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Sunday

THE NEWSLETTER of
THE SIBERIAN, SPURIA and JAPANESE IRIS GROUP
of the British Iris Society

No. 7

June 1980

THE OBJECTS OF THE GROUP

1. Communication between members in Great Britain and Overseas.
 2. A means of exchanging ideas, plants, seeds etc.
 3. To assist beginners in growing Iris and to offer help with problems.
 4. To report on Hybridisation.
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EDITORIAL

Ernest G. B. Luscombe did a great deal of research in 1965, when he wrote 'Iris Species Identified' for the B.I.S. Year Book.

Doris Hansford included them in her description 'The Iris in Art' in 1963. Eric C. R. Winston in Australia wrote about them in 'Species in and around Melbourne'.

Hans Herbert Frohn described the Hybrids of Dr. Hirao at Hamburg in 1966. Dr. Hirao also wrote about their cultivation in the Year Book.

The late Angela Marchant took up the challenge around 1968, and went on to write a booklet for the B.I.S. called 'Irises for the Water Garden'.

The late Donald Patton listed them in his 'top twenty' in 'Wild Ones for the Garden' in 1975.

As you will probably have guessed, it is I.Laevigata and I.Kaempferi that were the main subject under review.

In this News Letter we have printed the excellent article by Mr. Akira Horinaka, written for the B.I.S. Year Book 1978.

Mr. Akira Horinaka is the President of the Japanese Iris Society and his clear description most certainly takes us into the world of 'Iris Grown in Japan'.

These Irises like wet conditions, so if you have'nt got a pond, get out your old buckets, baths, tubs, sinks in fact anything that will hold the moisture, allow drainage, sink them into the garden and you are away. Start with I.Laevigata and progress towards I.Kaempferi (Higo Strain), they are called 'Clematis flowered' and they really are most exotic.

EDITORIAL - Cont'd.

Write in and tell us how you fare, I am sure you will say how beautiful they are.

I have had to leave out the Terminology list, due to lack of space, will remedy this in January.

Happy Gardening, do'nt work too hard.

J.T.

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Dear Fellow Members,

I would like, first of all to thank our N/L Editor for all her hard work, and to congratulate her on the splendid January issue. It was most welcome, reminding us of the good things to come when the dark days of Winter are over.

We are now well into the Iris season, with it's Shows and Garden Visits. The days are hardly long enough to allow for all the things to be done in the garden.

I am looking forward to a good show of Sibiricas and Spurias, but I still have not discovered how to make my I.Kaempferi bloom, any hints would be most welcome. I do not think we have yet had an article on the basis of growing this lovely flower.

All good wishes for a very successful Season.

Hilda Goodwin. Hon. Chairman.

(Spare my blushes, dear Madam Chairman, but thank you, I really do enjoy preparing this News Letter and find our members so enthusiastic and helpful. Ed.)

My Irises by Jack Venner.

My association with Water Irises began when I was 7 years of age. My Father built a small pond in our garden near Shooters Hill on the outskirts of S.E. London. I remember a blue Iris, which I am sure was I.Laevigata .

At the start of the War my parents moved to Grappenhall in North Cheshire, I stayed behind with a retired Headmaster and his wife. In their garden was a very well-balanced pool with Goldfish 15 years old and some I.Laevigata of a much darker shade than the common form, they were probably the variety known as Atropurpurea. They grew and flowered happily in the shallow areas around the margin of the pond. I took over the management of this pond which survived the bombing and was still flourishing in 1948 - the year I got married.

My Irises by Jack Venner - Cont'd.

My wife and I lived with my widowed Mother-in-Law long enough to establish a pond in Upper Belvedere. We moved again to Bexley Heath where we built a 12ft x 9ft pond which we stocked with plants including our original *I. Laevigata*.

Moving again to the Brith/Bexley Heath border, during the next 22 years we made a much bigger pond, and extended our Irises to include *I. Laevigata* Albo-Purpurea, white flowers mottled blue, very free flowering and a rapid grower, 'Colchester' a lovely white *Laevigata*, ¾ of the petals covered in deep purple, sadly this did not survive. 'Snowdrift' was a beautiful white, a strong grower, increasing moderately, flowers very large...more *Kaempferi* in appearance than the others.

'Rose Queen' (probably a Hybrid form) grew best in shallow water, an outstanding plant, it grows even better in 'bog conditions'.

