

PLANT HERITAGE

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North East Group



Newsletter 2013



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Articles, snippets and photographs are always welcome.

Opinions expressed in NE Newsletter are those of the authors and / or the editors and don't necessarily reflect those of the charity as a whole. The editors reserve the right to edit contributions.

EDITORIAL

ASSEMBLING THIS magazine makes us realise how many people are enthusiastically involved in plants and gardens, either professionally or as an activity outside work. It can't be denied though that many of these, including the owners of gardens we visited in Scotland, are over 50, and we wonder what will happen to some of these gardens in the future. There's been a lot written recently about the "skills gap" in horticulture, and the worryingly negative perception of gardening held by the under-25s (roughly summed up as old blokes in battered hats wielding spades in mud). So it's very heartening to see that the RHS had no difficulty in selecting winners for its second Young School Gardener of the Year Award, and that there is no shortage of deserving students at Kirkley Hall for our Plant Heritage North East Student Award. What's more there are still youthful folk (such as the Thompsons of Northern Ark and our own Adam Greenwold) prepared to run traditional nurseries in the face of competition from the huge garden centre chains who heavily influence the plant-buying public with the current fashions in plants and gardening. Hopefully these green shoots of change will mean increasing numbers of the under-25s will

come to choose plants and gardens as a career or a way of life.

A note of regret: we were all very sad to hear of the untimely death of John Bennett, husband of Sue our Secretary, after his long illness. He was a familiar sight at meetings (so tall you couldn't miss him!) and at our plant fairs with his woodturning, and was always a great help. It was good to see him at Blagdon Plant Fair in September where he looked so well, and we gather he enjoyed the day. He'll be very much missed.

We must also record the death in a car accident of Jennifer Scott, long-time member of Plant Heritage North East, and well-known as a Britain in Bloom judge.



Photo: Marjorie Goodchild

Alex Ryley receiving the PHNE Student Award from Chairman David Goodchild

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

LAST YEAR we decided that one of our herbaceous beds was getting overgrown and things were invading each other. So we cleared everything out, bedded things we wanted to keep in the vegetable plot and dug the whole thing over.

We thought we'd convert it into a mixed bed with some shrubs which weren't happy in other parts of the garden and some new herbaceous plants we'd bought without any clear idea of where they could go. That included some Euphorbias we bought to make the display at Gateshead Show last year and which were still in their pots.

It has all been very successful, meaning the bed is already beginning to look a bit overcrowded again in parts. This is the really positive aspect of gardening for me. If you choose the right plants and put them where they can be happy, it doesn't take long to make a garden. That also came across from Simon Thompson of Northern Ark when he spoke to us in October. Starting from a field with no services or infrastructure of any kind, he and Tracy have created a garden and a successful nursery which now looks very mature and established.

It also means you can always make space for another plant, even if you have to say goodbye to something which isn't as good as you thought it would be or has outlived its welcome. So you could do your bit for cultivated plant conservation by getting something from the Plant Exchange or joining the new Plant Guardians scheme.

As you'll see elsewhere in the newsletter, we have decided to move the date of the Plant Fair at Blagdon from September to 27th July. This is partly because we have been finding it difficult to get nurseries to come in September and also customer numbers have been falling. This year's event still made a healthy surplus but we felt it was time for change. The date we have chosen is the weekend when Gateshead Flower Show used to be so we hope nurseries and customers will feel they have a good plant hunting opportunity back.

It's very encouraging that we have new members taking on important jobs so special thanks to Jackie Latham (Programme Secretary), Irene Bosomworth (Bus Trips) and Ros Cooper (Plant Exchange). Please give them all the support you can.

David Goodchild, October 2013

Veronicastrum

THE REVISED edition of Johnson's *Gardeners' Dictionary* (1917) has a long list of Veronicas. It includes *V. Armstrongii*, *V. cupressoides*, *V. Loganoides*, and *V. Salicifolia*, all of which we now know as Hebes. The list also includes *V. virginiana* and *V. sibirica* both of which have been transferred to a genus of their own,

namely *Veronicastrum*. At the time of the big sort out, *Veronicastrum* was classed as Scrophulariaceae but since has been reclassified as Plantaginaceae, giving it quite a chequered history of naming.

However you wish to classify them, veronicastrums are beautiful plants and well worth growing in the garden. They are tall architectural perennials, 1 - 1.8m; much taller than veronicas. They have toothed leaves which grow in whorls around a strong central stem. The plant throws up tall racemes of long thin flowers and, later in the season, more flower stems from the higher leaf axils making a many branched head.

