

May 2013

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## February: Sarah Cook

By Jackie Collings

February's talk was given by Sarah Cook - a former Head Gardener at Sissinghurst who now lives in her native Suffolk and tends the national collection of the irises originally bred by the artist and plantsman Sir Cedric Morris. (See page 4 for details of a special open day.)

Sarah bubbled with enthusiasm over her collection of the Sir Cedric Morris bearded iris she obviously loves. I couldn't get over the lengths she goes to in researching the authenticity of these irises. She is clearly an expert in a highly specialised field, but she also knows how to entertain an audience. The humorous asides to her husband Jim, together with snippets of gossip about Sir Cedric and the 'colourful' creators of Sissinghurst - Harold Nicolson and Vita Sackville-West - added greatly to the evening's entertainment.



Sarah Cook waxes lyrical over Sir Cedric Morris irises.

I have visited Sarah's iris collection at Shelley, near Hadleigh. It is not easy to find their rural village so Sat Nav is advised. (Postcode = IP7 5RE) The timing of the open days is crucial as a large proportion of the garden is obviously dedicated to the iris. The vast display of irises is beautiful and they are all clearly labelled to help you buy! (I can also recommend a visit to Helmingham Hall plant days in May and September. All the specialist nurseries in one place, a plantsperson's dream and also an opportunity to explore the Hall's gardens.)

As I love plants, enthusiasm and gossip, I thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Jackie

## March: John Hewson

By Sheila Hilton and George Bethell

For the March meeting, nearly 50 people packed the Village Hall to hear John Hewson speak about the plant he referred to as 'the Queen of Annuals' - the Sweet Pea. John started with an overview of the plant's history from the arrival of the first seeds in 1699, through the work of Henry Eckford (1823-1905) who gave us the Grandiflora types, then the discovery of a particularly attractive mutant plant in the gardens of the Earl of Spencer which gave rise to the much loved Spencer varieties, and finally to the more recent work of the sweet pea specialist William Unwin.

John then moved on to the question that most of the audience, we suspect, had come to hear answered: 'How do we grow masses of big, fragrant blooms on long stalks?' At first he reassured us that sweet peas are '*not difficult plants*' but as he described the care, attention and effort that he lavishes on them, we realised that he may have been somewhat economical with the truth!

He plants seeds in October taking care to drench with fungicide and restrict watering to prevent damping off. He then wages war against the mice that seem to find sweet peas irresistible. Planting out early in the year, John protects the young plants against slugs and strong winds. But the most outstanding of his Herculean tasks are the preparation of long, deep beds laced with bone meal, and the construction of a sturdy support system - 4" posts at the end of a row, with 7' canes planted 3' apart and covered with netting! And that's before the never-ending chores of watering copiously, keeping greenfly under control and snipping off seed pods.

John's enthusiasm for sweet peas was clear, but we're not sure many in the audience left believing that they are truly 'easy'. It will be interesting to see how many of the sweet pea seeds given to members - courtesy of Thompson and Morgan - finish up in lovingly prepared beds and how many are consigned to pots and forced to grow up inadequate obelisks!

Sheila and George



Selected members of the audience get John's attention.

Sarah Cook on the web:

Information, contact and plant orders at:  
<http://www.malmaisonsandiris.co.uk/#>

National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG) <http://www.nccpgsuffolk.org/#/iris/4532888128>

## April: Jeremy Pratt on Alpines

By George Bethell

Jeremy Pratt is Secretary of the Alpine Garden Society's Ipswich Group and is clearly addicted to these small but beautifully formed plants. He started the evening with a short guide to growing alpines successfully. The goal, he explained, is to replicate the harsh conditions that the plants enjoy in their natural habitats including rocky crevasses, high altitude meadows and scree beds. In addition, the grower needs to provide cold, dry winter conditions followed by sufficient water from the spring onwards. Jeremy showed that the rewards can be spectacular - saxifrages, fritillaries, gentians and orchids to name but a few.



Jeremy and a magnificent display of *Pleiones*

The second part of the talk was entitled 'Alpines Around the World' and took the form of a slide show of images captured by Jeremy and his wife Angela as they have travelled around.

