

## Meconopsis at Branklyn Garden: - Jim Jermyn

Jim began by saying he was a little nervous about giving a talk relative to the nomenclature after the talk by Geoff Hill, the registrar for ICRA, who will be looking carefully at the names. He stated it is a great privilege to be looking after Branklyn following Steve McNamara and Bob Mitchell before. Steve did a wonderful job looking after the legacy of the Rentons. Having gardened in Hertfordshire, Berwickshire and East Lothian, Jim said that Perthshire beats the lot and he was beginning to wonder what can't be grown here having been at Branklyn a year.

The Rentons constructed their house and property in the early 1920s. They unselfishly designed the garden so that it could be appreciated by many generations both now and in the future.



One of the features in the garden were the big blue poppies. We want to make sure we develop the Collection.



Meconopsis Alley (above) featuring *Meconopsis* 'Dorothy Renton', (right), is spectacular. This is a beautiful cultivar, one of the early raisings by the Rentons.

We have 35 volunteers at Branklyn, one of whom is in charge of the bonfires. When I first arrived I noticed he was spreading his wood ash onto the compost which we were then shredding in the compost area and sterilising before it went on the ground. An article in the RHS journal indicated that wood ash can affect pH and bring it up to 11. Possibly this could affect the coloration of the poppies at Branklyn, so I have been trying to lower the pH in Meconopsis Alley.

Some of my favourite plants are dotted amongst the meconopsis. These include the highly scented *Magnolia wilsonii*.

In the exhibition bed facing the entrance to the garden are plants important to Perthshire. One is *Meconopsis* 'Keillour' AGM from Keillour Castle where beds of the original Keillour, along with MG52 (*Meconopsis* 'James Aitken'-a similar cultivar), can still be seen, although the property is in private hands. Jim commented that he noticed similarities between the foliage of *M. grandis* taken at Arunachal Pradesh by Ann Chambers and *M. 'Keillour'*.

*M. 'Mrs Jebb'* AGM is one of our visitor's favourite plants, distributed by Margaret and Henry Taylor who got it from Mollie Sanderson in Northern Ireland. It is the best form derived from the once fertile *M. 'Crewdson Hybrid'*. Another fine plant in the garden is *M. 'Willie Duncan'* named after Willie who raised it from SRGC *M. grandis* seed. Jim recounted that they once received a packet of seed from this plant but destroyed it since the true clone can only be raised by division.

Of the many well know visitors to the garden is Peter Cox an authority on rhododendrons but who also loves meconopsis. One of his favourite spots is in front of *M. 'Susan's Reward'* AGM, a member of the George Sherriff Group.



Jim then told the Group about a meeting between Sir George Taylor, Alex Duguid at Edrom Nurseries in 1979, at which he was present, where Sir George Taylor said that on the last expedition of Ludlow and Sherriff, the collectors were getting lazy and instead of climbing the mountain to collect seeds, they went to instead to the yak herder's enclosures and sent back seeds from the plants there. Are the plants we are growing now not really from species? Perhaps DNA work will answer this question.

In George Taylors monograph is a photograph of a stand of *M. grandis* planted at RBGE, collected from the dwellings of shepherds.

A plant associated with Branklyn is *M. 'Stewart Annand'* named after the first National Trust Gardener there. It is similar to two other meconopsis emanating from the garden *M. 'Dorothy Renton'* and *M. 'Mervyn Kessel'* but is taller and flowers later. *Meconopsis 'Mop-head'* AGM selected by Liz Young started to flower towards the end of April and continued through to May. Its enormous flowers made it the most photographed plant in the garden.

One of Jim's favourite plants is *Philadelphus delavayi* with its maroon scented calyx. He also loves the variety of primulas there, the late flowering *Trillium vaseyi*, and *Rhododendron wardii*, collected by Ludlow and Sherriff which flowers profusely. He said that maintaining the collection of the many species found at Branklyn is very important



People are generous in presenting plant material to Branklyn. These include the finest of the yellow-flowered meconopsis, the monocarpic *M. sulphurea* from Peter Cox, *M x cookei* 'Old Rose' from Leslie Drummond and the red *M. 'Sichuan Silk'* from Ian Christie. There are plants with just MG (Meconopsis Group) numbers. One is MG 100 which came from Keillour and was given to Evelyn Stevens by the gardener there. It is a plant worthy of a name. It is possible it is *M x Finlayorum*, a deliberately created hybrid, but there are differing views on this.

*Meconopsis 'Lingholm'* is of course present in the garden but some of the forms are inferior plants. Jim intends in future to only have plants which come from Dr Roger Nelson who has been selecting the best forms from the original plants that arose in his family garden in Cumbria. A name for a purple flowered form of *M. 'Lingholm'* found at Branklyn has been proposed but it seems that that the flowers have a tendency to revert to blue. Jim stated that stability is a factor that should be

considered when naming plants' In contrast the colour of *M. baileyi* 'Hensol Violet' is constant. Jim reported that there is now an *M.* 'Ascreavie' with purple flowers growing close to *M.* 'Hensol Violet' indicating some hybridisation. The new plant is fertile.



Jim has been impressed with the forms of *M. baileyi* growing at Branklyn. There are some stunning forms including a cluster-headed form which is particularly beautiful.

Others may have characteristics of *M. baileyi* subsp. *pratensis*, originally discovered by Kingdom Ward growing in open meadows.

Other outstanding plants include *M.* 'Marit', by far the best of the white-flowered forms, which grows well and is a good nursery plant. Visitors always admire *M.* 'Slieve Donard', which originated in Edinburgh, but received its name from the nursery in Ireland. Before this it was known as 'Prain's Variety'. A plant from County Cork is *M* x *beamishii*, planted separately from the three plants of *M* x *sarsonsii*. A particular favourite of Jim's is *Meconopsis* 'Barney's Blue', who remembered it growing at Inshriach, Jack Drakes' nursery, when he was there. This has coloured flowers ranging from purple to blue on the same plant depending on the age of the flower.

Jim then recounted a problem that has recently arisen. On visiting the garden of the late David Stuart Moore in Ireland some people have wondered whether the George Sherriff Group plant growing there, which may be the 'true' *M.* 'Branklyn' was the same as *M.* 'Jimmy Bayne'. This particular George Sherriff Group plant was the only one grown in this garden. There is evidence that the original three plants were purchased from Jack Drake for 17s 6d. Jack Drake had sent plants down to The Savill Garden where it was named 'Branklyn', but has since been lost. Jim has planted some of these plants from Ireland in the new bed for special Perthshire meconopsis. Whether this plant is the same as 'Jimmy Bayne' will need further investigation including work on DNA.

There are other plants in Branklyn Gardens which were once labelled as 'Branklyn'. Jim is keen to distance these plants from the clone recently received from Ireland. An observation made by Jim was that the flowers of these long established plants had a sweet scent, as did *M.* 'Jimmy Bayne' (shown on the right) whereas the flowers of *M.* 'Dalemain' and *M.* 'Huntfield' did not.



Jim finished his presentation with a picture of the tea-room at Branklyn which is a great asset and renowned for its fresh scones and jam.

All photos in this report courtesy of Jim Jermyn