They are good plants for most situations. In the wild their habitat is a fertile grassy plain whether it is in the east of North America or the Japanese Islands. They enjoy the open spaces with plenty of sun and a reasonably moist soil, but they do not like wet feet. Translated to the garden environment, that means moist but well drained borders in sun or part shade. They are not fussy but will get better and more quickly established if given a good fertile soil to start them off, so add garden compost or well rotted manure to the planting hole. Mimicking their natural habitat they look good with tall grasses in a Piet Oudolf-style planting but are equally good towards the back of a traditional herbaceous border. Their strong stems also make them



Veronicastrum virginicum 'Album'

good specimen plants, planted singly or in clumps, in small dedicated lawn beds.

They mostly flower from July to September in a range of colours, blue, white, pink, purple and more recently new cultivars are introducing red to the spectrum. They are nectar-rich flowers and therefore most attractive to bees, hoverflies, butterflies etc, so are a good addition to the wildlife-friendly garden.

Veronicastrums are trouble free. Their sturdy stems mean they do not need staking and, as in the wild, will withstand quite strong winds. They can be cut down in



Veronicastrum virginicum 'Diane'

the autumn or left until the late winter as the dead flower spikes have an interesting winter beauty when clothed in frost.

Propagation of these plants is easily done by division. Divide established clumps either in the spring or autumn. Cuttings can also be taken in the spring or early summer. Seeds can be collected and should be planted in the autumn but because they are so tiny they need to be sown directly on to the soil surface with no covering as they will naturally fall between the soil particles.

There are two major species: *Veronicastrum virginicum* and *Veronicastrum sibiricum* from

North America and the Far East respectively, although there are a few lesser known species such as *V. axillare*, *V. brunoniana* and *V. latifolium*. It is *V. virginicum* from which most of the cultivars have been created.

White-flowered cultivars of *V. virginicum* are 'Album' and 'Diane'; 'Apollo' and 'Cupid', are pale blue; *f. roseum* and 'Pink Glow' are pink; 'Lavendelturm' and 'Temptation' are lavender. 'Erica' has red-flushed foliage and 'Pointed Finger' has curved flower spikes. Some of the cultivars show an occasional fasciation of the flower spikes but this is an interest rather than a disadvantage.

The most common cultivar of *V. sibiricum* is 'Red Arrows' which is red only in the bud form before opening to pink.

Veronicastrum was named for Saint Veronica who offered her veil to Christ to wipe his forehead as he carried his cross. Its common name of Culver's root comes from Dr Couvert of the late 17th early 18th Century who found laxative properties in the plant.

Marjorie Goodchild

Photos: Dr Gavin McNaughton,
National Collection Holder of
Veronicastrum



Veronicastrum virginicum 'Roseum'

The Garden Museum Lambeth

WHATEVER YOUR views about gnomes in the garden, you would probably find the gnome collection in The Garden Museum quite endearing. Like the miniature German lead gnome on display, it is a small but perfectly formed history of the species.

Though you'd never guess from a quick visit, the Museum has about 10,000 objects and documents representing 400 years of gardening in Britain, of which only a tiny proportion can be exhibited at any one time. There are plans for future expansion. The Museum was set up in 1977 to save from demolition the disused St Mary's church, burial place of John Tradescant. His baroque tomb is the centrepiece of the knot garden surrounding the church. Only in 2008 did the interior of the church become the light airy exhibition and events centre that you see today.



John Tradescant's tomb end

I don't want to present you with a catalogue of the objects on view when we visited in February this year, but here are some of the highlights (besides the gnomes):

Garden tools: A large weeder to end all weeders, fierce and dangerous-looking. A display case of "expensive" tools, some in silver, designed to be light and elegant for use by gentlefolk. These included walking sticks with pruning saw, weeder, slasher and spudder attachments. Plus many more robust and familiar spades, forks, hoes and lawn mowers from all periods.



Wood & metal dibbers

Back-of-shed finds: Such as old tins of weed killer and creosote, riddles, seed scoops and measures, decorative catalogues and seed packets, balls of twine and well-used trugs.



Cat Scarer

Garden paintings & drawings: We had to buy the postcard of Hubert Andrew's "Gardener and tortoise" (1954), a gently humorous etching of a gardener resting among his tools while

the resident tortoise peers out from a patch of sprouts behind him. This was just one of the many very satisfying artworks on the subject of horticulture and gardening.

The regular exhibition - which in February 2013 was "Floriculture: flowers, love and money" - was a history of the growth of the worldwide wholesale trade up to the present day. I'm not a fan of exhibitions that involve acres of text on huge display boards, but in this case the statistics were too fascinating to skip, and the illustrations, artefacts, artworks and general overall presentation were first class.



