



The Review

The Group for
Beardless Irises

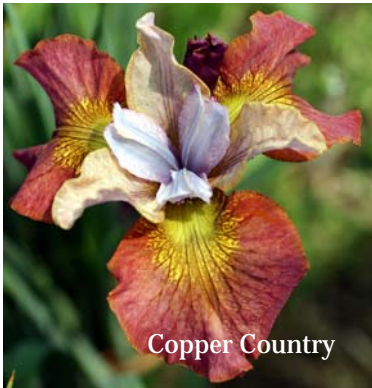
Issue No 5 Autumn 2008



Nothing But The Blues



Laugh Out Loud



Copper Country



Light Of Heart



Who's on First



'Lemon Blush

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Notes from the Editor

Brita Carson

Can this be the same year when, on the one hand, at the Beijing Olympics, we won the most Gold Medals that Britain has ever won and on the other, the FTSE fell by half? And now the whole world is in recession? Time to bury my head in the sand (wet heavy clay in my case) and let husband do the worrying.

Thankfully all is not lost and we have our own Olympian to bring excitement back into these dull days; a retreat from both the news and the weather. Our Olympian is, of course, Jennifer who has won the coveted Dykes Medal for her Siberian 'Peter Hewitt'. Few Siberians have attained this status and there is a lovely tribute to Jennifer's work by one of the "proud parents". We always need the past to produce the future and irises and their inheritance are no exception. We need people like Marjorie Brummitt and Sir Michael Foster and also the dedication of hybridisers today, to produce lovely plants with the possible added bonus of winning awards or nearly winning awards.

After moving house my own irises showed great reluctance to flower this year and it was the possibility of having remontant irises that started me seeking out rebloomers. Jennifer patiently searched all the records and sent me a list of possibles but she felt very doubtful about any of them liking my climate. When I asked Anne about ensatas she confirmed that it would take a lot of extra work to have much success. But you must read all the articles on "Rebloom" and "Repeat Bloom" and see if your plants might qualify for more flowers. And I want to know if anyone has positive results and with which cultivars.

And so if I can't have any remontants the next best thing is to have a collection of *I. unguicularis* which just helps to fill the gap after summer and before the *reticulatas* start. I know we all need a seasonal rest but we also need an iris fix on as many days of the year as possible. Again Jennifer will probably suggest I go for *I. lazica* in my climate.

Berney Baughen has always kept notes on bloom times with start and finish dates which will be an invaluable source of information when people look back at the records. Alun is also doing the same for Herefordshire. Would any others like to take on this task somewhere else? I think the plants would need to be well established before starting.

Again I've asked some expert growers for their cultural advice and would like to thank them for all their help, advice and photographs.

It would be great to hear from any member who would like to write for either *The Review* or with news for *The Newsletter*.

Chairman's Message

Anne Blanco White

So much for global warming in these islands, except perhaps for the north-east coastal zone. Damp and chilly most of the year resulting in a poor seed season. Even the runner beans have been sulking! Worse still, not only have there been outbreaks of stinking rhizome rot among the bearded irises, but one of my foetidissimas went down with it too. Luckily it's simply a red berried form and I can spare it.

However we have had one really good piece of news: Alun and Jill have taken over the national collection of siberica irises so the future of many old cultivars is assured for the present though it will take time to get them sorted, properly identified and displaying to their satisfaction. Note the spelling of 'siberica'. This has been the practice with the species proper for a long time and it makes sense to apply it across the board. This is partly because a spelling of 'sibirica' can lead people to think that all cultivars descended from both groups of this Series are descended from *I. sibirica* alone. We, who have experience, know that the 28 and 40 chromosome plants are very different and that there are three different species in the 28 group alone. And it is interesting to note that after years of breeders concentrating on stiff stalked siberica hybrids with large, showy flowers there is a tendency now to go for the older style with slender stalks and more generous branching for lighter weight flowers.

All the same we need more breeders of all types of beardless irises to concentrate on a wider range of colours. But that is not all. We should congratulate Brita on the Reviews with their colourful covers and splendid photographs of plants to complement the texts. Editors tend to feel that they are taken for granted, but the results of their labours (and it is hard work) are essential to the life of the Group. Madeleine, too, had a successful start with the seed distribution though this year may not be so good. We need here to accept that some of our sales are at the expense of the main Society to which you may have sent your seeds in past years. Personally, I split my harvest between the two partly because the Group has a smaller catchment and partly because the BIS has a much wider one.

Carrying on Gardening. This was the year of the alpine strawberries. Frankly they got out of control and I made a pig of myself. I think their over-enthusiasm may have been due to the wormery which produced vast quantities of dark fluid which I sloshed over the flower beds. The wormery worked very well in its fashion – I had no problem with keeping the worms happy, but it simply couldn't cope with the quantity of material I wanted to compost. And the compost it produced wasn't what I wanted either. So last autumn I bought a so-called 'patio composter'. The name alone is enough to

raise the gravest doubts, but in fact it did what I wanted. It consumed everything I put into it – along with surplus worms from the wormery – and produced the sort of compost I really want. Clearly the sheer weight of vegetable material was what made the difference. I still have to take the toughest stuff down to the recycling centre, but the wormery itself has gone and been replaced by another and larger composter which is of considerable interest to two varieties of wasp. I'm short of hover flies and bees, but something dealt with the problem of setting seed on the Evansias and there will be an outbreak of seedlings next year; still, they are easy enough to weed out. One LA, a Bert Bailey seedling, flowered on a fine scale and tried, but failed, to set seed.

