tender plants). The panels meet for a briefing before judging begins. We have

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a final chance to look round the exhibit, which is then discussed under each of the three 'headings'. The chairman makes sure we focus on each 'heading' separately and concentrate on positive points, before we make any criticism. We start by looking at the plant material - the best stands have a good range of interesting plants in peak condition (flowering plants should have a good ratio of flower to bud) and correctly labelled, free of damage, pests, diseases or dying leaves.

Next we turn to 'overall impression' – does the stand have impact, is it well designed, do the plants complement each other, are the labels legible and is the general finish good? Finally we assess 'scale of endeavour'. I always find this most difficult, however in this (and all the other sections) there are clear guidelines – 'Excellent' scale of endeavour is awarded to exhibitors who have "resourcefully planned, scheduled, sourced and assembled all the elements. There has been innovation and careful thought in the use of props and great care has been taken in presenting and growing plants to a state of perfection".

The higher the total marks the better the medal. 11 or 12 marks is Gold, Silver Gilt is awarded for 8-10 marks and so on. The rare, very poor stands are not given a medal at all. Each judging panel has a secretary who



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notes down the good and bad points and keeps a record of the marking. This enables the chairman to explain decisions to exhibitors and give advice on how to improve for the future.

Exhibits with a substantial 'Educational' focus are judged for a 'Lindley' medal (The others are awarded 'Floral' medals). All the exhibits in the Plant Heritage Marquee at Hampton Court are judged in this category. In addition to the three headings of Plants, Impact and Scale of Endeavour these exhibits are also judged on 'Information and Interpretation'. This means having a well researched and clear 'take home message' To be marked Excellent the exhibit must ".....very knowledgeably portray a very clear self explanatory message that is well presented with superb quality of signage, handouts and supporting material" Quite a challenge for National Collection Holders!

Before medals are handed out all the judging panels meet with 'moderators' to ensure the judging standards have been the same for each panel. To help a fair process judges have to attend a training day each year – the RHS goes to great lengths to ensure the judges do 'get it right' - but do we?

Next time you go to a show look at the medals and see if you think we have. You may also be amazed by just what you notice if you look at each exhibit in this much detail and also by how much enjoyment you get from it. Just like ice skating the judges are looking at technical excellence and artistic impression. At Hampton Court the 'viewers' are asked to vote for their favourite feature. However, unlike on 'Strictly' they are not yet asked to vote their least favourite exhibit out of the Marquee!

APPLE IDENTIFICATION – ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TABLE!

PETER LAWS

Some years ago at an Apple Day, I joined the line moving towards the Stable all clutching carrier bags of unknown apples for identification by The East of England Apples and Orchards Project (EEAOP). I wanted to know what varieties I had so I could find out how to look after them and whether they were rare and required conservation. After all, apple trees have only a limited lifetime and so apple varieties become extinct if they are not re-propagated and conserved.

I was struck by the wondrous variety of apples on display and intrigued by the seemingly dark art of identification. Usually, the expert seemed able to retrieve the matching variety from the display. Not infrequently, however, the apple was unfamiliar and the ‘facial recognition’ process stalled. My curiosity was hooked, but how long would it be before I could stand on the other side of the table?

Clearly the process was very difficult unless you had a physical collection for comparison or had ‘three lifetimes experience’ working with a heritage collection. The books generally illustrated only the common varieties and there were limited ‘keys’ to apple characteristics, so were of limited use for identification.

In contrast to identifying distinct species, we are trying to separate the clonal diversity within one species. To make an analogy, imagine being asked to name a particular unfamiliar rose brought to you for identification! The appearance of fruit changes as it ripens. Seasonal factors and growing conditions bring their own impact, so samples may be atypical. We have seen Bramleys the size of ping pong balls from neglected, undernourished trees!



East of England Apples and Orchards Project public ID session at Audley End. Photo Martin Skipper.

Also the diversity is huge. Every apple pip is a new individual variety which, like children, may or may not be better than their parents! So thousands of varieties have arisen by chance (or deliberate cross pollination) and if worthwhile they may have been selected for propagation and distribution (i.e. a cultivar). Occasionally a growth bud may mutate and give a branch carrying redder or more russeted “sport” which can be propagated as a new cultivar.