Seed Display Cabinet

If I mention that there's also a vegetarian café with exquisite soups, salads, hot dishes, quiches and exceptional cakes (not that this was a priority you understand), then you'll realise that

this is a very worthwhile destination. You can probably give the shop a miss though, unless you like pretty designer hand tools and nicely packaged balls of string, or need more garden books. The whole museum is of course partly a nostalgia trip, but you can't miss the serious message which is of the importance and endurance in Britain of plants and gardening, domestic, grand and commercial.

The Museum is just by the Thames on Lambeth Palace Road. You can check the details at www.gardenmuseum.org.uk.

Suzanne Stanley

SUMMER TRIP

– 193 days to go?

At the time of writing, this is where the RHS Malvern Spring Gardening Show website countdown has got to, and it's one suggestion for our summer break next year. The Show dates are 8th -11th May, and our aim as usual would be to have one day there as well as visiting significant gardens and nurseries in the area. However, it's a long way to go and it's early, so it might not suit everyone. So more suggestions as soon as possible please, to Irene Bosomworth (i.bosomworth@btinternet.com) who has agreed to organise it, or to any member of the Committee, so that planning and booking can commence.

Conservation of Plant Collections within the care of National Trust for Scotland

SINCLAIR WILLIAMSON presented this excellent talk at Durant Hall on 11th May. He has worked with the NTS for 10 years and has been the Garden Advisor for the last three.

An important element of plant conservation is knowing what you have, and the



Seedhead of Clintonia andrewsiana, Branklyn

Head Gardeners of 35 major and 35 smaller gardens have the responsibility for creating and maintaining plant records in Scotland. Sinclair is coordinating their transfer onto Demeter - a slow process, with so far "only" 75,000 NTS records entered. However, it's a vital job, as each garden has at least one specialist collection, some of which are National Collections.

Sinclair listed and described all of these. For example Branklyn hosts Cassiope, the first NTS collection to be accepted by NCCPG (1982). Scotland is of course famous for its Rhododendrons, of which there are special collections at Inverewe, Brodick and Branklyn. At Greenbank on the south side of Glasgow, away from the peaty, acid moorland conditions, 111 examples of Bergenia flourish. This site

was gifted as a demo garden, and is a trial garden for “Which? Gardening”. It is the largest collection NTS manages. In contrast, the smallest is the collection of 7 *Dianthus* ‘Malmaison’ cultivars (i.e. 100% representation) at Crathes, where they are all under glass. Another “100% representation” collection is at Branklyn: the 16 cultivars of Mylnefield Lilies.

The NTS philosophy and approach to plant conservation on their properties is thus:

- where there are detailed historical garden plans, try to stick to them;
- where no plans exist, aim at conserving “the spirit of the garden”.

This is the approach taken at Kelly Castle where there is no planting information for the walled garden, only design outlines. In such cases the style of planting is maintained, but individual plants can be changed to suit conditions.

The greatest threats to current collections (apart from extreme weather events) are *Phytophthora ramorum* and *P. kernoviae*, both of which kill Rhododendrons quite quickly. There have been outbreaks at Inverewe, and collections have been lost at Crarae and Brodick. The plan is therefore to have samples elsewhere to maintain the range of species.

Sinclair then developed the theme of Inverewe, probably Scotland’s best known garden world-wide and not least for the striking story of its development by Osgood Mackenzie from the age of 20. Here it is very important to maintain the spirit of the garden and Osgood’s original aims, by continuing to try new things, and to bring in disease-resistant species. The particular problems of this garden are well known – the variable soil depth (just one inch in places), periods of drought, periods of extreme rain, and gales which wreck plants and topple the shallow-rooted conifers in the shelter belt. This latter essential feature is now being managed more systematically and effectively, having been “taken for granted” for decades. Observable changes in the climate mean that two or three years ago, Inverewe experienced its first snow in years, which shocked the exotics!

This informative, interesting and well illustrated talk was a great incentive to visit – or revisit – Scotland’s splendid gardens.

Suzanne Stanley

THE PLANT EXCHANGE

– can you take part?

This is the opportunity to find an unusual plant, or to share with members your own rare or unusual plants. List your Wants and/or Offers and give to Ros Cooper by **20th November** by e-mail on r.cooper738@btinternet.com. Include your contact details as well as the plant information. Only plants with two or fewer suppliers in the RHS Plant Finder will be included in the lists.

The national collated lists will be available on the website on 15th December.

Plant Heritage NE visit to Scotland: a personal appraisal

EVERYONE WHO has been on a Plant Heritage NE trip knows that it is a plantaholic's opportunity to buy, buy, buy and beat the record for filling the bus as well as the dedicated luggage space with plants. This year was no exception as the places we visited had so many tempting treasures by the end of May.