As to my odd hybrids of last year: the seeds from the *pseudacorus mzchetica* x 'Seuver Punch' have germinated, but the reverse cross with 'Punch' as the pod parent did not. Since both plants, kept well apart this year, have again set seed I fancy that there was no cross. In which case the *mzchetica* ones will be just that and the 'Punch' will probably be closer to *versicolor* if they come to anything. All part of the spice of life.

The Wetland Trials. One way and another, not a good year for flowers. All the *pseudacorus* hybrids grew like mad having got started early in the season, but the pseudatas had a very poor flower display while the Seuevers did quite well. The ensatas in general did not enjoy anything. The Portsmouth Field is an unforgiving site and very prone to radiation frosts at critical times. There was, too, a very hot spell without any rain and with a drying wind just when these plants were trying to put up flowering points. The Wisley staff did their best with watering, but it seemed to dry up as fast as it was applied. For the coming season, the beds are to be deepened to see if there will be better results because when there is a good display these beds do encourage visitors down to look at all the trials.

It is noteworthy that plants around the bottom areas of the rock garden which are better sheltered from climatic extremes put on a much better show. The dwarf forms from Japan have survived on the edge of the fish pond while they pretty well died out in the trial proper.

Secretary's Report

Madeleine Bullock

There were so many days when it was impossible to venture into the garden this year that I spent some time reading books and Newsletters from the GBI Library. My favourites so far are *The Siberian Iris* by Currier McEwen (1996) and *Irises* by Harry Randall (1969) – both delightful to read and packed full of interesting information. I've also been reading my way through a pile of very old newsletters from USA and New Zealand Iris Societies.

Earlier in the year we received an email from a student in Poland, Karolina Rogala, who was planning a research project for which she needed 500 iris seeds of known parentage in several varieties. Unfortunately, most of the seed in the Seed Distribution is open pollinated so we couldn't help but I'm hoping to hear how the project went and will let you know if I receive news.

Considering what a challenging year it's been in the garden, the response to my request for seed for the Seed Distribution has been very good. We are fortunate to receive seed from some of the best beardless iris growers worldwide. Thanks to everyone who contributed. There would be no Seed Distribution without you!

You'll probably remember the very interesting *Review* in Autumn 2006 which focused on PCIs. If you're interested in these fascinating and beautiful irises you'll be pleased to hear that we have some PCI seed in the Seed Distribution this year donated by Bob Sussman, Seed Exchange Chair for SPCNI. He has very kindly sent some seed from 'Gold Dust' seedlings and from 'Cape Sebastian'.

We also have some mixed PCI seed from Garry Knipe (hybridiser from California, USA) whose pack of mixed PCI seed was accompanied with the following note:

..... it has quite an assortment of pod parents going into the mix. Most are from my seedlings which focus on *I. munzii* derived blue/turquoise breeding. But don't get hopes up too high since few offspring exhibit those colours and those that do tend to be pale. Lots of other stuff too, like red perianth tubes, and some faint fragrance from the *I. macrosiphon* breeding. Good luck to your members. Best wishes Garry Knipe

I look forward to sowing some of these named varieties and selected seedlings of *I. tenax* and *I. macrosiphon*, second generation.

Let's hope we have a crisp cold winter and a long hot summer in 2009.

Report from the Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Alun Whitehead

The Treasurer's report should be the article of least interest in the Review. After all it is really an administrative necessity and our real interest lies in irises. By tradition and expectation, it is an article which gives a breakdown of the Group's finances. There should be nothing to get excited about or to raise the pulse; in fact a Treasurer's role should be one of tedium. However, what a different year this has been and continues to be thanks to the esteemed Old Lady (no not Jill, the Bank of England – the banking regulator). The Group is unlikely to be considered a "private individual" and

so the protection of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme probably doesn't apply to us. During the darkest days, it actually became necessary to take a closer look at our bank and even now that the liquidity crisis is easing, it is still worth a closer look. Traditionally I am told that banking crises are usually at the end of a recession and in the UK bad debts have still to surface. By luck or judgement, the good news is that HSBC is one of the better names currently in banking circles. No alarms have so far been ringing and hopefully none will. A quick assessment can be made by looking at the ratio of a bank's total liabilities divided by its shareholders' funds – the lower the ratio, the greater the safety margin provided by the shareholders. At the end of 2007 before the current wave of bank recapitalisation, the ratios looked like

HSBC	16.4
RBS	19.8
HBOS	29.0
Barclays	36.8

As can be seen, HSBC looks to be one of the most prudent, though we may not be out of the woods yet. The Government might have been seen to come to the rescue, but the Government is a bit like a David trying to handle a Goliath. The UK Gross Domestic Product at the end of last year was something like £1188bn. This is similar to Barclay's liabilities. In other words, Barclays is about the same size as the UK economy and RBS is about half as large again

UK Public Sector Debt	614bn (at March 2008)
Bank of England total assets	102bn
Barclays total liabilities	1194bn
RBS total liabilities	1809bn
UK GDP	1188bn

With globalisation our 'domestic' banks may need a larger international regulator? This all makes our finances look definitely small beer. However, they are given below for your enjoyment. The year ended 31st Dec. 2007.