My one regret is that I did not grow *Elegantissima* (Variegata), it is worth growing for it's foliage alone. At Wisley it has overflowed from the lake and is now growing in the paths.

Having been associated with ponds for most of my life, it may seem surprising that I have not built one yet in my present garden.

Actually, a plan has been 'on the drawing board' for some time, but my enthusiasm has been blunted by the fact that this part of Essex is 'heron' country, and I cannot imagine a pond without fish.

I can overcome this with netting, so eventually I hope to have the pleasure of starting again and then I will have the beauty of *I. Laevigata* and *I. Kaempferi* to enjoy.

IRISES IN JAPAN by AKIRA HORINAKA

(Reprinted by kind permission of the British Iris Society from 1978 Year Book)

In Japan seven iris species grow wild: *I. laevigata*, *sanguinea*, *ensata* (*kaempferi*), *setosa*, *rossii*, *gracilipes* and *japonica*.

Among all the iris species in Japan, *I. laevigata* is known to be the oldest as it is mentioned in the Japanese traditional poems during the Nara era (710-793), and it has been loved by the people since the Heian era (794-1192) when Kyoto was the capital of Japan. It can be found in the middle of Honshu Island up to Hokkaido Island. In the swamp of Ohtanosawa and the lake of Mizorogaike in Kyoto, *I. laevigata* is a Government protected species. Some can be found occasionally in Tottori and Shimane prefectures and more in Unzen in Kyushu Island.

IRISES IN JAPAN by AKIRA HOSHINAKA - Cont'd.

Horticulturally, about twenty forms are known today. The most famous and distinctive forms among them are 'Orizuru' with three petals and 'Maizuru' with six petals. The former was loved by Emperor Koukaku (1779-1816). The variegated-leaf form of *I. laevigata* is of great beauty. Cultivated clumps of this species can be found in the gardens of the Heian shrine and the Umenomiya shrine in Kyoto, while the people who have small ponds in their gardens prefer the cultivars of *I. ensata* (kaempferi). Today breeding of this species is attempted by a few iris lovers including the author. I have produced tetraploid forms using colchicine. In 1966 I was successful in getting seeds from a cross between *I. versicolor kermesina* and a red form of *I. laevigata*. This hybrid has branches and the flower shape is similar to *I. versicolor*, but the colour is deep red unlike that of the parents. Today the name of *I. sanguinea* is well known. It grows on the plains in mountain areas so that it was not known until 1681, when it was mentioned in the literature for the first time. Around 1870, five named cultivars were known but it seems that the names were given to wild forms of the species. Today, the most common ones are white and violet in colour, and some are dwarf forms. There are some differences in the forms grown in a local area. In 1956, 'Suijiri-ayame' and 1958 'Buchizaki-ayame' were found, the colour of the former being white with violet lines and the latter, white with violet variegations. A lavender-pink form was recently found in Akita prefecture. *I. sanguinea* is widely grown today in private gardens.

My first experience with siberian iris was when I imported 'White Swirl' from the late Mr. Frederick Cassebeer in the U.S.A. Since then I have been collecting modern cultivars of siberian irises from Great Britain and the United States. My collection immediately attracts visitors, and, gradually, many siberian irises are getting distributed all over Japan. In 1971, I obtained seeds from a cross between siberian irises and *I. setosa*. This hybrid bloomed in 1974 and the flower is similar to a siberian iris while its habit is similar to *I. setosa*.

The cultivated variety of *I. ensata* (kaempferi) is famous as 'the Japanese Iris'. It is the one developed from *I. ensata* Thunb. var. *spontanea* Nakai grown wild. Most of the botanical gardens in Japan grow Japanese iris, and making Japanese iris gardens is very popular these days.

IRISES IN JAPAN by AKIRA HORINAKA - Cont'd.

I. ensata has two forms with variegated-leaves, both having flowers of the wild form, one turning to green in autumn and the other keeping variegated-leaves till winter.

Hybrids of *I. pseudacorus* and *I. kaempferi* were obtained by three breeders, the first one, which bloomed in 1962, by Mr. Oosugi. The colour is cream-yellow and the form is in between the two, though showing somewhat greater resemblance to the pod parent.