Of course there are always the anticipated delights of gardens to visit and this year was a real treat, because each of the five gardens was spectacular in its own way.

Mindrum, the first that we visited, was a wonderfully landscaped garden overlooking the River Tweed, with mature trees and good mixed borders.

Kevock, the home of Stella Rankin of Kevock Garden Plants, was impressive if only because of the amount of work that had gone into its development. The house fronts the road but is perched on a narrow ledge overlooking the steeply sloping garden and distant view. The wide variety of alpine plants, some very unusual, reflected the fact that the owners run a Nursery.

Haystoun is a very old house with traditional ornamental and vegetable gardens but a new naturalistic garden had recently been developed alongside the burn from which had been created a large lake and several waterfalls – a major feat of earth-moving and water engineering. This burnside walk featured rhododendrons and azaleas.

Shepherd House in Inveresk was quite different. We entered the garden from the main street through a door in the original brick walled garden. The garden has been designed in stages by the owners Sir Charles and Lady Ann Fraser since they purchased the property in 1957. The garden is divided by a shallow rill running through the central axis with several small 'rooms' on each side full of plants in full flower, including nepeta, roses and spectacular alliums. There was also some interesting mosaic paving designed for Lady Ann by mosaic specialist Maggy Howarth.

Portmore also had a walled garden, but of a classical design with statues. The garden was laid out in squares, each



Mindrum Garden, Northumberland



Binny Plants, Ecclesmachan, W Lothian



square an open room with specimen trees and shrubs surrounded by herbaceous plants. Outside the walled garden was a new development on several levels: a watergarden featuring *Hosta*, *Primula*, *Ligularia* and *Gunnera* interspersed with driftwood and large rocks. We had tea here and to show how late the season was, on the table there were fine arrangements of daffodils freshly picked from the garden.

We spent a whole day at Gardening Scotland on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Here there were nursery and garden displays, the usual stalls selling equipment, and plant stalls galore. The RHS Gardeners' Question Time marquee and a Craft Marquee gave a brief respite before plunging back into the plants.

We were glad to meet up with our Scottish Plant Heritage friends who had a promotional display stand.

It is a rule that David and I agree before going where there will be plants that we shall be very selective about what we buy, but there are so many wonderful plants that the temptation to over-buy cannot be squashed and we are now trying to find homes in the garden for them all.

So, what did we buy? Well, we started very quietly by buying a single plant at Mindrum: a white *Anemone*, probably *sylvestris*. In the garden there was a whole row of them alongside the house wall and they looked stunning. Then we went to Binny Plants - say no more! We bought another *Rodgersia* ('Cherry Blush') to add to our already too large collection, more *Hostas* ('Touch of Class' and 'Purple Heart'), more *Anemone nemerosa* ('Kentish Pink' and 'Bowles Purple') to put in the shady area, and another fern - *Osmunda regalis* var. *spectabilis*, our third *Osmunda* and our 31st fern. Some people don't know when to stop! We already have *Lamium orvala* which has rich claret flowers, but we spotted a white form, *Lamium orvala* 'Album'. *Sanguisorbas*, in which we found an interest a few years ago, seemed to call out to us too, but we decided to select just one, *S.* 'Pink Elephant'. In a similar way we bought another *Veronicastrum*, this time 'Red Arrows', and (another) *Epimedium* 'Alabaster'.

Keock Nursery was not open for our visit because they were at Gardening Scotland but there was a small selection



Portmore House, Eddleston

of plants at the house. We limited ourselves to *Primula waltonii*.

At Gardening Scotland we were spoilt for choice, but managed to restrict ourselves to three more Hostas: 'Lakeside Cha Cha' which we had lost the previous the winter, 'Paradise Island' and 'Risky Business'. We also bought four more ferns: another *Osmunda*,

O.regalis 'Japonicum', *Matteuccia orientalis*, *Woodwardia unigemata* and *Arachnoides davaliaeformis*. We went looking for a spectacular tree for a new bed so made a beeline for Bluebell Nurseries and after agonising over several we finally settled for *Cornus kousa* 'China Girl'. Then, I just had to have *Geum* 'Golden Joy' and *Anemone* x 'Andrea Atkinson' and.....

At Shepherd House there were no plants for sale but after talking to Sir Charles about the strange bulbs that he found in his potting shed, we were given two to play with. We think they are *Ornithogalum*.

We always remember gardens by the plants we get there. This trip provided some lovely memories - we just have to get the plants planted.