Subscriptions:	415.50
Donations	8.50
Seed Sales	85.50
Plant Sales	66.55
Newsletter Cost	103.39
Review Cost	158.12
Cost of printing flyers	60.00
Interest Received	21.45
Postage due to A Whitehead	9.99
Total Net increase at bank	285.98

Opening Bank Balance Current AC		1752.32
Plus net increase in funds		285.98
		2038.30
represented by:		
Closing Treasury AC Balance		1021.45
Closing Current AC Balance		1016.85
subs paid in advance	@ 31.12.2006	215.27
And	@ 31.12.2007	321.66

The accounts reflect the dates payments are made and so the Review Cost relates to 2006. The cost for 2007 was £130.81 and will be shown in 2008 figures. The figure for the Newsletter Costs covers both those for 2006 and 2007. New items include the cost of printing the flyers and interest received on our Treasury account. The accounts were kindly reviewed by Chris Towers, the BIS Treasurer, and a copy of his statement is available to members (just send an email or SAE). No matters arose which gave concern and we would like to thank Chris for giving his time so generously.

It is difficult in this financial situation to know whether the UK is heading for galloping deflation and a prolonged period of recession or an overdose of antidote and rapid inflation. Hopefully, a middle course will be found. In the meantime, it seems sensible to leave subscription rates unchanged.

I am pleased to welcome 11 new members to the Group. It is clear from the correspondence that you are all enthusiastic about your particular irises. We are widely dispersed geographically and this means that it is difficult to meet, but hopefully by contributing to the Review and the Newsletter we can continue to keep in touch and share ideas. The feedback we are getting is that there is an interest in irises and beardless irises in particular. So hopefully, as Membership Secretary I can expect a busy year.

2009 SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE

Please send cheque, **£4.50 for U.K. & Europe; £5.00, elsewhere** payable to: ***The Group for Beardless Irises*** in respect of your subscription 2009 to: **The Membership Secretary, GBI, Aulden Farm, Aulden, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0JT.**

If it is more convenient you can pay 2 or 3 years' subscription in advance at the discounted rate of £4.00 for UK & Europe or £4.50 for non-European members.

Please include your name, address, telephone number and email address. We will publish a list of members periodically. Please indicate if you would prefer that your details are not included.

Congratulations to Jennifer Hewitt – With Mixed Feelings

Bob Hollingworth, Windwood Gardens, Michigan, USA

It was with an odd mixture of pleasure, envy, and a little pride, that I learned that Jennifer Hewitt had won the British Dykes Medal for her fine Siberian iris, 'Peter Hewitt'. Pleasure in this recognition for Jennifer who has been a stalwart hybridizer and supporter of Siberian (and other beardless) irises in the UK, continuing the long tradition of Amos Perry, Marjorie Brummitt and several others. Better yet, I'm sure the award must be all the more meaningful by recognizing the very special iris she chose to name after her husband. She has been a tower of strength, not only as a hybridizer, but also as a proponent and supporter of other people's cultivars, many of which might not be available in the UK if it were not for her efforts. Regrettably, Jennifer's own introductions have not often made the trip across the Atlantic, but two that many people here admire are her selections 'Enid Burgoyne', a sibirica type in white and yellow, and 'Dark Aura', (versicolor/virginica) with its quite arresting black stems.

Envious? Of course, particularly because there is little chance of any beardless iris winning the Dykes Medal in North America. Even having an intermediate bearded win, as with Marky Smith's 'Starwoman' this year, seems like a triumph of diversity after the virtual monopoly of the TBs. This is only the fifth time a Siberian has been so honored in the British/EU system (preceded by 'Cambridge', 'Anniversary', 'Berlin Ruffles', and 'Perfect Vision'). The Australasian Dykes has also been awarded to at least one Siberian ('Emma Ripeka' in 1994). Oh for such an appreciative audience here!

Finally there was the undercurrent of a little pride because we can claim 'Peter Hewitt' as a sort of grandchild. 'Coronation Anthem' — an introduction of ours — is one of the parents, the other being Currier McEwen's 'Golden Edge'.

Congratulations Jennifer!
Thanks for flying the Siberian flag so high.

Medal Winners, Our Olympic Sport

In Britain the Gold Medal for any iris is the Dykes Medal which, although it is available to all irises, is seldom awarded to a Siberian. Some years if there are no outstanding candidates it is not awarded at all.

In America the Dykes Medal has never been awarded to a Siberian and so a medal was created to be given annually to the best Siberian. Started in 1986 the Morgan-Wood Medal soon became established as the gold of Siberians.

Cleveland Morgan was a Canadian breeder of Siberians and a founding member of the AIS. Three of his best known hybrids are 'Caesar', 'Caesar's Brother' and 'Tropic Night'. Ira (Sandy) Wood and his wife were very active in all work attached to the AIS and they were both awarded the Distinguished Service Medal in 1974.

Bob Hollingworth has been hybridising Siberians for many years gaining the most Morgan-Wood medals since it was first awarded - an amazing achievement. Many congratulations to Bob. These are the winners with the years they were awarded, most of which are available in this country.

