

The Meconopsis Group Assessment Committee Ian Christie.



This afternoon I'm going to talk about the role of the Assessment Committee.

First I want to go back a little bit to where it started with me. I was lucky enough to go to Ascreavie in the 1960s. There are still remnants of blue poppies there. The early plant hunters did something very special. George Sherriff together with Frank Ludlow brought back several new plant species to this country including meconopsis.

The Beginning

In the very early days the SRGC, AGS and RHS (Joint Rock) were asked to judge meconopsis for awards. Plants were to be delivered to RBGE, a recognised Scientific Institute. I lifted large flowering plants to pot up, some from our net tunnel others from open ground to show how variable the plants could be. .

Plants were put forward for P.C. (Preliminary Commendation) A.M. (Award of Merit) or F.C.C, (First Class Certificate) These awards are given for Exhibition Plants only. Several plants gained awards at this first meeting.

I was very pleased that several well respected members of Joint Rock from the South visited our nursery on several occasions to view our plants.



The polytunnel in the nursery blew away three years ago in a storm.

Our meconopsis are now grown in the open. We have a large number of cultivars.



After the visit from the Committee we started to conduct our own trial within two growing areas in our nursery. We looked at the early foliage, leaf shapes, pigments in leaves, the different rosettes, seed pods and plant stature. Many different flower colours were observed each year, weather being the main factor for variation. The plants could be different in different years. We studied the growing plants for botrytis and downy mildew. We lifted and split plants.

Problems

1. Watering plants when sun is shining, overhead sprinkling is not a good idea ,
2. Heavy rainfall followed by sunshine
3. Snails and slugs in the autumn.

No Chemical spray were used.

We have no other problems with pest or diseases.

Several meconopsis have been exhibited at the Joint Rock Meetings at Gardening Scotland. The committee meets on Saturday mornings to consider plants on the Nursery stands.

Role of The Meconopsis Group.

Recommendations for naming meconopsis are put forward at Group meetings. All officially named meconopsis are shown at Group meetings Only if the members present accept the recommendations can they then be registered. This is very important. The Meconopsis Group is the ICRA for the genus Meconopsis.

This is the International Cultivar Registration Authority which works with the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS) through its Commission for Nomenclature and Registration.

The current Registrar who acts on behalf of The Meconopsis Group is Geoff Hill.

The Group has been involved with the RHS Meconopsis Trial held at Harlow Carr. Members from RBGE, SRGC, AGS and RHS visited Harlow Carr for three growing seasons to view the plants. Plants were also grown at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, Holehird Gardens in Cumbria, The Linns Rosemoor , and Wisley. The Trial concluded with 11 plants being awarded the AGM (Award of Garden Merit).

The plants awarded an AGM in 2013 were: *M.* 'Mop-head', *M.* 'P.C. Abildgaard', *M.* 'Bobby Masterton', *M.* 'Mrs Jebb', *M.* 'Keillour' *M.* 'Inverewe' *M.* 'Marit', *M.* 'Susan's Reward', *M.* 'Dalemair' *M.* 'Himal Sky' (on hold) The AGM previously awarded to *M.* 'Slieve Donard' was re-confirmed..

To receive an AGM a plant must be:

Excellent for ordinary use in appropriate conditions
A cultivar or selection that out performs others, perhaps for more flowering, length of flowering, scent, colour, form or in any other significant way.

Available to buy.

It should be healthy with a good constitution.

It should be stable in form and colour.

It should be reasonably resistant to pests and diseases.

The Meconopsis Group have also hosted a stand at Gardening Scotland in recent years which has been very successful. The photo below shows the display .in 2016 which won a gold medal



National Collections.

There are at present three National Collections of Meconopsis.

Branklyn Gardens Perth – A National Trust Garden
Holehird Gardens Windermere, the Gardens of the Lakeland Horticultural Society
The Explorer's Garden. Pitlochry.

Edrom Nursery, Coldingham and MacPlants, Pencaitland, both have large collections of species and cultivars.

My observations

I have studied the rosettes of plants in spring to see how different they all are. We have seen today how variable they are in the wild,.I am particularly interested in different years to see the effect of the temperature. We are approximately 600 feet above sea level and on the northern rim of Strathmore Valley. The winters can be very severe. We often get large snowfalls which can sometimes last for three months.

My observations over the years suggest that flower colour is influenced by the following:

- 1 The amount of moisture, rain or mist.
- 2 The temperature. it might be warm but sky overcast.
- 3 Bright sunshine or open sky.
- 4 Possible soil content, high lime, very dry, no organic material.