Marjorie Goodchild

FOR THE first time in my experience of Plant Heritage meetings, the tea and biscuits sat neglected until the rush for Simon Thompson's plant stall had died down. He had just recounted the setting up of Northern Ark Nursery in Longhorsley.

It wasn't easy. In 2004 he and Tracy bought a 3-acre field with planning permission for a market garden, keen to start their own nursery after working in public and private gardens for many years. "Growing plants is easy" says Simon, "it's everything else that's difficult". Both were still working full-time for the National Trust at Wallington, so every stage of nursery development had to fit round working hours.

The first steps were clear: rotivate two long strips, apply black plastic to kill the vegetation, and surround with netting sunk to a spade's depth to deter enterprising rabbits. More difficult to deal with were moles - and the authorities. Thus a car park and the entrance from the road had to be a minimum size and standard for public use, at huge cost. Common land sits between the road and the site, so they had to apply to and pay the Parish Council for the right to cross it. Necessities indeed, but a depressingly long way from the primary aim of growing their own plants from seed and cuttings.



Building a Northern Ark

Sadly, if predictably, as soon as they started planting, thieves started stealing. The couple, still in Netherwitton, realised they needed to live on-site but NCC wouldn't allow this. So they camped, using their home only for essentials like the washing machine - and water, which they had to transport to the fledgling nursery for stock plants that had gone in during a drought. A tap on a post was a major advance. Propagation could take off at this point, and new planting areas were developed as needed.

The nursery stands quite high and open on a slight north-facing slope, so is a good test for plants. Priorities therefore were a fenced area to shelter standing plants so that they didn't blow over, and a potting / storage shed. This wooden building, visually friendly, was built by Simon [he casually remarks that as a landscape gardener he is "used to doing stuff", but this man was still working full-time!]. The sales area then developed naturally around the shed; all plants are up on staging (built by Simon) to guard against rabbits and crawling pests, but it also suits buyers. At this point they retrieved stock from their home and lodgings in neighbours' gardens in Netherwitton, and the growing sequence from cell-tray to "saleable pot" was at last all on one site. Pots are topped with gravel to prevent lichen growth, and the standing-out bed has a base of gravel, sharp sand and a membrane which should last 15-20 years.

The final stage was to find a name. Tracy and Simon loved the idea of John Tradescant's museum, The Ark, and because of his horticultural significance, felt a Northern Ark was fitting. Open Day finally came in 2007, and suddenly there were "real customers", initially just at weekends, but now every day except Monday from 1st March to mid-October.

Domestic arrangements progressed from tent, to small caravan bought for £100, to bigger caravan. This and the nursery were powered by a bank of solar panels and latterly a small wind turbine. Clearly living permanently on site was essential to good stock management, and despite the restrictions, they were allowed to live there for three years while meeting the tests for a successful planning application, namely proving the need to live on-site, and that they had a viable business. Permission was finally obtained for an eco-friendly house built of Finnish logs (by Simon), which is almost complete.

To finance this, Simon still works full-time at Wallington, while Tracy is full-time at the nursery with one part-time helper. Chief emphasis is still on hardy perennials sold from the nursery, markets at Gibside, Hexham, Morpeth and Alnwick, and at plant fairs. However, Wallington's request, followed by Cragside and Lindisfarne, to stock their plant centres, was too good an opportunity to dismiss, though they ensure that "mass production" and wholesaling are never more than 50% of the



business. Successful growing now required a new irrigation system and a substantial polytunnel to allow controlled humidity, watering and increased efficiency. From an early decision to produce 50 of each plant, the couple now need as much of everything as possible. And to meet public interest, they source and grow many new and early varieties, including bulbs. Their environmental objectives are intact: to use peat-free compost, renewable energy, and to re-cycling everything possible, while presenting beautifully healthy plants, fully labelled, and displayed with a photograph of the mature plant accompanied by cultivation details.

Sales and appreciation hopefully justify the prodigiously hard work that Tracy and Simon have put into their venture. Long may they continue. For further details see www.northernarknursery.co.uk.

Suzanne Stanley

September Plant Fair at Blagdon

FORTUNATELY THE weather was largely fine for us at Blagdon (if you could stay out of the cold wind!). In the end more nurseries than we had been led to expect attended and with our own plant stall there was plenty for people to look through and purchase.

In the Clock House the home-made food (all supplied by members) was as tempting as ever. The plant crèche proved popular, freeing visitors to look at the gardens as well as buy more plants.

This year we managed to clear around £1,000 for PHNE use.

There was the usual core of members who are regular helpers at such events but more volunteers are always welcome.



