

More plants of distinction

Powerpoint presentation written up by Evelyn Stevens

Introduction This talk is really an extension of the talk I gave in March. In that talk I outlined the achievements of the Meconopsis Group since it was founded in September 1998.

Since then, the RHS trial for Awards of Garden Merit was concluded in June 2013 with 10 plants receiving the award, together with confirmation of the award for *M. Slieve Donard*. Also the RHS would like, in the not-too-distant future, to assess 10 "near misses". The failure of most of these to obtain AGMs was probably due to their positions in the trial bed. So I conclude from all of this that the work that we have been doing so far in identifying and naming distinct, good and name-worthy cultivars has been a successful venture.

But in my view, I don't think we have quite finished yet. I know that some people say "enough is enough", but I think there are still a number of other plants that should not be overlooked. And if we do approve naming a few more plants, this is in no way setting a precedent if you compare our plants with other genera such as geraniums, primulas, etc.

Another aim of this talk is to show some plants that I don't think have been shown before at our meetings.

I emphasise that the plants discussed in this talk are tried and tested. I have been growing, propagating and studying them for many years now and I know that they are distinct, persistent, good garden plants. I have also given some or most of them to Pat Murphy who has them growing successfully in The Lake District, to Geoff Stevenson at Attadale near Strathcarron in north-west Scotland and to a few other gardeners in various areas, so they thrive elsewhere than in my garden in central Scotland.

Way back we established the idea of giving the plants MG numbers (MG for Meconopsis Group) to replace much more meaningful nick-names, but I find that very unsatisfactory. It is difficult to remember which number applies to a particular plant. And the problem with using nick-names instead, is that they would probably "stick" even when not approved by The Meconopsis Group, so we have avoided using them, except privately.

We are also in the process of writing up the big blue poppy work and I really think it is time to tie up the loose ends, and draw a line under this work. We have largely achieved our original goal of identifying and naming the big blue poppies, and there is a strong feeling in The Meconopsis Group that we should move on and give more attention to the species. I fully agree with this view, but I also think that we cannot overlook the remaining good big blue poppies not yet approved by the Group.

So to-day, I want to run through many of the remaining cultivars in my Plant Heritage National Collection not yet discussed at our meetings. Some already have ok names and some not. Of the latter I greatly hope that our assessment committee will soon be able to make some final decisions on these to bring along to a near Meconopsis Group meeting for ratification.

Slides shown

The first 4 slides reiterate points made in my last talk and the results of the AGM trial. The latter has already been done by Pat in the last talk, but I include a slide with the "near misses". These are *M. 'Ascreavie'*, *'Barney's Blue'*, *Crarae*, *'Crewdson Hybrid'*, *'Louise'*, *'Huntfield'*, *'Strathspey'*, and *'Willie Duncan'*. Added to these are *M. 'Mildred'* and *M. 'Evelyn'*, which were not available for trialing at the time the trial was set up.

This is followed by a couple of pictures of part of my National Collection in central Scotland.

I cannot comment on no. 7 below, but I find that all the others, except 1 and 2, are sterile and can only be propagated by division.

For each taxon that I show in this talk, I discuss with the aid of several pictures for each, the following:

First, two forms of *M. grandis*

1. ***Meconopsis grandis* ES84 (MG28)** This is a true *grandis* form which has been going around as *M. grandis* ES84 and I compare it with *M. grandis* 'Himal Sky', now with an AGM. The former has rounded, overlapping petals, the latter wavy, more separated petals. I have had both these since 1998, having received them from Mike and Polly Stone. They both set viable seed which breeds true.

2. ***Meconopsis grandis* – ex NAPE (MG32)** Seed collected by the NAPE (Nagaland-Arunachal Pradesh Expedition) expedition of 2003 was sent to Peter Cox who had seen the same plants in flower in the Arunachal Pradesh in 2004 and grew plants from this seed. It does not seem to have been persistent with some people (me included), but I have one plant given to me by Ian Christie that is very perennial and also rhizomatous and very worthy of being bulked up for wider distribution – as occurred, for example, with the division of *M.* ‘Marit’ sent to me by Finn Haugli in Norway in 1998 and the cultivar that became named *M.* ‘P.C. Abildgaard’ from Troels Juhl in Denmark in 1999.