1992 'Lady Vanessa'

1993 'Jewelled Crown'

1994 'Sultan's Ruby'

1997 'Coronation Anthem'

2000 'Over in Gloryland'

2001 'Strawberry Fair'

2004 'Blueberry Fair'

A search through the Plant Finder will supply all but two of the above cultivars. 'Sultan's Ruby' and 'Over in Gloryland' are not listed. What better place to start your hybridising programme by using cultivars from one of the experts. Unfortunately the new introductions will remain elusive to us meantime.

On the inside cover are new introductions from Bob and they all look likely contenders for more Morgan-Wood Medals. They are all diploid Siberians. 'Laugh Out Loud' introduced in 2007.

'Light At Heart' 2007.

'Nothing But The Blues' 2008

'Copper Country' - exciting new red and yellow combination, 2008.

'Laugh Out Loud' - is almost a complete yellow, 2008.

'Lemon Blush' - another for 2008

'Who's On First' - Bob explains

“'Who's On First' is actually registered with AIS in the Species-X class since it has a good complement of *I. typhifolia* genes and resembles that species in form and in blooming very early. Aside from the allusion to being early, this name may be a bit mysterious, but it refers to a famous vaudeville sketch in the US describing a baseball game.”

On the inside back cover are more medal winners. They all show the strong direction the hybridisers are taking to-day. More and more of our winning iris cultivars are produced using American genes from some of their very best hybrids.

Thank You Marjorie

Jill Whitehead

I was looking at the British Dykes Medal winners and it suddenly struck me how few Siberians have been awarded this honour. After all it is the supreme award of the BIS, instituted in 1926 to commemorate the outstanding work of William Rickatson Dykes and is made to hybrids of proven garden merit. Bearded iris have always dominated until 'Cambridge' had the distinction of being the first non-bearded iris to win since it was given to 'Margot Holmes' in 1927, the year the award was first made. In fact only four Siberians have received this honour but it is only fair to point out that it is not automatically awarded every year.

1971 – 'Cambridge' Marjorie Brummitt. First registered in 1964. ('White Swirl' x 'Gatineau'). Described as having turquoise blue standards, falls the same with white and yellow markings at the base.

1979 – 'Anniversary' Marjorie Brummitt. First registered in 1965. ('Wisley White' x 'White Swirl'). Described as a white self with yellowish hafts.

1999 – 'Berlin Ruffles' Tomas Tamberg. First registered in 1993 it came from 'Lake Niklas' x 7643C ('Cambrita' x 'Tealwood') and has mid-blue standards with ruffled velvety mid-blue falls. Height 40" (102cm).

2000 – 'Perfect Vision' Cy Bartlett. First registered in 1996 it came from 'Harpswell Happiness' x 'Berlin Ruffles'. Standards are medium violet-blue, with darker ruffled falls while the style arms are turquoise.

Immediately you notice that Marjorie managed to win twice in the 70s but it was 20 years before another Siberian was honoured. As I find it fascinating to know about the person behind the plants, I started thinking about Marjorie Brummitt. She and her husband Leonard, himself no mean iris breeder, lived in Bloxham Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire and from all accounts they were a formidable team. It's funny how little thoughts remain in your mind. As a child, living in London, we used to visit my grandparents in Leicester via Banbury. I used to pester my parents endlessly as to when we were going to get to where the white horse lived and then why hadn't I seen "the fine lady on the white horse?" I wonder how much my parents regretted reading me the nursery rhyme!

Leonard's original interest was in orchids and he was a member of the RHS Orchid Committee. Orchids take six years to flower from seed and so he started breeding iris when he found that he could get them into flower in half the time. Whilst Marjorie became a member of the BIS in 1950, Leonard had become a life member in 1946. Leonard tended to concentrate on bearded iris, three of his TBs were also Dykes Medal winners, in 1957, 1959 and again in 1964. What started Marjorie breeding I have been unable

to find out or why she chose beardless. One of my thoughts is from the flower arranging aspect. She was obviously a very talented flower arranger whether professional or amateur I'm not sure, and as much as Beth Chatto describes how she started growing the more unusual plants for her flower arranging, did Marjorie start breeding the iris for a similar reason? I don't suppose we will ever find out but one thing is for sure, we should be grateful that she did. Certainly in their excellent article in the 1956 *Year Book* entitled "Irises in the Home" we are treated to a detailed description of flower arranging using many different irises throughout the year. Marjorie was also chairman of the Banbury Floral Art Group and in this role acted as an iris-missionary, extolling the virtues of the iris for the flower decorator. In fact once you start reading the *Year Books* it is more than obvious that Marjorie had a real talent. She won recognition at a number of the shows and two in particular caught my imagination. In 1958 she won the Insole Challenge Cup for a display of Californian and Pacific Coast Irises. A photo appears and it is described as "floral fireworks", "outstandingly attractive exhibit", "spectacular array of the princesses of the iris race". In 1972 for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations, Marjorie covered a table with golden velvet and filled it with arrangements of PCIs. In her obituary Ivor Knowles describes how he "was brought to a halt, as were many others, by a large table covered by what at first sight seemed to be mounds of precious stones". Although the RHS had recognized her work on many occasions, this exhibit was special. It was awarded the coveted Holford Medal, for the best exhibit staged by an amateur at any of the RHS Shows, including Chelsea, during the whole year.