Thinking ahead, we have decided to try a different time of year. We have opted for the time in July previously taken up by the Gateshead Flower Show, so Blagdon is already booked for **Sunday 27th July 2014**. Hopefully this will be a better time of year for the nurseries and more people will be inclined to buy more if more is in flower.

Guest Speaker - Toby Buckland

AT OUR ANNUAL Guest lecture on 19th October we were delighted to have Toby Buckland entertain and inform us on the subject of importing a touch of Chelsea into our own gardens. There'll be a full report in the spring "Newslines", but meanwhile over winter, when you're contemplating your spring and summer gardening



plans, remember what the Chelsea judges are looking for: quality of plants, good combinations of plants correctly spaced, overall texture, effective use of colour, and good craftsmanship in the hard landscaping and garden furniture (in its broadest sense). But note: 40% of their marks go to "scale of ambition". We might not all want a Diarmuid Gavin Vertical Garden on our plot (what would the neighbours think!), but the message is to think boldly and creatively within the scale of your garden.

There was a healthy turn-out of over 100 people – Plant Heritage and Hardy Plant Society members and the public – who gave Toby the welcome he deserved. And it was very good to see ex-Chairman Veronica Goulty (pictured here with David Goodchild and Toby Buckland) looking so well.

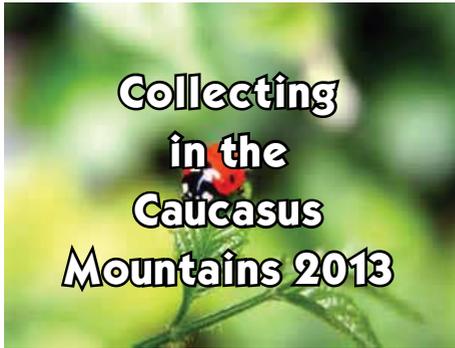
Suzanne Stanley

PHNE FACEBOOK ENTRY

The North East Group now has a Facebook page. This is a plea for everyone to "Like" it so that we can reach a wider audience. The address is given below. I intend to use it to advertise all our events, including the monthly meetings. So, it will be a good way for people to be reminded of what's coming up and to send on to all their Friends. Many thanks.

Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/PlantHeritageNE>

Jackie Latham, Programme Secretary, PHNE



WE'RE VERY fortunate to have Howick Garden and Arboretum on our doorstep, not least because far from being a "closed collection", it is still an actively growing site for conservation and research. Robert Jamieson, Head Gardener at Howick, was part of a joint plant hunting expedition in August to the northern side of the Caucasus Mountains in Russia with Neil McCheyne (Benmore Botanic Garden), Robert Unwin (RBG Edinburgh) and Andrew Luke (RBG Kew), organised by Gennady Firsov and Alexandra Volchanskaya from the Komorov Institute in St Petersburg. We're envious of the experience, and look forward to reports of the outcome.

Robert reports:

"The aim of the expedition was to collect alpine flora and woody material that we thought would be suitable to grow in the participating gardens. This was mainly seed, as well as herbarium specimens for Kew and Edinburgh and leaves in silica gel for DNA analysis in Edinburgh.

We flew to Mineralnye Vody on the edge of the Caucasus Mountains and met up with Dimitri Shilnikov who worked at the Pyatigorsk Research Station, a

satellite of the Komorov Institute. He is an expert on the flora of the mountains and was our guide for the trip. It was a three hour journey from Pyatigorsk to Elbrus Ski Village where we spent the first couple of nights in 'The House of Friends'; contrary to the name, the staff were not too friendly and seemed to think that the louder they shouted the more chance there was of us understanding Russian.

The first day's collecting was on Mt Elbrus which at 5,642m is the highest mountain in Russia. We went up to 3,400m, just below the start of the glaciers and the permanent snow line, where we managed to find a few alpinists growing in the crevices among the boulders and on scree. These included *Saxifraga exarata* and *S. scleropoda*, *Draba bryoides* and *Senecio caucasigena*. We spent about an hour here but had to cut our collecting short as it started to rain followed by thunder and lightning, so it was felt we would be better to go down the mountain a little where hopefully it wouldn't be quite as bad. Gennady decided we should take the ski lift, which to me didn't seem to be the safest option with lightning in the air, but we were assured we would be safe and did make it alright to the lower station. We were now at 2,900m with the occasional alpine meadow where we found *Campanula collina*, *Gentianella caucasica*, *Primula algida* and *Primula elatior ssp. Meyeri*, all with good seed, so with these plus others we made 13 collections. There were also many Gentians and an unknown Scabious flowering, but as yet they had no seed on them so we hoped to come across them again later in the trip. Back

down in the valley we made one more stop for collecting in the woodland alongside the road where the main tree species were *Pinus sylvestris* var. *hamata*, *Betula pendula* and *Sorbus aucuparia*. We also collected three different roses, *Prunus padus* and a couple of *Ribes*, all a good start to the collecting. Back at base for the night, we sorted seeds, notes and herbarium specimens before dinner. On the whole we were well fed throughout the trip, the main meal generally being salad, soup and then meat and potatoes; the accommodation was clean and reasonably comfortable.