We were treated to stunning photographs of plants from: Italy, Chile, Tanzania, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Ecuador, South Africa, Lesotho, Crete and Morocco,

One of the key messages was that wherever you go you will find alpines - provided you are prepared to negotiate never-ending hairpin bends, scale rocky crags and endure strong winds from the Antarctic!

### The wisdom of Jeremy #1

"If you want to grow alpines... move out of East Anglia!"

### The wisdom of Jeremy #2

"Kissing's not in season when the gorse is not in flower."



A quiz to prove you know your irises.  
(Answers at foot of page 4.)

- 1: Which of the following is a type of Iris?  
A bald      B bearded      C bristled
- 2: In Greek mythology, with what symbol is the goddess Iris associated?  
A rainbow      B owl      C moon
- 3: Which of the following was written by Iris Murdoch ?  
A The Sea, the Sea  
B The Handmaid's Tale  
C The Golden Notebook
- 4: Who painted these irises?



- A Paul Gauguin    B Vincent van Gogh    C Claude Monet

- 5: In *Iris reticulata*, what is the meaning of the species name '*reticulata*'?  
A The petals curve backwards.  
B The leaves have a ribbed structure.  
C The bulbs look like they are covered by a net.
- 6: In which Shakespeare play does the goddess Iris appear at Prospero's betrothal masque?  
A The Merry Wives of Windsor  
B The Winter's Tale  
C The Tempest

### What's the plural?

#### Iris or Irises?

Either. The plural can be 'iris' as in 'I've been growing iris for 20 years.' or 'irises' as in 'My favourite alpines are the miniature irises.' You could even use the technically correct term 'irides', but that may be too pretentious... even for Battsford!



## Cup Cake Preview

Last December, Jackie Collings led a workshop, organised by Linda Clark, in which she showed participants how to make Christmas wreaths and table decorations. The event was so successful that Linda immediately booked Jackie for a repeat performance to be held in December this year. However, it appears that twelve months was too long for some to wait so Linda is organising a 'Summer Floral Display Workshop' on Saturday 1st June at which Jackie will show her acolytes how to make a 'cup cake display'.

Just to show what's on offer, two beautiful examples were given as prizes in the April meeting's raffle.



*Daphne and Denise show off the cup cake creations and, below, a close-up.*



For further information, see 'Coming Events' opposite.

*Proceeds from the April raffle were donated to the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) charity supported by Paul Hansord. The generosity of members meant that the Club's contribution from the evening was a magnificent £100.*

## Coming Events

### Friday 3rd May: Visit to Rod Leeds' Garden

Back in September 2012, Rod spoke to a Club meeting about bulbs. He has now kindly invited us to look around his garden at Preston St. Mary on Friday 3rd May from around 6:30 pm. The cost is £5 including tea and cake. *If you want to go, please let Bill know as soon as possible so Rod knows how many to cater for.*

For drivers the directions are.... Chestnuts, Whelp Street, Preston St. Mary, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 9NL. This is on the Brent Eleigh Lane out of Preston St Mary to the south west. Parking is around the corner towards Brent Eleigh on the left hand verge.

### Monday 13th May: Tour of Ickworth's Gardens

Tour of the National Trust's Ickworth gardens with Sean Reid. Meet at Battsford Community Centre at 5.45pm or be at the gardens by 6.30pm. Cost £3



Photo © Anthony Hammond

### Saturday 1st June: Summer Floral Display Workshop

Jackie Collings will be introducing 'Cup cakes with a difference'. (See opposite.) The workshop will be in Battsford Village Hall from 10.00 am till noon. The price of £6 includes two, 12cm cup cake cases with oasis, and tea/coffee. There will also be a small raffle.

Please bring secateurs or scissors, a small selection of foliage including flowering shrubs, and a bunch of flowers, e.g. spray carnations, freesias or small flowers from the garden. This is sure to be very popular so if you are interested don't delay - contact Linda Clark on 01449 775193 or e-mail her at lindaclark55@btinternet.com.

### Monday 3rd June: Club BBQ

Club BBQ at Field Cottage, Straight Road, Battsford (opposite the Community Centre) by kind permission of Caroline and Denis Wicking. Please note 7:00 pm start.

### Monday 1st July: Trip to Green Farmhouse

Trip to Green Farmhouse, Shelland, Stowmarket IP14 3JE. Meet at Battsford Community Centre 6.30pm or there by 7.00pm. £5 including tea and cake.