The garden at Bloxham Road was of modest size but full of interesting plants as both the Brummitts had green fingers. In one article mention is made of a fine stand of meconopsis as well as a delightful rock garden where some of the smaller species iris featured. Of course there were numerous shrubs which not only provided a backdrop but were also useful flower arranging foliage. The curved path to the front door was lined with PCIs and a bed of TBs featured in the back garden along with Leonard's greenhouses for his orchids and beds for his hemerocallis which he also bred. However it was their "allotment" which caused a stir. It was not a true allotment but a piece of ground which was originally a tennis court bounded by hedges on three sides. It was up a track on the opposite side of the road, approximately ½ acre in size and adjoining a recreation ground. This is where Leonard grew the majority of his TBs and Marjorie had her collection of Siberians and other irises which she liked. It must have been a stunning show, a real opportunity to see and compare new seedlings along with some older varieties. Both were keen photographers, not only of plants, but also of wildlife. In one article Marjorie describes how the hedgehogs and birds were all part of the garden. However when a vixen

raised her cubs under the shed on the allotment they were not so keen, especially when the cubs used the iris seedling beds as a playground!

Visitors were always made very welcome and Jennifer Hewitt talks fondly of them both. Jennifer had moved to near Banbury in 1964, when her parents retired there, and for some reason decided that she must have an iris border. It was her mother who spotted the advert in the Banbury newspaper about iris for sale at 1/- (5p) each. Jennifer and Peter (her late husband) bought 15/- (75p) worth to divide between the two gardens. The Brummitts used to sell these to raise money for a local animal shelter. Their dog, Candy, had been a rescue dog and 'Sugar Candy', one of Marjorie's PCIs, was named after their beloved and devoted pet. 'Sugar Candy' is described as a biscuit self with maroon markings, registered in 1966. It looks very interesting - does anybody still have it? Jennifer's interest at this time was TBs and it wasn't until their move to her present home that she developed an interest in Siberians. However, on future visits Peter was given the task of occupying their daughters on the swings at the recreation ground while Jennifer spent time with the Brummitts and their irises. On one occasion they were waiting in the Brummitts' house admiring a beautiful single orchid, Peter asked "Is it plastic?" Jennifer quickly said "No" and was very grateful that nobody was in hearing range. The only time that Jennifer has seen 'Margot Holmes' in flower was on their allotment. She also remembers seeing 'Cambridge' growing there, as well as 'Dreaming Spires'. The original intention had been to call this 'Isis' in honour of Oxford but presumably this name had already been taken. We still grow 'Cambridge' on our heavy soil and it seems to do very well, although this is not always the case with everyone. We also recently acquired 'Limeheart' and 'Anniversary' and hope they will soon become well established.

Everyone who visited the Brummitts enjoyed cups of tea and lashings of encouragement. John Taylor, in his reminiscences in 1983, describes Leonard as his mentor when he first joined the society. He was friends with them for 25 years, and particularly enjoyed Leonard's dry sense of humour. He felt very privileged to share their knowledge. There is also an article in the American Iris Society *Bulletin* 2007 on "The Brummitts of Banbury" where the author Mr George Waters fondly remembers his visits to their garden. George with Joy, his first wife, lived in Oxhey near Watford, Hertfordshire. Joy was the secretary of the BIS in the '60s and they were both active members of the Mercia Group. After Joy's death, George moved to the States. The article has photographs, taken by George, of the Brummitts and 'Sugar Candy' features on the cover.

'Fawn Ruffles' was the first iris that Marjorie registered in 1955 but she is probably best known for her Banbury iris strain, with names like 'Banbury Beauty', 'Banbury Dream' etc. Care must be taken because Leonard also

prefixed some of his TBs with Banbury. It was during the sixties and early seventies that she registered most of her seedlings, also gaining a Dykes Medal for her PCI 'No Name' in 1976. This was the first and only time a PCI has been awarded the medal. 'No Name' (*douglasiana* seedling x 'Pacific Splendour') is bright yellow and Marjorie chose the name because it looked rather like a large *I. innominata*.

In 1978 they were jointly awarded The American Iris Society Hybridizer's Medal. Leonard and Marjorie were obviously a remarkable couple, both very generous with their time and plants. Leonard eventually gave up his hybridising to look after Marjorie, but died before her in 1981 aged 81. Even in her later years Marjorie was still enthusiastic. Cy Bartlett in an article in the 1989 *Year Book* on hybridising, describes Marjorie staying with them, and how "In a short space of a few days Marjorie filled me with the urge to hybridise because of her unbounded enthusiasm and how easy she made it all sound". Marjorie died in 1988 and in her obituary Ivor Knowles mentions that when illness forced her breeding work to stop, she had collected 3 Dykes Medals, 8 Hugh Miller Trophies, 5 FCCs (First Class Certificate¹) and no less than 18 AMs (Award of Merit). She had also inspired a good number of people to grow, exhibit and even breed irises which surely counts as having left the world a better place.

Jennifer is continuing this great work with Siberians and congratulations to her for being awarded the Dykes Medal with 'Peter Hewitt'. Little did Peter realise all those years ago when he drove Jennifer to the Brummitts that his name would become a famous iris.