Robert
collecting

the way. We started off in areas with *Juniper communis* ssp. *communis*, *Rhododendron caucasicum*, *Daphne glomerata* and *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, then passed through meadows of grasses, *Geranium gymnocaulon*, *Aconitum cymbulatum*, *Campanula latifolia*, *Lilium kesselringii* and *Astrantia maxima* before reaching woodland with *Betula pendula*, *Pinus sylvestris* var. *hamata*, *Sorbus aucuparia* and *Acer heldriechii* ssp. *trautvetteri*.

For the next two weeks we visited valleys and mountains in mixed weather, but were only stopped from visiting one mountain when we woke up to find that it had snowed overnight down to 1500m. We were therefore unable to collect there and headed to a different valley nearby for the day. In all we made just over 200 collections which were split between the three institutions, so it will be interesting to see how they germinate and grow in the different gardens. We made some good contacts which hopefully will enable us to arrange more expeditions to different parts of Russia in the future."

Robert Jamieson
(including photos)



Lilium kesselringii in front of Mt Cheget

The next day we visited Mt Cheget on the other side of the Baksan valley from Mt Elbrus, and this was to be our most productive site with 27 collections on one day. We went up to 2,750m and spent the rest of the day wandering back down to the valley collecting on

Garden Party 2013



THE PURPOSE of the Group's Annual Garden Party is at least two-fold. It is a social occasion for members to meet each other in a relaxed atmosphere outside the monthly meeting. It is also an opportunity to visit members' gardens which are so very different from each other. We have been to large and small gardens and each was well worth the visit.

This year Dianne and David Nichol-Brown hosted the party at Trimdon Grange (Co. Durham). As an end house it has gardens on three sides but is split into smaller areas of differing sizes.

This is the home of the National Collections of Polemonium, Collomia, Gilia and Leptodactylon and these are displayed in beds and troughs with stock beds on the adjacent allotment.

July was the ideal time to see Polemonium at their best. By the house there are two beds dedicated to them. One is a species bed of blue Polemoniums from around the world. The other is a bed of cultivars in shades of pink, white and lavender. Central to each bed is a specimen tree and the small pink and white bed was well complemented by the white bark of *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*. Dianne served a long term as NE Group Secretary and this tree was a gift of appreciation.

There are smaller enclosed areas paved or floored with bark or gravel where there are alpines. The secret garden on the other side of the house is quite sheltered and holds in the almost overwhelming scent of *Philadelphus coronarius* and *Cytisus battandieri*, the pineapple-scented shrub. Both were in full flower. The allotment had all the usual vegetables and fruit but it was the Polemonium stock beds that caught everyone's eye. By chance Dianne had chosen a hot sunny day (and yes, it was the Gentlemen's Singles Final at Wimbledon). Those who came agreed it was nice to find so many quiet corners to sit and enjoy the plants, the company and the tea.

David Goodchild

Guardians

The Plant Guardians Scheme records plants which are assessed as Threatened under the Threatened Plants Project or by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and which are conserved by members in small numbers in their gardens. These plants are listed on the PH website.

Become a Plant Guardian - If you are interested in obtaining material of a particular plant, please contact National HQ to be given the contact details of the Plant Guardian in question. There is no obligation for the Plant Guardian to supply plant material. To be a Plant Guardian you need to be a member of Plant Heritage. If you are not already a member, please consider joining now.

Thorp Perrow

OUR THANKS to Irene Bosomworth who initiated and very successfully organised a one-day visit to Thorp Perrow, near Bedale, on 22nd October. This 85-acre arboretum, owned and managed by Sir John Ropner, is one of the finest private collections of trees and shrubs in the UK, including “some of the largest and rarest” as Irene points out. There are National Collections of Juglans, Quercus, Fraxinus, Tilia and Cotinus.

The party stopped first at the Lakeside Country Café at Scorton and the adjacent Green Frog Garden Shop. Val Giles reports “First of all I have to say the scones at the Lakeside were wonderful! The small nursery had a bit of everything: annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees (and winter hanging baskets made-to-order if you’re so inclined). There was an aroma of septic tank being emptied during our visit, but otherwise it is to be recommended”. We gather that plants were purchased.

