

THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY CENTRAL SUSSEX GROUP



NEWSLETTER



OCTOBER 2008

KATIE PRICE – KEW'S ALPINE HOUSE & WOODLAND GARDEN

Katie was appointed to take charge of the alpine house and woodland garden as the alpine house was being built and it was therefore both a great opportunity and a terrifying experience. A major part of Kew's obligation was to hold a national reference collection (there are 19 major collections) and to cover as many families as possible from all over the globe.

There has been an alpine house at Kew since 1887 (with two extensions), closed in 1981 with a second in the late 70s (203/23). There were air flow problems requiring the removal of plants to



Illustration 1: Kew's alpine house John Humphries 2 December 2006 AGS Website

the nursery from time to time, noisy fans had to be installed to keep the air moving, and the only shading was a layer of whitewash on the glass; moreover its out-of-the-way location was never much of a visitor attraction. So it was decided in 2004 to build a third at the north end of the rock garden; it was opened to the public on 11 March 2007. The 2006 RIBA Award winning landmark building, designed by twice-Stirling Prize winning architects Wilkinson Eyre reflects the same architects design for the 2002 Gateshead Millennium Bridge which spans the river Tyne in Gateshead. The Davies Alpine House's shape and geometry have been designed to create the complex environmental conditions necessary for alpine growth through passive means, providing a sustainable, energy-efficient growing environment for the plants. Two back-to-back 'twin arches' create the height required to draw warm air out of the building, despite its footprint of just 144m² squared. The use of low iron glass gives a 90% light transmission rather than standard 60% glass. An innovative shading solution, developed

using yacht technology and based on a fan-like form similar to a peacock's tail, will keep summer temperatures at the required levels. Below ground, air is cooled in a labyrinth (air plenum chamber) within a double concrete slab, inspired by the natural cooling strategy utilised in termite ant nests. This cooled air is then re-circulated around the perimeter of the house and onto the low level plants. We were shown various stages in its construction and its use to house plants in West Sussex



Illustration 2: John Humphries May 2006 AGS Website

sandstone and on benches. Substantial growth has been possible from planting since November 2005. Among the plants shown were the rarely grown cushion *Petunia patagonica* (302/461),



Illustration 3: Kew's alpine house January 2006
John Humphries AGS Website



Illustration 4 *Corydalis tomentella* (L) *Centaurea clemente* (R) Richard Wilford 9 May 2008 AGS Web



Illustration 5: *Petunia patagonica* Richard Wilford 9 May 2008 AGS Website



Illustration 6: Kew's alpine house September 2006
John Humphries AGS Website

Primula verticillata (255/36) from Saudi Arabia, *P. poluninii*, *P. scotica* (2787/355, 295/78), *Ranunculus alpestris* (65/146) struggling in the alpine house, but superb in the Schatten Garden south of Munich, *Paeonia clusii* (265/355, 284/198) which is easily damaged by spring rain, *Cyclamen graecum* (61/133, 65/222, 66/247, 72/277, 380), *Oreganum dictamnus* (42/293) which also grows outside in spite of its grey foliage, pale pink flowered *Incarvillea arguta* (170/260, 324, 73/51), *Amorphophallus kiusianum* (44/74), *Lilium speciosum* v. *clivorum* which needs baking, *Helichrysum eruae*, purple flowered and felted grey foliage, *Mutisia decurrens* (62/259, 260, 265, 345, 66/234) with recurved petals, *Calceolaria uniflora* which flowers itself to death in two years, *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* (253/273, (295/7) recently re-discovered in the wild and happy growing outside in Northern Ireland, *Calochortus tolmei* (238/342, 259/84, 265/282) the "pussy ears" of the western USA, *C. catalinae* (260/188) and *Androsace hirtella* (256/209, 287/67) Crevice planting is a feature and a tufa wall has been constructed from the destruction of a feature at London's Barbican in which New Zealanders are doing well. *Alrawia bellis* has remained in the remained in the same pot since 1962 and has never split.

The key to the woodland garden is soil management with leaf mould for planting and critical timing for mulching – wait for rain or irrigate before. It is too hot and dry for *Meconopsis*, but even so moisture loving *Primulas* do well. *Littonia modesta* is a yellow to tangerine flowered *Colchicum* relative, while *Calanthe striata* (258/371, 278/440) a yellow to bronze flowered Japanese sub-alpine woodlander suffered from a late frost in its second year. Among shrubs *Mahonia japonica*, *Camellia japonica*, the very early flowering *Rhododendron praevernum* and *Lapegeria rosea* which does very well on a wall. *Galanthus nivalis* needs irrigation more and more.. *Erythroniums* are good, but the bulbs need to be refrigerated. *Tricyrtis latifolius* is self seeding everywhere and New Zealanders are being planted in three areas for insurance purposes. Among the casualties over the past three years has been *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, the 'Snake Bark' *Acer pennsylvanicum*, *Herocallis x intermedia*,

Bletilla ochraeus and the lovely *Meconopsis integrifolia* (276 – incorrectly named 275/162, 289/263) whose seed pods were stolen. There were photos of the nursery and frames with cushions kept in clays in a sand plunge and a reminder of Katie's predecessor Tony Hall among his Junos and Oncos. A full record is kept of all the plants.

