

## Dr Evelyn Stevens A Eulogy – Jim Jermyn

It would be remiss of us not to spend a moment or two talking about Evelyn and the quite remarkable work she did for the club.

I was very nervous about getting involved with The Meconopsis Group in 1998 when it was formed by Evelyn and Mervyn Kessel. Ron McBeath had come down to help me at Edrom Nursery. We had received a large packet of seeds described as GS600 from Finn Haugli of Tromso. These germinated well and we sold the plants, possibly adding to the chaos of identification. I thought it was better that I didn't get involved, but Evelyn said 'You Must'. She persuaded me and from that time on we had a very close relationship particularly as a result of going to many meetings at The Linns where we were made extremely welcome by both Lewis and Evelyn. Many of you will have memories of the trips made by The Meconopsis Group to The Linns



Here is a photo of her standing, rather proudly, amongst a stand of Meconopsis 'Inverewe', but it could have been any of the meconopsis species and hybrids that she grew to perfection.

She had a great interest in all plants, not just meconopsis. For instance she had a remarkable collection of *Sorbus* in the garden that she grew from seed.

In a wooded area she discovered a rather splendid snowdrop that she asked me to take down to an RHS Show one February where Matt Bishop spotted it and said it should be named; it being rather better than just *Galanthus plicatus* subsp. *byzantinus*,

This became *Galanthus plicatus* 'Sophie North', named in memory for one of the children who died in the appalling tragedy at Dunblane school.



The work that Evelyn carried out at The Linns is legendary. There is no question about the dedication that she put into the garden. The order that she brought to the beds was quite extraordinary so when we went as the plant assessment committee to look at the plants, it would have been chaos had she not laid them in well labelled beds. We were able to make comparisons and I for one benefitted from the 'Group

status' that was given to the big blue poppies from the very beginning. I remember Jim Cobb giving a talk here where he called up a group of males and a group of females to explain why we had set up these 'Groups'. It was only really after quite a number of years that I could look at a plant and say that definitely is a member of the George Sherriff Group or a member of the Infertile Blue Group. This had so much to do with the work that Evelyn had carried out by putting these plants together. It was the job of the plant assessment committee to decide whether these plants were virtuous or not. Her work there was hugely important.



Evelyn did not just grow the plants, she took many pictures as well. It is the detailed pictures that I feel are very important. Growing at The Linns were various forms of *grandis* such as 'Himal Sky' and 'Astral Blue'. Copious amounts of seed were produced from these stands of plants which could be distributed through the seed exchange.

In addition Evelyn produced the herbarium specimens, the sheets that are now in the custody of RHS Wisley. That was also a painstaking work to collect herbarium specimens and an important record for us as The Meconopsis Group.

One could say there was a danger that chaos could come from growing plants from seed but there was always order with the chairmanship of John (Mitchell) and Evelyn and the dedicated committee. I think that disorder was avoided.



Many of you will know that Jim and Mildred Thompson bought a plant at Auchtermuchy market which was subsequently named 'Mildred'.

However it was trialled first of all. You do not just take a plant and randomly name it. It needs to be assessed first. This is what happened at The Linns. It was submitted for naming and is now grown by many of us here.

Evelyn was not just interested in cultivars, she grew many species, including *Meconopsis quintuplinervia*. I used to grow the compact form at Edrom and it was pleasing to see these wonderful plants growing in these ideal conditions.

Another plant grown by Evelyn was *Meconopsis* 'Mop-head' raised by Liz Young. Beryl McNaughton will say a few words about the origin of 'Mop-head'.

Beryl: As I walked in the gate I was delighted to see Liz Young. Liz grew this from seed, selected it, handed it on to Evelyn who grew it and tried it in her garden and brought it to our attention. It is a splendid plant which came from Liz and Evelyn working together. This is what happened. You could take things to Evelyn and she would take them home, grow them and bring them on. 'Mop-head' is a good plant. It has huge flowers and stands up to the wind very well which some others do not.

Jim then invited Pat (Murphy) who stayed with Evelyn at The Linns on many occasions to give a few recollections of her experiences.

Pat: I first met Evelyn at a Meconopsis Group meeting when I asked her about some herbarium sheets of *M. grandis* she was showing and she explained the differences to me. After a year or so I went to visit her garden; she took me round and told me about the plants. One of the most impressive things was that she would get up early in the morning to take pictures of the plants, because she wanted the correct light and she would do this constantly.. She had masses of photos, a lot of which have gone into her Pictorial Guide which is a culmination of a lot of the things she did. She gave a lot of plants to many people and I could never come away without a car full of plants. Often she would think of something and get up early in the morning to give it to me. One of the very last things she did for The Group was to write her contribution for the book 'Meconopsis for Gardeners'. She did a lot of work on that even though she was not at all well at the time, because she was determined to do so.

Visiting her National Collection of Meconopsis Jim described how it would be possible to walk along and know from the foliage what kind of plant it was. This was helpful and due to the way that Evelyn had laid out the Demonstration Beds. She had good relationships with people like Leslie Drummond, who is not so well now. The hybrid *x cookei* was growing in profusion at The Linns,

In conclusion Jim added that she wrote many articles which brought the blue poppies to the fore. Whether it was the AGS journal or the Rock Garden, she was constantly updating the information that The Meconopsis Group was gleaning. That was very important. Having been Manager for Gardening Scotland for 17 years, once The Meconopsis Group started exhibiting, the interest in the blue poppies was palpable.

Below is a picture of the Demonstration Beds.



We should appreciate all the years of work that Evelyn put in at The Linns