

## North East Group

Registered Charity No. 1004009

### Autumn Bulletin – Update for 2014

We're sorry if you were expecting a glossy colour magazine! There are two reasons for this offering via e-mail (or printed A4 if we don't have your e-mail address): 1) lack of time on our part, for various reasons during the last two months, to produce a magazine in time to get it printed and 2) the understandable reluctance of nurseries to pay for advertising at this time of year, without which the printed colour version is very expensive. So we've agreed with the Committee that we'll go back to producing one glossy mag a year, but in Spring rather than Autumn. We've already got a good line-up of material for the next issue. **Your contributions are always welcome.**

*Bryan & Suzanne Stanley, Newsletter Editors (01670 787 916 or maxitoby1@gmail.com)*

### TIM WALKER – GUEST LECTURER – 2PM - 22<sup>nd</sup> NOVEMBER – JURY'S INN - GATESHEAD

If you haven't yet bought tickets (£10) for this event, it isn't too late – you can pay at the door on the day, and look forward to an entertaining afternoon. Tim will be talking about "Plant Conservation – why it matters and how it works", followed by refreshments, book signing, and a chance to talk to him in person. For more information ring David Goodchild on 01661 823145 or e-mail Jackie on [Jackie.Latham@aim.com](mailto:Jackie.Latham@aim.com).

#### Notes from the Chair

I'm sitting on a train on the way back from the Plant Heritage Council on bonfire night. Another glorious clear sky so it's going to be a frosty night. The weather continues to astonish and delight with the warmest Autumn on record. It's given me the opportunity to do some major new work in the garden. Last year we lost a lot of plants in pots to the wet so I'm making a new raised bed for the shrubs. We've also reorganised the fruit cages and made a new fruit area. The poly tunnel cover is now 10 years old, double its expected life, so I'm being very nice to our daughter and son-in-law so I can have help putting the new cover on.

Gardening is very satisfying when the season is extended so that even before this year's plants are over, next year's are already showing signs of growth. A *Smilacina racemosa* I dug up has big fat buds just below the surface. This is why I am a strong believer in cutting down herbaceous plants in the Autumn, rather than leaving it till the Spring. I know we are told that the old vegetation is a habitat for wildlife and some plants do look good with the frost on them, but most don't and it seems the only wildlife sheltering in old plant material in our garden is slugs and snails and woodlice. Anyway there are lots of other places for creatures to hide. The shed is full of overwintering butterflies. Many of the other herbaceous plants are also showing new growth, which will be easily damaged if I leave it till it's really got going in the Spring. I'd be interested in your thoughts.

I'm quite impressed with the start made by the new PH Chief Executive, Sarah Quarterman, and the new Chairman, Mike Buffin. I've known Mike for some time and he is an expert horticulturalist. Many of their problems are the ones which have been around for years but there does seem to be a fresh approach. There are documents out for discussion on Strategy and Membership Recruitment. There's also a new emphasis on the importance of conserving both cultivars and species grown in gardens which is welcome because the latter have been rather overlooked in recent years and some of our National Collection Holders who are world experts in their field have collections which are mostly species.

It's interesting that the new Plant Guardians scheme is starting to take off. I hope it's something we can develop in the North East so let me know if you might be interested. It enables members who don't want to have a National Collection to get involved in Plant Conservation and the requirements aren't onerous. There are details on the PH website but contact me or Faith if you want to talk about it.

It's almost the end of another season for the North East Group and the AGM is approaching. We're a very active group doing lots of things which means we are always in need of more volunteers. Please help if you can, not necessarily by joining the Committee. Any time you can offer will be most gratefully received.

*David Goodchild – Chairman*

## **Christmas Meeting**

Jackie Latham, our programme organiser, tells us Planatagogo, holder of the National Collection of Heucheras, will be coming to our **next meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December** to talk about - well - Heucheras. She hopes they will also be able to bring plants for sale, even though it's out of season. There will be nibbles and a few crafts tables - if you have any craft items which you can bring to sell then please have a word with Sue Bennett (on 0191 240 1232 or [nccpgne@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:nccpgne@blueyonder.co.uk)). We ask for a minimum of 10% commission towards group funds. Starting at the usual **2.30**, this will probably be our last meeting in Durant Hall (see below). **Christmassy food donations welcome.**

## **Notes from the Secretary:**

### **A new venue for the North East Group**

We have been truly spoiled by the services of Ian and Dorothy Clark at Durant Hall, and were pleased to give them a leaving gift. Ian has taken retirement, and the Unitarian Church has decided to close the Hall. Sadly therefore we find ourselves looking for an alternative venue.