Just think.....

....if Jennifer's mother hadn't seen the newspaper advert offering Marjorie's irises for sale
....if Cy hadn't had Marjorie to stay
....if Marjorie hadn't bred 'Cambridge' then Tomas Tamberg would not have been able to produce 'Berlin Ruffles'

It's amazing to think that without Marjorie's enthusiasm and her plants, all the Dykes Medals would never have been awarded to a Siberian.

So thank you Marjorie.

If anyone has any memories of either the Brummitts or their garden I would love to hear from them.

¹The FCC has now been replaced by the Award of Garden Merit (AGM)

The Marjorie Brummitt Trophy is awarded to the most deserving PCI cv in the Dykes Trial. It is given annually, but some years PCIs are not entered. See how to enter your seedlings in the BIS Trials in the spring *Newsletter*.

Sir Michael Foster

Christopher Saunders

Sir Michael Foster (1836 – 1907) was a pioneer of collecting and breeding irises from about 1875, as has been fittingly commemorated by the Iris Society's award in his name. So it was a revelation to us when in 1973 the then secretary of the Society called in, and told us that we were living in Sir Michael's house, built by him in 1875. Mrs Waters told us about his work with irises, and sent us copies from her archives of documents about him. We had noticed various non-flowering irises about the garden, rather overgrown and neglected, so slowly we set about moving them to more congenial places and eventually 3 bloomed, very exciting.

Then in 2003 Anne Blanco White got in touch and arranged to visit when we had some blooms to show. A beautiful pale blue she has since identified with 90% certainty as 'Caterina', one of Foster's pallida hybrids. It is very vigorous with 9 flowers per stalk and resists leaf rot better than some; it has since been called a thug! She sent us more archive material about Foster, including his obituary from *The Gardener's Chronicle*; this set us going, and medical friends at Trinity College sent extracts from books and articles on the history of the Cambridge Medical School whose rapid development in the late 19th century was due to Foster and colleagues whom he inspired.

Foster was one of the great Victorians who did so much to increase knowledge and enhance our world. He revolutionised the teaching of biology and physiology at Cambridge, and his methods spread to the Continent and the USA through his graduate students, and his publications and papers at learned conferences. His friends included Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley and many more scientific and medical luminaries who flourished from 1860 to 1914.

Foster came from a medical family in Huntingdon, and won a scholarship to Cambridge which he was not allowed to take up because of his family's non-conformism. Instead he went to University College London; qualified as a doctor and then, after practising as a GP, he was persuaded to return to UCL. He joined a pioneering physiology research team who were also developing more practical ways of training medics. He became Professor of Physiology. This eventually led to an invitation from Cambridge where he was soon instrumental in establishing chairs of Anatomy, Physiology and Pharmacology which were previously all under one Professor of Medicine. Foster continued to extend his influence by serving on various National commissions and committees. He was President of the British Association at its 1899 meeting; joint secretary of the Royal Society from 1881 to 1903; and MP for the University of London 1900 - 1906.

At the same time he pursued his hobby, gardening, with the same fervour as

medicine with a strong scientific bent. His scientific approach to iris breeding is shown in his meticulous notes of everything he did, preserved in the Linnaean Library. He had full scope for that when he bought 10 acres of chalky land on top of the last of the Gog Magog hills just south of Cambridge. Here he built a red brick 5 bedroom house and established his garden, wood and paddocks, sheltering them by planting hundreds of trees, and employing at least 2 gardeners and 2 garden boys. He is quoted as saying “We have no soil, so we make our own”.

He must have started collecting irises before he built this house. He had shrewdly recruited diplomats, Russian generals, colonial administrators, pioneering travellers and members of the American Mission to send him specimens of irises from Turkey, the Middle East, Central Asia, India and China. Thus he formed his remarkable collection which gave him great scope for selecting the best forms and then hybridising to improve them. He worked on both bearded and beardless irises. He showed that many irises named as separate species were already in cultivation or those identified in their habitats were the same plant adapted to different conditions or natural hybrids. Their parentage he determined by recreating hybrids from his own collection with his wide knowledge of what species would be growing where.

A list of 17 species irises in his collection runs from *I. bakeriana*, from the hill country in the upper reaches of the Euphrates, to *I. willmottiana*, from East Turkistan. It also includes others from Tibet, Cyprus, North Persia, China and Bokhara.

In the *Bulletin* of the American Iris Society, an article by L. F. Randolph, “The first crosses made by Foster in the Spring of 1878 included various American species and other beardless irises such as *Ii. pseudacorus*, *versicolor* and *ochroleuca*...” By 1882 he seems to have concentrated on hybrids of bearded species.

Iris Chronicles (USA) of 1963 gives a list of over 50 hybrids and selections that he named. Two spurias are among them. One was ‘Shelford Giant’, growing to 6 feet with large golden yellow flowers. I was told it is a selection from near Ephesus in Turkey, though the list says *I. spuria* subsp. *ochroleuca* x *I. spuria aurea*. Photos from the recent Wisley trials show it doing well. Sadly it has not survived here. I hoped to obtain some ‘Monspur’, the other spuria on the list, and I was given some by Anne Blanco White. It flowered in 2008, a charming medium blue, about 2.5 ft tall. The name combined parts of its parents’ names – *I. monnieri* and *I. spuria*. Another spuria, name unknown, has survived here, and now flowers vigorously after feeding and weeding – it is up to 5 ft tall, with yellow and white blooms, handsome though not as showy as ‘Shelford Giant’. It may be a survivor of Foster’s collection of species, or a later introduction.