I. setosa grows wild in extremely cold areas such as the highlands of the middle and northern parts of Honshu and Hokkaido. There are two varieties known in Japan: var. *hondoensis* Honda in Kirigamine in Nagano prefecture and var. *nasuensis* Hara found recently in Nasu in Tochigi prefecture. Both of them are large in flower and form. The former has a deep violet colour with a form like that of *I. laevigata*, and the latter has a blue-violet colour.

White forms and pink forms of *I. setosa* are found occasionally in Honshu and Hokkaido, and recently a red form has been reported.

This species grows also in the warmer part of Honshu. However, in spite of the fact that this flower is very attractive, we seldom find the plant in ordinary gardens. A hybrid of *I. setosa* and *I. laevigata*, which I produced, bloomed in 1977. This attempt was made to try to decide whether var. *hondoensis* is a hybrid of *I. laevigata* and *I. setosa*, or just a variety. The hybrid turned out to be intermediate in shape and with long standards, unlike the typical *I. setosa*. The crest was of the type of *I. laevigata*.

In Japan *I. rossii* grows wild in the southern part of Honshu and in the northern part of Shikoku Island and Kyushu. This iris, found in Ehime prefecture in Shikoku, is famous as a 'symbol flower' of the prefecture. It is quite difficult in transplanting and cultivation, and is cultivated only by alpine flower-lovers in Japan. It is reported that a white form has been found.

I. gracilipes grows wild mainly at the foot of the mountains on the Japan sea side of Honshu and also in Shikoku and Kyushu. It is cultivated more by alpine flower-lovers than in the botanical gardens. It is planted in pots, and pots carrying twenty flowers have been seen at exhibitions. The white form is attractive; the 'Blue Rose' semi-double form was imported from abroad.

I. japonica is seen growing wild in some places, and is thought to have been brought from China in ancient times. The ones found in Japan are triploid and sterile. They are grown in ordinary gardens, sometimes as clumps.

IRISES IN JAPAN by AKIHA HORINAKA - Cont'd.

Clumps of *I. japonica* are successfully grown in Takarazuka Botanical Garden in Hyogo prefecture. The variegated-leaf form of this species is particularly charming. A few years ago, a Taiwan form was imported. It is very interesting that a hybrid ('Bourne Graceful') of 'Ledgers variety' and 'Capri form' was bred by Dr. J. R. Ellis in England. Now, I would like to mention briefly some well-known irises other than the species which grow wild in Japan. *I. tectorum* was introduced from China before the year 1563 and planted in ordinary gardens in Japan. The white form is attractive and variegated-leaves are found occasionally. The crested irises, including *I. wattii*, have been imported from abroad and *I. cristata* is well-known among alpine flower lovers.

I. florentina is said to have been brought to Japan in 1867. It is planted in many gardens in Hyogo prefecture and is also known as *I. albicans* in our country.

It is said that *I. pseudacorus* was imported into Japan in 1897. Today it is naturalized in wet fields and marshes. In the northern area wild clumps of *I. pseudacorus* are found in Ryshiri Island of Hokkaido. A mutation which is nearly white was found in Akita prefecture and in Hokkaido, and some iris-lovers collected these plants and developed an almost pure white form from them. 'Golden Queen' and some forms from England are being grown by enthusiasts in Japan. There are two double forms, and an attractive form with variegated-leaves.

The irises introduced from Korea and China after *I. tectorum* (which I have mentioned) were as follows: *I. pallasii* (biglumis), which is well-known and to be seen in botanical and private gardens. *I. ruthenica*, cultivated mainly by alpine flower-lovers. The iris sometimes grown under the name of *I. uniflora* seems to be a dwarf form with the short-stem of *I. sanguinea*. *I. thunbergii* Lundst. (*I. kamayama* Makino) is said to have been imported at the same time. This is very similar to *I. sanguinea* with a brilliant colour and is cultivated widely for cut flowers. *I. minuta* (*I. minutoaurea* Makino) and *I. tigridia* are cultivated by alpine flower-lovers.

The herb garden located in Edo (Tokyo) in 1638 became the foundation for the Koishikawa Botanical Garden, which was founded in 1875 and is the oldest botanical garden in our country. In this garden several irises from abroad were cultivated. One of them was *I. pallida* which was imported in about 1890.

IRISES IN JAPAN by AKIRA HORINAKA - Cont'd.