Many of our members have made useful suggestions which David and other Committee members have been investigating. The first finding we made is that any city centre location we choose is going to cost us more. We therefore have been exploring venues in the city outskirts and a little further afield. This was undertaken on the basis that when there is a football match or any other big event in the city, travelling in can be a pain. On the other hand, there is plenty of public transport heading towards the city, usually meaning one direct journey.

The venues on the outskirts we've investigated have been north or west of Newcastle, as approximately two thirds of our members live in that locality. Community Centres have been promising namely because they are a lot cheaper than the city centre and geared up for self-catering, and very often parking is free. At the time of writing, we are in the process of short-listing the venues. At present, the strong contenders are: **Laing Art Gallery**, Newcastle city centre, **Trewhitt Road Community Centre**, Heaton, and **Ponteland Memorial Hall**.

Whichever one we choose, we can't tick all the boxes. Ideally we would like to find a solution that meets the needs of our loyal members who come to the Newcastle meetings, but also encourages members who perhaps don't normally relish the journey to join us. However a decision needs to be made very soon as we need to book the meeting dates as quickly as possible!

### **Molly Walker**

Molly and Trevor Walker were amongst the founding members of our Group. Molly has now moved away from the north east to be nearer her family. It must have been hard for her to leave her wonderful garden in Forest Hall, but she can take comfort that so many of us benefited from the Walkers' generosity, and are growing many of those plants in our own gardens. We all wish her well in her new life. There'll be a full report of her memories of the early years of the North East group in the Spring Newsletter.

### **Margaret Owen**

Margaret Owen founded the Shropshire Group in 1982, and sadly died in late October. Margaret had a reputation as a dedicated plant enthusiast, with a particular interest in snowdrops as well as keeping four National Collections. The Shropshire group will sorely miss her.

### **Looking forward to 2015**

**The AGM** will go ahead on **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2015**, and we will notify you of the new venue as soon as we are able. As always, we will be delighted to welcome new blood onto the Committee as a fresh viewpoint is always helpful. If you are interested to join in, even if you don't want the responsibility of a specific role, please do have a word with one of the Committee members.

**PH Chief Executive** - We have invited Sarah Quarterman, Plant Heritage's new CEO, to visit us in the North East and she has accepted. Unfortunately she isn't able to come for our January AGM but will come later in the year.

**Next year's programme** is shaping up with a few events still to be finalised. As (at the time of writing) the venue has yet to be decided, the issuing of programme cards, usually available in December or at the AGM, may be delayed. Moving the **Blagdon Plant Fair** to July proved a wise thing to do; the aim now is to make it a regular summer fixture. We have booked **19<sup>th</sup> July 2015** with Blagdon Estate.

**Summer visit:** Our Group and the Hardy Plant Society are combining forces in 2015 to arrange a joint weekend trip to **Dumfries and Galloway**. Yes we know we went there recently, but the itinerary will be to different gardens. See below for more details.

*Sue Bennett, Secretary*

## A Date for your 2015 Diary

### **Coach Trip – Thurs 25<sup>th</sup> June to Sat 27<sup>th</sup> June 2015**

Next year we are planning another 3-day trip, this time to Dumfries and Galloway, staying at **The Cally Palace Hotel**, Gatehouse of Fleet. A trip to that area would not be complete without a visit and chance to buy plants at both **Cally Nursery** and **Elizabeth MacGregor's gardens**. Also included will be a visit to **Portrack House**, "The Garden of Cosmic Speculation" created by **Charles Jencks**, and this garden, I suspect, will be the talking point of the entire weekend. We'll also visit **Broughton House**, **Bridge End Nursery**, **Newtonairds Hostas**, **Shambellie Walled Gardens** plus other private gardens. In other words, lots of opportunities to look at plants, talk about plants and buy plants.