Of Thorp Perrow she reports that Curator Faith Douglas’s guided tour in the afternoon “was entertaining and interesting; she’s very knowledgeable about her trees. There wasn’t yet full autumn colour, but Cotinus and Acers were colouring up”, and Irene comments on the “conkers just waiting to be picked!”. Val has also discovered that her *Cornus controversa* ‘Variegata’ (the Wedding Cake Tree) needs at least another 10 years of tlc to match the specimen at Thorp Perrow. Irene thought “the lunchtime falconry flying display was worth seeing even if Colin the owl didn’t really want to fly due to the wet weather. Colin’s very odd waddle of a walk made you smile”.

Both felt that it was an excellent visit and Thorp Perrow is well worth repeat visits at different seasons.



Photo: Jackie Latham

North East National Collections Open Days

IN THE North East 13 Collection Holders have 17 National Collections. One of the responsibilities of being a collection holder is to make it accessible to the public, either on open days or by appointment.

This year was the 35th anniversary of Plant Heritage so 35 National Collections were especially opened to commemorate it. One of these gardens was in the North East Region - the Goodchild's Potentilla (herbaceous) collection.

This year the region's Collections Open Days were as follows:

31st March - 1st April: Corydalis - Brian Whitton, 74 Archery Rise, Durham.

26th May & 25th August: Polemoniums – Dianne & David Nichol-Brown, 28 Sunnyside Terrace, Trimdon Grange, Trimdon Station.

16th June: Potentillas (herbaceous) - David & Marjorie Goodchild, 66 Darras Road, Ponteland.

30th June: Sedums - Ray Stephenson, 8 Percy Gardens, Choppington, Northumberland.

Ray reported that rain threatened, but the day was warm & windy. About 50 visitors attended.

The following collections can be seen whenever the properties are open:

Iris series spuriae at Belsay Hall NE20 0DX.

Fagus at Kirkley Hall NE20 0AQ.

Sorbus at Houghall East Durham College DH1 3SG.

Centaurea at Bide-a-Wee Cottage, Stanton NE65 8PR.

Acer, Alnus and **Sorbus** at Blagdon, Seaton Burn NE13 6DB.

Propagation Day



Photo: Marjorie Goodchild

On Tuesday 15th October David Goodchild hosted another of his excellent sessions in his Ponteland garden. Using material from David's or their own gardens, members were given a chance to find out how to carry out propagation of various plants. The photograph shows the hard work in progress, which was sustained by a pooled picnic lunch.

We Can Make A Difference

Plant Heritage (also known as National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens - NCCPG) is a registered charity. Its aims are to encourage the propagation and conservation of cultivated plants in the UK through the National Plant Collections and the Threatened Plant Project. Keen amateur and professional gardeners contribute alongside botanists, horticulturalists and conservationists. Our friendly local group, Plant Heritage North East, was formed in 1978 and has a programme of lectures, plant sales, garden visits and publications. Visit www.plantheritage.com and follow the links for more information.



Heloniopsis orientalis

If you're reading this as a non-member, why not join and help secure the future of our garden plants? Plant Heritage membership automatically gives you local group membership, so you receive the benefits of both.

Membership starts at £28/pa for an individual (£15 for students). You can join online, download a form to complete, ring HQ on 01483 447 540 or contact our local Membership Secretary on 01912 666 635.



Fritillaria meleagris

Programme 2013 – 14

- 9th November** Martin Walker: "The National Collections of the City of Leeds."
- 7th December** Christmas Meeting including Lord Howick: "Plant Hunting."
- 2014**
- 11th January** NE Group AGM, plus a short talk by Ray Stephenson.
- 8th February** John Ellis: "Gardening at Wallington."
- 8th March** Val Corbett shows some of her favourite gardens from around the country and gives tips on their photography. She will have some of her wonderful books for sale too.
- 12th April** Dr Colin Scrutton (Durham University): "Orchid pollination by sexual deception."
- Early May** Trip to RHS Malvern Spring Gardening Show (to be decided).
- 17th May** Dr Kirsten Wolff (Newcastle University): "DNA profiling of rare plant collections: implications for *Hesperantha* (*Schizostylis*) and *Tilia* (lime trees)."
- 8th June** Great North Plant Sale, Kirkley Hall .
- July** (date tbc) Annual Garden Party (venue tbc).
- 27th July** Great North Plant Fair, Blagdon Hall.
- 11th October** Vicky Fox (Plantago): "A passion for Heucheras." There will be plants for sale.
- 8th November** John Richards: "Alpines of Szechuan Province."
- 13th December** Christmas Meeting.