3. Next shown is ***Meconopsis baileyi* subsp *pratensis* (MG42), together with *M.* ‘Inverewe’ for comparison** The former is rare in cultivation. Until the last year or so I have found it difficult to bulk up. But I am having better results recently. It is very different from others we have in cultivation, except *M.* ‘Inverewe’. Chris Grey-Wilson is quite clear that this plant is the species *M. baileyi* subspecies *pratensis*. This species was found in Upper Burma in the Seingku Valley in 1928 by Frank Kingdon Ward along with *M. violacea*. Chris is also adamant that it is conspecific with the plant we know as *M.* ‘Inverewe’, although they are clearly different clones. One distinct difference is that ‘Inverewe’ is easy to propagate from divisions, but *baileyi* subsp. *pratensis* is much less easy – which is presumably why it is not very common. It tends to produce a fine flowering stem, but not very many side-shoots for the next year. Both are sterile but presumably were fertile at one time.

Refs: Gardeners Chronicle Series 3 Vol 82 p. 506 and Annals of Bot 42, p.856 Fig. 1 1928 opposite p 96. Chris has also examined the herbarium specimens.

The next three taxa I discuss are 3 hybrids raised by 3 of our members, Allan Jamieson, Leslie Drummond and Liz Young. A brief mention is also made of “possible *M. betonicifolia*” raised by Geoff Hill who will speak about it more fully at another meeting

4. ***Meconopsis* MG 59** Allan Jamieson deliberately crossed *M.* ‘Lingholm’ with *M.* ‘Kingsbarns’ about 10 years ago. The parents were supplied by me and the trueness of the ‘Kingsbarns’ clone had been confirmed by its raiser, James Cobb. *Meconopsis* MG59 has the distinction of being the earliest of the big blue poppies to flower and is very striking with long, very frilly, narrow petals and long, slender leaves. I find that the plant Allan gave me is sterile, readily propagated by division. I think Allan finds some of the other plants he raised do set some seeds, but I am not familiar with this.

5. ***Meconopsis x hybrida* (MG59)**

Leslie Drummond remade the cross between *M. punicea* and *M. quintuplinervia* to create *M. x cookei*, and a fine selection from this became the now well-known *M. x cookei* ‘Old Rose’. Leslie has done a lot of other hybridising including re-making *M. x sheldonii*. He has given me plants, but as they have not yet flowered properly I can’t comment yet. Another of his crosses was *M. x hybrida* (*M. simplicifolia* x *M. grandis*) originally made by Puddle. This elegant hybrid has not yet been widely circulated, but I think it should be and will endeavour to make it more available.

6. ***Meconopsis* MG54** A deliberate cross made over ten years ago between *M. simplicifolia* and *M. baileyi* by Liz Young. The influence of *M. baileyi* is clear in this hybrid, but a very striking feature is the way the petals become attractively upswept, reminding Liz of butterflies.

7. ***Meconopsis* MG43** I am showing a slide given to me by Geoff Hill of “possible *M. betonicifolia*, but more likely a hybrid” raised by Geoff from seed sent to him by Stanley Ashmore in Alaska. Geoff will speak about this more fully at a later meeting.

Now I am coming on to cultivars that are not forms of the species *grandis* or *baileyi* and ones which have not been raised by members of The Meconopsis Group. Also, most of these are cultivars that I think The Meconopsis Group should seriously consider naming. I have had them for many years, and I have found that they are useful, attractive, interesting, persistent and name-worthy garden plants.

8. ***Meconopsis* MG51** This was given me by Les Newby as **Original *M. x sheldonii***. Les was given it by Edrom Nursery before 2000. I don’t know more about its origins than that, but it is clearly a very old clone and very closely related to ‘Slieve Donard’, but not identical to it. Maybe members will say that this is a clone for National Collections only! But I, for one, would not want to be without it.

9. ***Meconopsis* MG52** This, like ‘Inverewe’ and *baileyi* subsp *pratensis* (MG42) just dealt with, has a partner with which it should be compared. The partner for MG52 is *M* Keillour. *Meconopsis* MG52 has not yet been named, but I think it should be. Nurseryman, James Aitken in Perth gave it to me, and Mrs

Knox-Finlay of Keillour Castle gave it to him. I am pretty sure that it is the blue poppy illustrated in James Cobb's book and labelled Betty Sherriff's Dream Poppy (opposite p 49). It once grew by the bridge at Keillour Castle, but James Aitken said that it had not done so for many years. It is clearly related to *M.* 'Keillour', but is also clearly not the same clone – also not "Betty's Dream Poppy" because it is clearly not a member of George Sherriff Group which it would need to be in order to be the Dream Poppy. It consistently emerges significantly later, flowers later and is significantly taller than many other cultivars including *M.* 'Keillour'. Also the flowers show differences from the latter as the petals are more crisp and puckered.