This trip will be open to both Hardy Plant and Plant Heritage members - more details, costs etc will be in future newsletters.

*Maggie Duguid, HPS Bus Trip Organiser*

### Regional Coordinator Meeting at Glasgow Botanic Gardens

I recently attended the regional co-ordinator meeting at the Glasgow Botanic Garden. We are a member of the largest PH region which includes NE and NW England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Eire. Seven areas were represented and Sophie Lequil (Threatened Plant Project, TPP) and Gill Groombridge (Conservation) came up from London to update on the changes recently made at Head Office, the 2015 Collection review and the status of TTP. It was interesting to hear the reports on collections in other areas and some of the problems encountered such as fungal infections in rhododendrons and trilliums in Scotland.

I gave a report on the current status of collections in the NE as below:

We currently have 16 collections in the North East and none have been withdrawn this year. With the mild winter and good weather this year Collection holders have not experienced problems. The Chief Executive at Blagdon, Bob Downer is now actively managing the *Acer*, *Alnus* and *Sorbus* collections with some help and support to update the plant list. I have visited several times and hope to involve a student in the update next year. This year I visited *Iris species spuriae* and *Centaurea* and attended the *Corydalis* open day. A visit to the *Sorbus* collection at East Durham College is delayed until next year and the *Primula marginata* collection until the plants are out in the spring. I will arrange a NE collection holders meeting next spring.

Ena Gatenby (*Leucojum*) applied for the Brickell award although was unfortunately unsuccessful and Lorna Hutchinson (*Brunnera*) is working towards applying for Scientific Status. There has been increased interest this year in establishing new collections in the NE although no applications as yet. I have talked with Newcastle University and Perennial Favourites at Blyth. We also hope to encourage uptake of the Plant Guardian Scheme among members in the new year.

The open days for the collections have been actively advertised at the meetings and on the new PHNE website and some collection holders have commented that they have had more visitors than recently.

Despite the typical Glasgow rain I had a few minutes after the meeting to enjoy the Botanic Gardens and to pop into the glasshouses to view some of the National Collection of *Begonia* and the fernery.

*Faith Williams, November 2014*

### Looking back on 2014

#### **The indoor events**

We've had an interesting programme of well-illustrated talks since the spring.

How good it was in October to listen to the experts from **Taylor's Clematis**. Their simple pruning mantra alone was worth turning up for: Group 1 – No Pruning, Group 2 – Prune Light, Group 3 – Prune Hard. Somehow it never seems that simple when I read the copious cultivation notes on a plant label or in a book. We were grateful that Chris and Suzy could come at short notice when Plantagogo had to postpone their visit.

**Prof. John Richards'** talk on 8<sup>th</sup> November – "High mountain flowers of Sichuan" – was a feast of exceptional photographs of the location and of such wonderful plants as you would - well – traverse mountain passes for. I could list and describe some, but really, you had to be there.

In April, **Dr Colin Scrutton** of Durham University covered Orchid pollination by sexual deception, revealing detailed and fascinating research into the relationship between insects and these remarkable plants. It's a very unequal relationship – a story of satisfied plants and frustrated insects!

**Dr Kirsten Wolff** in May provided a truly scientific exposition on the DNA profiling of rare plant collections with particular reference to *Hesperantha* and *Tilia*. A full report written by Jackie Latham on Kirsten's talk should be available on the website soon.

As an organisation we're dependent on the researches of these professional botanists to provide the serious underpinnings for Plant Heritage's existence.

### The outdoor events

Some of us enjoyed productive visits (in other words – we bought plants) to **Perennial Favourites**, Adam Greenwold's Blyth nursery, in May, and to **Northern Ark** in Longhorsley in September – in those happy days when the nights were light.

The **Malvern** trip in May was very successful and well-run (thanks to Irene Bosomworth's organisational skills) even if the weather could have been better.