At this period the irises brought from abroad which are well-known were *I. tingitana*, *I. pumila*, *I. chamaeiris* and *I. susiana* (*I. susiana* was imported for sale in large quantities after World War II.) Other species imported before World War II were *I. fulva*, *I. ochroleuca*, *I. xiphium*, *I. xiphioides* and *I. unguicularis*. Today, Dutch irises are very popular as cut flowers. Very old cultivars of bearded irises are planted in various parks and private gardens. Several old cultivars of bearded iris were collected by Chiba University and by a few iris enthusiasts.

At present, irises seen in our public gardens are those collected from abroad which are well-known there, and those that grow wild in Japan. For example, *I. gracilipes* and *I. versicolor* and many cultivars of Japanese Irises can be seen at Kyoto Botanical Garden. In gardens of many iris lovers, irises of various types are planted according to their interests, such as bearded irises, siberian irises, spuria irises, Louisiana irises, Pacific Coast irises, Juno irises, bulbous irises, Regelia irises, *Oncocyclus* and Arilbreds. Actually, cultivars of Tall Bearded irises are the most popular.

Tall Bearded irises which were imported a little after World War II, attracted people by their beauty. Since then the author has imported many of the modern cultivars. In order to extend interest in Tall Bearded and other irises, we organized the Japan Iris Society in 1967. The opening ceremony was held in the Kyoto Botanical Garden's Hall. Dr. Y. Tsukamoto, a Professor of the Horticulture Dept. of Kyoto University, was present as a representative of the Botanic Garden. Dr. K. Tomino, a Professor of the Education Dept. of Mie University, gave an address and the author a lecture. About thirty people were present at the meeting including Dr. S. Kitamura, a Professor of Botany at Kyoto University at the time. Messages of greeting were sent by Mr. Harry Randall, a past President of the British Iris Society and Mr. Hubert Fischer who was President of the American Iris Society. Since then we have been making efforts to publicise irises by holding meetings and annual exhibitions at department stores and other places. Flowers shown in the exhibitions were brought by the members including myself and by the Kyoto Botanical Garden. The aim of our Society was to develop an interest in all kinds of irises, but most of the members are interested mainly in Tall Bearded irises and T.B.s have become very popular and well-known.

IRISES IN JAPAN by AKIRA HORINAKA - Cont'd.

Following this, siberian irises and Louisiana irises are getting more popular and I am making an effort to popularise other irises and hope to have some success. It was very helpful to us to have lectures from the American Iris Society. I shall keep up the effort to widen the interest in irises but it may take a long time.

Finally I hope that all iris lovers will have a good flowering season each year!

TREVOR BOTTLE'S LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA.

On I. Kaempferi, Trevor writes that the varieties he grows are the old cultivars obtained from Nurserymen in Australia. There are several other suppliers who have new novelties, mainly to satisfy collectors and breeders in the Eastern States especially New South Wales, where the warm wet summers are nearer to the Japanese climate. Provided that the weather does not vary too greatly towards the top end of the thermometer, they grow well enough, here in Stirling.

Control of 'thrips is important, as the heaviest flights seem to occur just as the buds are unfurling. 'Fascination', 'Pastel Princess' and the beetroot red 'Imperial Palace' seem to be the worst hit. This last is my special favourite, as it is the epitome of the Marhigo strain --- very large (10" or more across), velvety texture, sunproof colour, good bud count and strong growth.

I spray several times, prior to 'bud-burst' with Rogax or Metasystox. It is important to spray early as damage to the exposed petal tips can occur if the spray touches them followed by strong sunshine. So far I have not fertilized any of the Japanese Iris, but I have mulched with 6" of pine needles.

The old leaves are left until they 'brown off' before I cut them down. They look untidy but it is the method that the experts advise. It is usually mid-winter before they are really dead, and already by that time the tips of the new fans can be seen at the base of the clumps.

Our Japs: grown in two areas where the soil is really wet. The first area is where our septic system soakage area is, they grow very well here along with I. Delavayii, I. Mirza Citronella, Hosta Sieboldii Glauca, I. Louisiana Hybrids and Azaleas. The area is exposed to full sun.

The second area is where our bath water runs into the garden via a very narrow channel.

This goes under a pair of Walnut Trees and is interplanted with Iris Kaempferi Hybrids, Helleborus Foetidus, Miscanthus Sinensis 'Zebrina', hardy ferns and a few self-sown Aquilegia Alpina and Californica. The apparently primitive drainage arrangements suit me just fine, as our tap-water is too expensive to waste just pouring it out to sea.