10. ***Meconopsis* MG50** This was given to me as *M. grandis* GS600, but it clearly is not George Sherriff Group. Clear differences include the lack of red-purple pigment in the emerging leaf rosettes, very late emergence of the leaves (one of just a few very late-emergers), young and adult leaves of a totally different shape and stance and flowers with a clean-cut, non-wavy outline and a paleish blue. It is the latest to flower and the flowers keep their petals until late-on, so that the flowers are eventually upward-facing.

11. ***Meconopsis* MG48** This is sold by Edrom nursery as "Meconopsis hybrid Dark Form – as yet unnamed" I find this is quite distinct from anything else. It is not GSG as I first thought. I don't think "dark form" is a good description and my plants look rather as does the picture seen on Edrom's web-site. I find it has the same range of colours as does *M.* 'Barney's Blue', but it is clearly not 'Barney's Blue'. One unusual feature is that the style and stigma are unique in shape and suffused with a reddish pigment. Other unusual features are a dark (? black) pigment in the walls of young fruit capsules and on the sepals.

12. ***Meconopsis* MG55**

This is another fine hybrid for which we are again indebted to Allan Jamieson. Allan found this distinctive plant growing in a garden open to visitors in the Borders, well over 10 years ago and was given some clumps by the owner. The flowers possess substantial rounded petals, crinkly and overlapping and of a clear, deepish shade of blue. This also needs bulking up for wider distribution, unfortunately having been relatively neglected by me for a few years for some unexplained reason. This should not be difficult to redress.

13. ***Meconopsis* MG58** This clone was given to me by Peter Cox from Glendoick, and he was given it by Sir Colin Campbell of Kilbryde Castle in Dunblane, but I have not traced its origin back further. It is an attractive plant, which is clearly different from any other cultivar as shown by its young leaves, mature leaves, flowers and fruit capsule. I only have it in small quantity and need to bulk it up for wider distribution that is clearly needed because of its attractiveness and distinctiveness.

14. ***Meconopsis* MG61 and 62** These are tall, large-flowered white cultivars, very similar to one another (and quite distinct from *M.* 'Marit'), which, on flowering can light up the back of a large sheltered border very pleasingly, But they may soon become rather straggly in windy conditions due to the long pedicels. A difference between them, which indicates that they are different clones, is that the newly opened petals of MG61 may be streaked with blue pigment, this usually not occurring with MG62. With maturation, the blue streaking disappears. *M.* MG61 came to me in 1994 from Sir Colin Campbell's garden at Kilbryde Castle in Dunblane and MG62 came from Ascreavie, the garden of the Sherriff's in Angus, in 2000.

There are several other white-flowered clones and these may include *M. x sarsonsii* and *M. x beamshii*, although we are a bit uncertain as yet about the identities of the latter two.

P.S. At the meeting I briefly showed one more slide with a list of other plants that I think need naming. I showed them under their MG numbers and also with nick-names. The latter are really quite helpful and meaningful, but we have agreed that using them may cause confusion, so here I list the MG numbers only unless they are already in nursery or seedsmen's list although not yet ratified by The Meconopsis Group. This list is as follows: MG69 (Keillour Violet, not yet ratified by The Meconopsis Group, but listed by one nursery (Kevock) and in one seed catalogue (Plant World Seeds)), MG57, MG88 (*M. grandis* 'Alba' listed by Edrom), MG63, MG65, MG64, MG67, MG73, MG74, MG78, MG79, MG80 (Springhill - has been or still is in a nursery list) MG86, MG87, MG77, MG72 and MG49. It is noticeable that about a dozen on this list are all clearly members of George Sherriff Group, and also appear to be separate clones. But it would not be sensible to name all of them as they are not sufficiently different from one another.

And finally, I said that I believe there exist several other big blue poppy cultivars/clones grown by other gardeners, but which are not in my collection!