A lot of effort and attention to detail also has to go into the organisation of our Great **North Plant Sale** at **Kirkley Hall** and the **Great North Plant Fair** at **Blagdon Hall**. Thank you to all the members who supplied beautiful and interesting plants for Kirkley, to all volunteers (we always need more, folks!) for both events, and to the nurseries who came to Blagdon. **Errington Reay Pottery** also attended for the first time, and were so pleased with the results, they'll be back in 2015. It looks as though it was a good decision to hold the Blagdon Fair in July, when most people are still actively involved in gardening and plant buying, rather than in September when maybe only the real enthusiasts are out plant hunting.

The **Goodchilds** went beyond the call of duty to ensure that we all got some fresh air this year. David held one of his enjoyable and successful **cuttings workshops** in June, then he and Marjorie hosted the **Summer Garden Party** in August (at which I said to various people "Never mind the plants – go and look at the tomatoes!"). But of course everything else in the garden was lovely.

Suzanne Stanley

### PHNE Student Award



We were delighted to give our 2014 award to Sue Fraser. She is seen here at Kirkley Hall receiving the award – a cash prize and a year's membership of Plant Heritage - from our North East Chairman, David Goodchild.

### Our Fame Spreads

Junella Mackay, Strathclyde Group's Newsletter editor, has written to Sue Bennett to let her know that her piece on Terra Preta, which Sue wrote for the Spring issue of our Newsletter, has now appeared in the latest Strathclyde Region's PH Newsletter. Several folk in Scotland have said how much they enjoyed it.

### National *Sedum*, *Rhodiola*, *Telephium*, *Phedimus*, *Petrosedum*, *Cornelis Versteeg Sempervivum* section *Jovibarba* hybrids Collection Report 2014

As the years go on I become more and more worried about providing lists of the collection or reporting potential losses. I received a request from a university recently for material and needed to point out that with ephemeral annual / biennial plants:

- 1) I do not have them in Winter.
- 2) I may have some in Spring if germination is successful.
- 3) I often find due to Winter weather (usually too mild) that all disappear and do not return.
- 4) But I may grow some from the *Free Sedum Society Seed Distribution Scheme*.

Mild winters also bring about the demise of high altitude species, so it may be more sensible not to list such things.

In January we explored Malta which is a lost cause as far as wild plants are concerned. The whole island is peppered with an alien *Oxalis pes-caprae* which is smothering natives. The purpose of the visit was to help in the description of a new taxon, but it was nice to see the azure-flowered stonecrop (*S. caeruleum*) holding its own.

We spent 3 weeks in May-June studying the Anatolian stonecrops of an area in which we'd not been previously. This resulted in the publication of 2 papers. New locations were discovered of *Sedum lydium* (I think we published the very first wild photos of this species favoured by Scandinavian green-roof specialists), *S. aetnense* (nearly 1000km from known sitings), *S. confertiflorum*, *S. hispanicum* subsp. *planifolium*, and photographed *S. samium* subsp. *samium* for the first time.

*Petrosedum pruinaum* is an odd stonecrop I've failed to perpetuate on 3 previous occasions. It only grows in sub-alpine areas of Portugal with the highest rainfall on highly acid rocks. Summers here near the coast are just too hot. I've always been fascinated by literature re quoting the River Homem as its type-locality and range. Our visit there in Autumn has resulted in another paper being published by *C&SJ(US)* questioning this data. The river valley is far too low for such a species and the higher stretches have been dammed in recent years. It is still possible that plants grow near the headwaters on the Spanish border but we failed though we found a new (undocumented site) in the Serra do Alvão.

The *Sedum Society Cuttings Exchange* continues to allow the flow of taxa between expert growers throughout the EC and beyond. This is essential if one is to replace lost taxa.

Open day was highly successful with not only *PH* and *BCSS* friends but the newspapers had spread the word and some visitors stayed hours, photographing and making notes.

I've been booked for 12 lectures this year (not all Crassulaceae) but always take the opportunity to flag-wave.

*DNA* sequencing continues to throw traditional taxonomy into upheaval but as Crassulaceae was one of the first families to be investigated, there are few new surprises. I really do wish the *RHS* would wake up and stop calling tall herbaceous plants *Sedum*!

Ray & Joyce Stephenson

**And finally, the Committee wishes everybody a Merry Christmas and all the very best for the New Year.**