Flower colour can be recorded using the RHS Colour Charts. However flower colour can be variable from year to year.

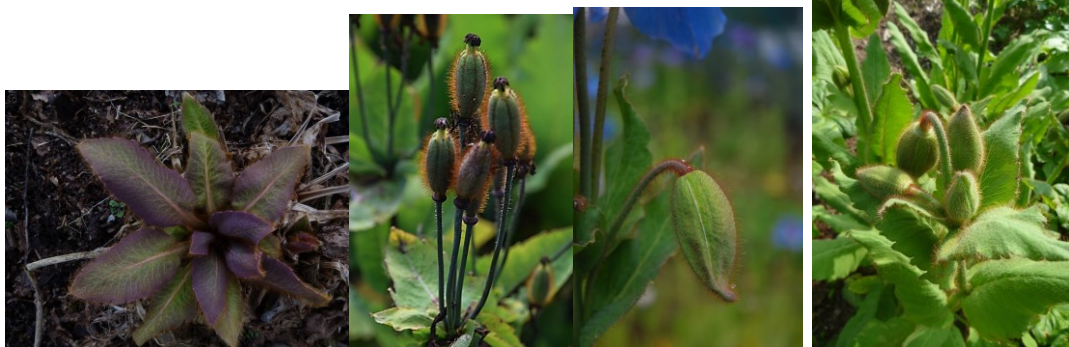
Plant Assessment.

To assess plants we need to look at every part of the growing plant e.g. the emerging rosette and the shape of the leaves



In the photo on the right the unnamed leaf is *M.* 'Alaska'.

We also look at the foliage, how the flower buds sit in the axils and at the false whorl.



We look at pigment on flower buds. I think this is important. Specific recent collections of *M. grandis* from the Nape Collection have this incredible blue pigment. Not all the other plants in the George Sherriff Group have this colouring I believe this is quite significant.



We also look at how the buds evolve within the flower spike and their shape. There is tremendous variation in the shape of buds.

The shape of the seed pods is also important. Photos of the fruits of closely related meconopsis were used to illustrate the detail needed for distinguishing different plants.

The Future.

A new assessment form will be used for each plant put forward for assessment.

It will record the details at the time of assessment and used by the committee each time they view the plants.

A suggested template is shown below

The Meconopsis Group, Plant Assessment Sheet

Date

Location

Gardener or Responsible person

MG number or Nickname

Year first known

Group type

Fertile Blue, Infertile Blue or George Sherriff Group

Flowering stems. New side-shoots, Flower size and details.

Distinctive details: Rosette colour in spring. Height of Plant. Flowering time.

Plant established.

Any other details

Photos of the plants' features will be recorded.

Meconopsis at Branklyn Garden

Some members of the Assessment Committee visited Branklyn Gardens after Gardening Scotland in 2016 to view several recently named plants. No decisions were made this year.

Meconopsis from Evelyn's book at Holehird

We plan to visit Holehird next flowering time to view the plants which were named in this book. These names are being held by Registration authority for confirmation by the Meconopsis Group.

The Meconopsis Book

This book compiled by members is to be published by The Alpine Garden Society and edited by Chris Grey-Wilson

There will be a special publicity stand at the 2017 Chelsea Flower Show to launch the book.

We have been invited to share this stand,

Meconopsis in flower will be grown for display and delivered to Chelsea,.

A few members will be on hand to promote OUR book, to give advice and generally promote The Meconopsis Group.

The book will also be promoted at The Meconopsis Group stand at Gardening Scotland.

The Forum

I would like The Meconopsis Group to be seen as the authority on Meconopsis.

There are other sites, Facebook, Twitter, the Scottish Rock Garden Club site.

The success of the Forum depends on the group's members. I would like the forum to be a success.

Questions

These ranged from comments on the site of the trial at Harlow Carr. (This was the first time that a trial had been conducted away from Wisley. It was on a sloping site which allowed visitors to see how the plants could be grown in their gardens but was not *fair* to some of the cultivars),) to how could members contribute to the forum. There would be a log in number. Members could contribute by sending in questions or comments. Ian and others would answer the questions. Members could also send in photos of the various features of the plants. This could include species being grown in gardens as well as the hybrids.

Beryl suggested that the way forward is for the plants to be uniformly assessed.

Margaret asked about the key in the book. John suggested that the key may have been modified. It should be easier to use. There are two proof readers Mary Ridley and Jim Jermyn

In answer to one question John made a distinction between the Assessment for Naming Plants and the Forum.

There is now a process for naming plants and a means of keeping records.

The Forum is for any Meconopsis, including species and those in the wild.