I am glad we live in one of the less 'civilized' areas of our city... Along with 'Imperial Palace' my favourite cultivars are 'Island Paradise' a double white with heavy beetroot hem, the white veins radiating over the margin. 'Sopi-no-Roi' is similar but a single form. 'Emperor' is a lovely double deep blue with good velvet texture and small yellow flash.

(Thank you Trevor, nice to hear your news. Many thanks for the seed you kindly sent for the seed Bank. M.)

THE GROUP LIBRARY

Copies of the following American publications are obtainable from the Hon. Librarian, Mrs. J. Hewitt, Haygarth, Cleeton St. Mary, Cleobury Mortimer, Kidderminster:-

Newsletter of the Bouria Iris Society.

Reviews of the Society for Japanese Irises.

Journals of the Siberian Iris.

The Genus Iris subsection Sibiricae - B.I.S.

Alphabetical Table and Cultivation Guide to the Species ... B.I.S.

Please include postage when requesting items.

THE SEED DISTRIBUTION

The following Seed are available:-

Section Laevigatae:

I. Laevigata (Blue) 20 Pkts at 5p

I. Pseudacorus Bastardii (Yellow) 5 Pkts at 5p

Series Sibirica

I. Sibirica (28 Chromosomes) Blue 8 Pkts at 5p

I. Sibirica (small) Dwarf form of Sanguinea 2 Pkts at 5p

LIST OF MEMBERS

British Isles :-

- Mr. J. Baxendale, 16 Senton Road, Lockwood, Huddersfield, Yorks, HD1 3TX
 Mrs. A. Blanco White, 72 South Hill Park, London NW3 2SW.
 Miss H. C. Butcher, 20 Ticehurst Road, Forest Hill, London SE23 2PJ.
 Mr. G. B. Cassidy, B.A. F.R.I.S.A. J.P. 67 Bushwood Road, Kew, Surrey.
 Mrs. and Mrs. O. Conley, 17 Udale Close, Ainsdale, Southport, Lancs.
 Mr. R. L. Davis, 29 Fairlawn Avenue, Meole Brace, Shrewsbury, Salop.
 Prof. D. A. Dixon, Sea Birches, 6 Nicholas Avenue, Whitburn, Co. Durham.
 Mr. E. Elliott (Seed Dist.) 27 Nelson Street, Cotmanhay, Ilkeston, Derbys. DE7 8P
 Mrs. E. N. Goodwin (Chairman) 42 Tycehurst Hill, Loughton, Essex.
 Mrs. J. Grout, Colt House Nursery, High Cross, Thurgaton, Notts.
 Mrs. M. Hand, 49 Colborn Street, Nottingham
 Lady U. Hicks, Porch House, Blockly, Glos. GL56 8BW.
 Mrs. D. Hansford Morris, 'The Little House', 58 Oakley Street, Belle View, Shrewsbury, Salop.
 Mrs. J. Hewitt (Librarian), 'Haygarth', Cleeton St. Mary, Cleobury Mortimer, Kidderminster, Worcs.
 Mrs. M. B. Howells, 'The Old Corn Mill', Ingwardine Lane, Farlow, Kidderminster, Worcs. WY14 0LP
 Mr. V. H. Humphrey, 8 Howbeck Road, Arnold, Nottingham NG5 8AD
 Mr. H. R. Jeffs, Nutfield Nurseries, Crab Hill Lane, S. Nutfield, Redhill, Surrey.
 Mr. P. I. L. Knowles, 11 Garth Road, Sevenoaks, Kent.
 Mrs. E. A. Leverton, 96 Derby Road, Risley, Derby.
 A. B. Long, 'The Pheasantry', Godington Lane, Ashford, Kent.
 Flg/Offr. M. D. McCarthy, 22 Lockington Crescent, Stowmarket, Suffolk.
 Mr. H. Morris, Pine House Nursery, Searsby Road, Gaddesby, Leicester.
 Miss F. L. Olver, 'The Garden House', Angley Park, Cranbrook, Kent, TN17 2PN
 Mr. L. Peach, 59 Channel Close, Heston, Middlesex, TW5 0PJ.
 Miss M. R. Scopes, 'Larch Cottage', 63 Somerset Road, New Barnet, Herts.
 Miss J. E. Sharland, 'Broad View', Farnborough Common, Farnborough, Kent.
 Mr. J. D. Taylor, 'Saltwood', Fosseyway Avenue, Morton-in-Marsh, Glos.
 Mr. D. A. Trevithick, 86a Grantham Road, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham
 Mrs. G. J. Trevithick, (Hon. Secty/Treasurer)
 86a Grantham Road, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham

Mr. J. Vennor, Raven's Croft, 120 St. Osyth Road, Little Clacton, Essex.
Mrs. G. Watkins, 9 Sherbourne Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham.
Mr. A. E. Whittaker, 'Chestnuts', Hidden Way, Littleton,
Winchester, Hants.