### Saturday 6th July: BDGC 6th Annual Show

This year's show will be on Saturday 6th July and we hope that all members will be able to exhibit in one, more or all of the classes. Don't forget that it's meant to be for fun and the exhibits undoubtedly give pleasure to the Fete's visitors. Show schedules are expected any day now but the list of classes is already available on the '2013 Horticultural Show' page of the website: <http://www.battsfordgardeningclub.org.uk/>

The late arrival of spring may mean that we'll be hard pressed to produce anything decent for some of the flower and vegetable classes so enter what you can and please consider the cookery, art and craft classes too!

## Other events...

### Saturday 18th May: Open Garden

New member Judith Thompson invites you to an open garden at Danecroft Cottage Garden off Beaumont Way, Stowmarket IP14 1PZ. on Saturday 18th May from 2-5 pm. Funds raised go to *Cogwheel Trust* - a charity caring for children in Uganda. Attractions include 'Make and Bake', Plant Sale and refreshments. Tickets on the day at £2 for adults and 50p for children.

### Saturday 1st June: Iris Open Day

Sarah Cook's collection of Sir Cedric Morris Irises will be open from 11 am to 4 pm. All donations in aid of Plant Heritage. Hullwood Barn, Bolton Lane, Shelley IP7 5RE.

### Sunday 16th June: Hidden Gardens of Bury

From 11 am to 5 pm, gardens in the historic town centre will be open in aid of the St Nicholas Hospice. Admission is by programme available on the day, from 10:30 on The Angel Hill. Suggested donation: £5

### Wednesday 19th June: Visit to Sandringham

Rattlesden Garden Club has arranged a coach trip to Sandringham to visit the house, garden and museum and has extended an invitation to BDGC members to join them! The cost for coach and all entrance charges is £17.50 per person. If interested please contact Brian Balaam on 01449 736374 or e-mail him at brian.di@btinternet.com



### Sunday 21st July: Combs Open Gardens

From 11 am to 4 pm, three gardens will be open in Park Road, Combs in aid of Muscular Dystrophy. The gardens are: 'Woodstock', Park Road, Combs IP14 2JS where Jackie Collings' miniature houses will be on show, plus a plant stall; 'Hedges' next door, where Sue will be selling her delicious home made pasties, cakes etc.; and, 'Trickers Green Farm' (first house down Jacks Lane) where refreshments will be available. Entrance to all three gardens just £3.

## Contributions to the Newsletter

If you would like to submit something for inclusion in a future newsletter, please don't hold back! Offers and/or submissions to George via e-mail [bethell.george@gmail.com] or by snail-mail to: Stone Croft, Valley Road, Stowmarket, IP14 2HH.

## Miscellany...

### Community Service

As most of you will know, the Gardening Club has been involved with maintenance of the gardens at the Punchbowl since it reopened a couple of years ago. This will continue this year so once again Bill is looking for volunteers to go on to a weekly rota for watering and weeding. If you are able help at all please let Bill know on 01449 672168 or send him an e-mail on wbaldry@btinternet.com.

### Recommended Garden: Hindringham Hall

Jackie Collings recommends a visit to Hindringham Hall in North Norfolk. The Hall, surrounded by a 12th century moat, offers beautifully maintained gardens. This year the gardens are open on Wednesdays from 27th March till 9th October. Opening hours are from 10 am to 2 pm. Admission is £6. For full details, check out their website.



### T&M Go Large...

Earlier this year, Thompson and Morgan paid a record €200 (£168) for a single pumpkin seed. As you can see from the photo, it's a bit of a giant and that's not surprising given that it came from a champion pumpkin that weighed in at a massive 911 kg (2,009 lb). If you want to try to grow your own giant pumpkin but don't have Paul Hansord's deep pockets, T&M offers two seeds of 'Paton Twins Giant' for £9.99. But beware, the spread of the plant is about 4 m (13 feet) and the fruit can weigh over 500 kg (1100 lb) - that's a lot of pumpkin soup! For more sensible fruits try 'Jack of All Trades'. (10 seeds for £1.99)

20 p



£ 168

### Brain Teasels Answers

1: B  
2: A  
3: A  
4: B  
5: C  
6: C