The idea of a ‘fruitID’ project was conceived in the East of England ID team to share knowledge freely between experts and help train enthusiastic beginners. Proposals for the project were shared at a design workshop at Narborough Hall, Norfolk, in September 2009 and the enthusiasm was evident. We decided use a website to hold images illustrating the range of appearance of each variety; descriptive text with the heritage story; and a

searchable list of identification characteristics. The information would be derived afresh from samples of known provenance (mainly the National Fruit Collection, Brogdale) and cross referenced to the literature.

This was clearly an ambitious undertaking! It would only succeed by the collaborative efforts of many contributors and would take at least ten years to become comprehensive even for the varieties found still growing in the UK. Now into our fourth year we have a stunning website freely available at www.fruitID.com and the content is still incomplete, but building steadily. I suspect there will always be 10 more years needed!

So do we know how to identify apples yet? Well it still remains challenging. We now have the start of a better reference library (18,000 images and 65,000 characteristics). We try to help identifiers who think visually as well as those that prefer a codified approach. We have a sequence of questions (with guidance) that asks about the tree and then the visible characteristics of the fruit etc until the shortlist is small enough to study in depth and hopefully a match is found for the unfamiliar sample - a process of identification. So for those involved in the identification of heritage apple varieties for a Biodiversity Action Plan or providing ID assistance to the public, help is at hand.

Did I make it to the other side of the table? Yes, although preferably as an assistant. The team encouraged me to get hands on as the best way to learn, but I really do need both fruitID and an expert alongside me!

www.applesandorchards.org.uk/

THE LAPWING PROJECT

DOROTHY CARTWRIGHT

In November I visited the Lapwing Project, which is run in conjunction with Activlives, in the Chantry Walled Garden. The project enables young adults with learning difficulties to spend some time doing horticultural activities with the help of keen volunteers. They have the use of some greenhouses and grow plants from seed and propagation material. They sell their plants to make money to continue their project. They have planted some historic fruit and vegetables and plan to grow more. They are also planning to have a cut flower border so they can sell flowers for flower arranging.

If you would like to support this project and can provide seeds or propagation material from plants in your garden do contact me: dot.cartwright@btinternet.com

CHALARA ASH DIEBACK

BARBARA SEGALL

Ash trees are in the news now as more and more cases showing the devastating effects of Chalara dieback caused by *Chalara fraxinea* fungus are reported. The symptoms of *C. fraxinea* are visible on leaves, shoots and branches of affected trees. In severe cases, the entire tree crown shows leaf loss and dieback. Common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) saplings and mature trees have been affected, and under the emergency measures, all outbreaks have to be reported (ddas.ah@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

If you need further information go to the Forestry Service website (www.forestry.gov.uk/planthealth or www.forestry.gov.uk/forestresearch) or the Defra website (www.defra.gov.uk/fera/plants/planthealth). Movement and sale of ash trees is prohibited under the emergency measures.

SUFFOLK'S NATIONAL COLLECTIONS

AESCULUS	Framlingham	Robert Grimsey, 01728 685203
BUXUS	Bury St. Edmunds	National Trust Ickworth Park, 01284 735819
CAMPANULA	Bury St. Edmunds	Sue Wooster, 07879 644958
DIANTHUS (Malmaison)	Ipswich	Jim Marshall, 01473 822400
EQUISETUM	Stowmarket	Anthony Pigott, 01449 766104
ERYSIMUM	Walpole	Dr.Simon Weeks, 01986 784348
EUONYMUS	East Bergholt	Rupert Eley, 01206 299224
HIBISCUS	Pettistree	John Woods Nurseries 01728 745100
HOSTA	Stowmarket	Mickfield Hostas. 01449 711576
IRIS (Sir Cedric Morris introductions)	Ipswich	Sarah Cook, 01473 822400
SYRINGA	Stowmarket	Norman's Farm, 01449 781081

Help wanted at Helmingham!

Volunteers are needed for the Spring Plant Fair on Sunday 26 May - at the members' marquee, free plant table, questionnaire stand and as 'ambassadors' for Plant Heritage helping on the site. If you can spare an hour or so please contact Hilary Drain 01206 263223 hilary_drain@hotmail.com. Helpers get free entry.

SUFFOLK PLANT HERITAGE

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www.suffolkplantheritage.com

