

***Meconopsis* in Hexham and in China**

by John Richards

Randle Cooke's garden at Kilbryde, south of Corbridge was left to the University of Newcastle in 1973 and I ran it with Job Creation help until 1981 when the site was sold. Many of the plants were transferred to the Moorbank Botanic Garden in Newcastle where I still help to look after them. After his death, many of Cooke's old slides and his garden book were discovered and the photos have been scanned in. Amongst those photos from the 1920's and 1930's shown were *M. delavayi* F28491, *M. 'forrestii'* F28388 (probably not this species), *M. bella* ex L. & S. and a slide labelled *M. discigera* also ex L. & S. which seemed to lack the distinctive stigma (blue flowers, but probably not *M. wallichii*). Not shown were pictures of *M. grandis* L. & S. 1071 and the white *M. grandis* 'Miss Dickson'.

My former colleague, the late William Clark had been a friend of Cooke and also raised many *Meconopsis*, including a cross of *M. baileyi* onto *M. simplicifolia* which he gave me in 1979 and I grew until 1990. This had long narrow racemes of rather small good blue flowers. I showed pictures of *M. simplicifolia* raised from The *Meconopsis* Group seed in 2010 which fruited well and seed had been donated back. This had rather large flowers of a good dark blue and approached *M. grandis* in some particulars.

I first acquired a very early *M. grandis* with extremely large (to 20 cm diameter) gappy 5-petalled pale blue flowers from Mike Hurst in 1995, introduced from Sikkim in about 1990, and still grow it. It may have come with the name 'Early Sikkim', but it became apparent at the meeting that this name refers to a 4-petalled darker blue plant from 1975 or earlier, although it is also very early and also has huge flowers. Possibly, Mike gave it to me merely saying it was early and from Sikkim, and I wrongly associated this information with a previous name!

Another mystery plant from my garden came as 'HW03/40 ex Assam'. It was monocarpic and set no seed. It resembled *M. superba*, although with lobed leaves (but long entire bracts), but lacked the black stigma.

The strain of '*M. latifolia*' I grow originated from the The *Meconopsis* Group seed list in 2007. It is monocarpic but sets good seed and I still grow it. It is not *M. latifolia*, but probably a form of *M. baileyi* although the shape of the basal rosette leaves is distinctive.

I have grown *M. punicea* intermittently for about 20 years, but now usually save good seed. With me, pollen is not usually shed until after petals drop and I rub anthers from a spent flower onto the ripe stigma of another plant. Seed is unexpectedly large, like grape-shot.

Photos were shown of *M. henrici*, *M. lancifolia* and '*M. non-impedita*' from western and south-western Sichuan. All have yellow anthers. The swollen filament bases of *M. henrici* were demonstrated. *M. lancifolia* has smaller, more cup-shaped flowers. *M. 'non-impedita'* has red petioles, broader leaves and long slender filaments. Its identity is not clear.

M. pseudovenusta was found on the Hong Shan and Shika Shan. It is very dwarf with leathery lobed leaves and white anthers. *M. rudis* also has white anthers, and is covered with red to straw-coloured bristles which arise from swollen black bases. It is widespread on high calcareous screes in W. China and grows well and sets seed in cultivation.

M. prattii and *M. racemosa* are closely related and might be best treated as subspecies. The former is very common and widespread on the Zhongdian plateau and has narrowly lanceolate leaves and an ebracteate inflorescence. In *M. racemosa*, the leaves are oblanceolate and the inflorescence markedly bracteate. The latter in particular self-sows with abandon in the garden.