An article in *The Garden* Dec. 1916, *Flag Irises* by R. W. Wallace, describes a visit probably during Foster's lifetime. "It was my fortune to visit Shelford in May and June when the garden was full of masses of bloom, irises in every direction...grand garden plants in 'Lady Foster', 'Crusader', 'Kashmir White', 'Ring Dove' and 'Shalimar'". The TB 'Kashmir White' may be a selection not a hybrid, described as *I. kashmiriana* Wallace var. However elsewhere it is described as a tetraploid and I understand may therefore be a hybrid.

Foster's obituary in *The Gardeners Chronicle*, February 2, 1907, states that, "He was present at a meeting of the British Science Guild at the Mansion House on Monday last, but died on the following day."

Up to the end, he led a remarkably active life, contributing to so many fields. The Foster Memorial Plaque is given by the BIS to individuals of any nationality in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the advancements of the genus *Iris*.

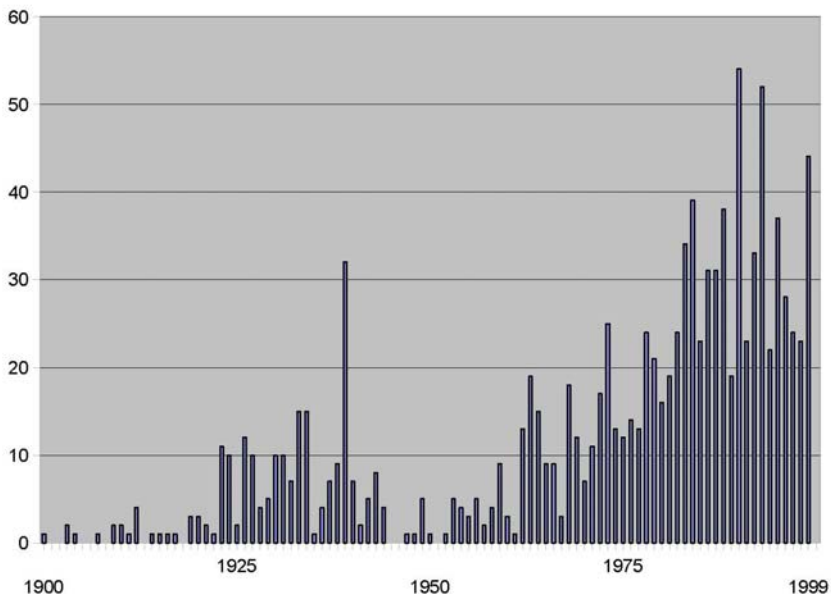
Old Plants, New Places

What's happening with the Siberian Collection?

Alun Whitehead

Over the last couple of years concern has been mentioned about the old National Collection of Siberian Irises that was held at Lingen Nursery by Kim Davis. The nursery closed and the collection lost its NCCPG status at about that time. Of course, something had to be done and we were slow to put up our hand for several reasons. Firstly, the main factor was time. Jill and I, as you know, run a nursery and 3 acre garden with only the help of a sometimes loveable cat. Herefordshire is not highly populated and too far from the Birmingham conurbation to run our type of nursery with the luxury of staff and still make a living. Accordingly, the extra work involved needed some careful thinking about.

So how big a job is it looking after a collection of Siberians? Firstly, let's look at numbers. From a list given to us, the old collection had about 125 cultivars. The criteria for including them in the collection was 1) that they were British bred with 28 chromosomes; 2) they are an award winner; and 3) they are significant in some way. From Lingen we managed to dig up 85, some are very strong growers, but some of the weaker ones had died. Jennifer Hewitt, long known for her love of Siberians and instrumental in founding the original collection, has kindly put together a list of about 200 cultivars. We already grow a large number and it soon became apparent that we could think of a few "must haves" which were not on the list! So that gives some idea of the current situation: what of the future. The introduction of new cultivars has tended to rise over the last decades.



The graph shows the number of Siberian registrations in each year. I won't say that it is 100% accurate as it was 'thrown together' quite quickly whilst writing the article, but it certainly shows the trend. I think you will find something similar for other well known herbaceous plants - so clearly any collection will need some room for expansion.

It was interesting to see how Kim had housed the collection at Lingen and we could learn from his experience. Ideally he had planted in groups of three where numbers allowed, as having three plants gave protection against a failure. On the other hand, having three plants together can mean that they all suffer if that patch of ground has a problem; lack of fertility, moles or accident. Wanting to spread our risks, it seemed sensible to aim for a system of bed rotation. We are using similar planting distances to the Wisley trials, which is about 100m² per set of the estimated 200 plant collection. We believe that we can manage about 2 complete sets in an area adjoining the garden. A third set can be kept with the nursery stock as back-up and eventually we will have an area in part of the garden where a representative selection can be displayed. Another factor to consider was that some irises seem to perform well in some parts of the country rather than others. What if disaster happens? It seems prudent for a second collection to be held somewhere else, if the cultivars are to be truly

protected. Our Editor has kindly agreed to make a second collection in Scotland. As well as safeguarding the irises, it will also provide an opportunity to those living further north to see the plants without having to travel so far. We had the pleasure of enjoying Scottish hospitality when we delivered some of the irises to Brita this autumn and had the chance of paying a joint visit to Billy Carruthers' nursery, Binny Plants, near Edinburgh to witness first hand the enthusiasm for the Siberians, and even more generous Scottish hospitality! Hopefully, we will be able to make time for a return whistle-stop visit during flowering time.