Finally a look at some of the woodland plants in flower during the year. As its specific names suggests, *Rhododendron praevernum* produces its bell-shaped flowers as early as January. In flower in February, *Chinodoxa siehi* (182/314, 186/272) often regarded as the best of the genus and *Bergenia crassifolia* v. *pacifica*, a more compact form of the species. In March and earlier than its native land, the spectacular *Fritillaria imperialis* - if only we could grow it in the same numbers we have seen it in Iran and *Erythronium californicum* (241/228, 273/309, 315) which has done well over the past two years. May brings Kew (ex- Robin White) *Epimedium pubigerum sempervirens*, a mountain woodlander from W.Asia and S.E. Europe, white flowered *Jeffersonia diphylla* (218/362), so unlike its shrubby members of the Berberidaceae and the Handkerchief Tree *Davidia involucra* v. *vilmoriana* the most commonly form grown. Into June with *Arisaema tortuosum* (245/266), *Roscoeia humeana* (231/25, 275/97, 98) and *Clematis koreana* with small, drooping white to purple bell shaped flowers. July brings the long stalked lanterns of *Crinodendron hookerianum*, *Hydrangea aspera* and at ground level *Epipactis palustris* (195/26). In August *Lilium henryi* a Chinese species with pendulous dark-spotted orange flowers, *Actea pachypoda* the white Baneberry with its white fruits on stalks; also a member of the Rununculus family is *Cimicifuga arizonica*. In September the Ginger *Hedychium densiflorum* from the eastern Himalaya with coral-red flowers. *Clematis heracleiofolia* and the fruit of a Chinese woody climber *Sinofranchetia sinense* appears in October. Autumn interest produces the foliage colouring of a cross between the Western and Eastern Dogwoods, *Cornus nuttallii* x *C. florida* and December the seed heads of *Cardiocrinum*.

Alpines at Kew remain in good hands with Katie – another enthusiastic curator.

There is a short piece on the new alpine house with photos in 304/134

For more of the Kew alpine house photos of John Humphries and Richard Wilford, go to the the AGS web site, enter the members online discussion and follow the links to their names.

RM

INGWERSEN'S BIRCH FARM NURSERY - THE END OF AN ERA

Sadly after 81 years trading the nursery will be closing on 1st November. Paul has been persuaded that at 77 he should retire. As there is no-one in the family to take over the reins he had been trying, through the year, to sell the business as a going concern but without success.

Both Paul and Mary have supported the Group since the beginning (as did Will earlier on) and we held our first of many local shows at the nursery. They, Martin, Michael and the nursery will be missed by many, but hopefully we shall continue to see them. A history of the nursery appeared in the AGS Bulletin 229/220.

There will be an auction sale of all the remaining growing stock, both 9cm retail plants and 3, 5 and 7.5 litre show plants. Plus all the trappings of a working nursery, including seed trays, pots, nursery trucks, various glasshouses, polythene and shade tunnels, office equipment and vehicles. This will take place on Saturday 1st November 2008 at the nursery, beginning at 10 a.m. If you would like to receive a catalogue please email your name and full postal address and one sent will be sent to you.

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ERNA FRANK 1918 - 2008

You will be saddened to learn of the recent death of Erna, one of the longest standing members of our group. She will be remembered not only for the talks she gave on her travels with Ronald (to the Middle East - visiting Turkey 26 times (!), the last in May 2005, Austria, the Dolomites, Greece, Syria, Mongolia and the States), for her expertise in growing alpines, the annual occasions she hosted Group visits to her lovely house and garden, for being a founder member of the Fritillaria Group and for her great interest in Cyclamen, in which with Ronald she found new species and for her translation into English of Hildebrand's monograph of the genus.

What is less known was her great love of music. She taught piano at Mary Datchelor Girls School and Phillipa Fawcett College, sung with the London Bach Society refining the choir's German pronunciation, became the pianist of the Benthien Quartet (recording for BBC3) and in later years forming a trio with friends. Her special loves were for Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert and Schumann. The funeral service on 29th September opened with a Bach Choral Suite, followed by Schumann's Der Lindenbaum sung by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and ended with part of Brahms's 2nd Piano Concerto, the first three notes of which were sung or whistled to summon each other from the garden.

Erna survived the devastation of Hamburg and the family home, met Ronald while he was stationed there feeding her with army rations and found they had a mutual interest in music. They were married on coming to London in 1951, some of us celebrating their 50th anniversary at Candenza. Erna enjoyed living, but railed against becoming old and would usually add, "it's not on". She and Ronald were inseparable, becoming increasingly lost after his death and she could only look forward to the time they might be reunited,

KEITH MOORHOUSE

Congratulations to Keith on his Local Group Award – much deserved for his dedication to alpines, two local groups and the AGS Society. If you haven't read the citation, it is in the last Alpine News, September 2008.

MEETING 18 OCTOBER JOHN HUGHES – ALPINES OF CHILLAN

Another opportunity to enjoy some super and often unusual plants.