Overseas

Frau M. Ahlburg 3171 Rotgesbittel, Hohenfeld 22, West Germany
Herr E. Berlin 795 Biberach/Riss, Marktolatz 5, West Germany
Dr. T. Tamberg 1000 Berlin 45, Zimmerstrasse 3, West Germany
Mr. Akira Horinoka 17 Kitamonodani, Minami-Ku, Osaka, Japan
Dr. R. H. Gali Avenue de Sully 67, CH 1814, La-Tour-de-Peilz,
Switzerland.
Dr. D. Koza 1171 East Idaho Avenue, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55106, U.S.A.
Mr. T. Nottle 5 Walker Street, Stirling 5152, South Australia
Mr. Ben R. Hager, 309 South Best Road, Stockton, California 95206, U.S.A.

CONTACTS IN SOCIETIES

Secretary of the B.I.S. Mr. G. C. Cassidy, B.A., F.R.I.B.A., J.P.,
67 Bushwood Road, Key, Surrey.
Secretary of the Species Group: Prof. P. J. A. Bowley, 'Brook Orchard',
Craffham, W. Petworth, Sussex.
Editor 'Bourne Iris Society Newsletter': Mrs. Joan Cooper,
212 W. County Road, C. Roseville, Minnesota 55113 U.S.A.
Editor 'The Siberian Iris': Mrs. H. L. Edwards,
235 Koehl St. Massapequa Park,
New York 11762 U.S.A.
Editor 'The Review Society
for Japanese Iris' Mr. W. Ouweneel, R.R. 31 Box 206,
Terre Haute, Indiana 47803 U.S.A.
Editor of Kent Group Mr. J. Vennor, 'Ravens Croft',
120 St. Osyth Road, Little Clacton, Essex

NOTICES

Anne Blanco White has the following Iris from Wisley for sale at
£1 each, inclusive of P. & P. (proceeds to the Group). Available
on a first come first served basis from August this year. Subject
to the weather (i.e. not too dry) and the time you would like them
to be delivered.

Doris Hansford's 'ROB' and 'SPRASHDOWN'.
Alex Back's 'VALOR' and 'V.I.' (VeeOne).
also 'Bourne Graceful' at £3 inclusive.

Please send your order direct to:-

Mrs. A. Blanco White, 72 South Hill Park, London NW3 2BN

(Anne is looking for a supply of I. 'Monsieur Blue', can anyone help please)

"SIBLING OF ORVILLE FAY"

In the autumn of 1978 I sent plants with this name attached to several Group members. It is the name under which I received it, but when my plant flowered in 1979 the flower was a medium blue and the falls had a white rim. From its general appearance I am virtually certain that the plant is a tetraploid, which one would expect a sibling of ORVILLE FAY to be, but I have heard from Dr. Currier McEwen that none of the ORVILLE FAY siblings which he has distributed have a white rim on the falls.

I believe that my plant is in fact SILVER EDGE, another of Dr. McEwen's tetraploid Siberians, and it seems possible that among the plants I sent out there may be others wrongly named. If the Group members who are growing it could let me know their opinions when their plants flower, I should be very interested to hear from them.

Jennifer Hewitt.

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| <u>SHOW DATE</u> | <u>SUPPER SHOW</u> | <u>R.H.S.</u> | <u>June 17th and 18th</u> |
| do | (West Midland) | OPEN GARDEN | ACOTON PICOT June 22nd |

An Appeal

Due to excessive vandalism in the Priary Gardens at Newark, I am in the process of establishing another Jubilee Garden, here, in the Grange Community Centre Gardens, Radcliffe-on-Trent. If you can spare any Iris plants at the end of the season, they would be very acceptable. Please send them to : Joan Trevithick,
86a, Grantham Road,
Radcliffe-on-Trent,
Nottingham.

Thank You.