Another reason for our slowness in volunteering was the fact that many of the 28 chromosome Siberian cultivars are not as threatened as their 40 chromosome counterparts, the Sino-Siberians and from the US, the Pacific Coast Irises. In particular, we have long cherished a hope to try to put the remaining British cultivars on a sounder footing. I think the Broadleigh PCIs are safely distributed, but what about those of Marjorie Brummitt or Nora Scopes? The Rix & Phillips *Perennials Vol. 1*, p221 gives photos of Doris Hansford's 'Splashdown' and 'Charm of Finches'. 'Splashdown' was even awarded an AGM at one time. Unfortunately, the only place you are likely to see them is in the pages of this book. I have found their labels in gardens before but not the plants. Similarly, we have come across the label of the first British Dykes winner several times, but so far not the true 'Margot Holmes'*. The impostors are 28 chromosome Siberians and look completely different. Time is our enemy and this is the reason we have not pursued this more enthusiastically. Having sufficient time to enjoy our garden, the plants, sell plants, propagate more plants and see other gardens in the short space of the flowering season has always been difficult.

Our solution for 2009 is to cut back on the plant fairs and concentrate on the garden and the collection. This naturally involves some risk to our income, but history is important to us. It is easy to spend one's life reinventing the wheel when more can be gained by building on previous experiences. A collection gives hybridisers of the future a chance to see what has been obtained and a chance to decide what improvements may be possible. It is all too easy to name a good-looking iris without checking to see if there is not a better one already in existence. Gardeners can also use a collection to see the range of cultivars available. In order to allow visitors to make some sense out of the large number of Siberians being planted, the first set of them are being laid out in date order so that a progression can be seen from 'Snow Queen' in 1900 to 'Atlantic Crossing' in 2005.

Let's now go back and have a second look at the graph. As well as the general trend for more cultivars to be introduced, it does have a very noticeable spike in 1939 when 32 cultivars were registered. Was this a rush before the onset of war or did it reflect the natural trend that the war cut

short? In those days, most of the introductions came from Cleveland in the States; for example 'Summer Sky'. In the same year John Waterer & Sons in the UK registered 'Bracknell' and 'Camberley', and tantalisingly two are also mentioned for Kelway & Son; 'Consul' and 'Florence Butler', but I have no further details. Of course many hybridisers contributed to the increasing numbers of cultivars which came towards the end of the century. The best known must be Currier McEwen starting with 7 cultivars in 1968, among them 'Cleve Dodge' which is still a favourite of mine for the intensely deep blue colour. Currier introduced almost one tenth of all Siberian cultivars up to the end of the last century. The fact that many Siberians still being sold were bred by him is testament to his achievement. In the UK Marjorie Brummitt had already started to register some of her famous Siberians; 'Cambridge' (1964), 'Limeheart' (1968). Also Doris Hansford was of this era, but sadly her irises are now all probably lost. Hopefully our knowledge will progress along with the collection.

Of course, whilst having planted the irises from the old collection, we know from past experience that we won't really know what plants we have until they flower. Labels can sometimes get moved (especially if you open to the public!) and digging mature plants closely planted can lead to errors. Some cultivars are kind such as 'Mrs Rowe' who forms a tight discernible clump whilst others such as 'Sea Horse' (?) after a few years have a more open explorative nature. They may also be shy to flower next year having been moved late this year, so perhaps a more complete picture should emerge in the next 2 years. In the meantime, there are at least two important gaps amongst the older cultivars, Dykes' 'Dragonfly' from 1923 and if it still exists anywhere 'Acuta' from 1813. So if you are ever doing the garden equivalent of rummaging through your attic, please bear us in mind.

*Currier McEwen raised and named 'Marilyn Holmes' which has been in the UK for a long time and could easily have become confused as to naming.

Repeat Bloomers

Experts talking to the Editor

Gardeners associate “remontant” with a few shrubs and plants which flower in spring and then again in autumn but often with less bloom and in some cases only single flowers instead of the usual doubles. But the good old monocot iris seems to be very economical with its flowers and not swayed by fickle weather patterns. Or is this the case for all of them? This desire for rebloomers has become an interesting study. Below are the experts’ findings with some examples if you get the chance to acquire them.

It may be that Britain’s maritime climate is against remontant flowering patterns in irises but our American experts would suggest we could achieve repeat blooming. They have provided me with many very interesting theories to try out. But first advice and experience from our home grown experts.

Anne Blanco White on Ensatas. “In the main it is a matter of gardening skills: it stands to reason that a plant which will flower twice in a calendar year has had to grow two lots of flowering points. So it needs two quantities of food and two lots of watering periods. Given a dry summer, it will need a lot of extra water to ensure the late summer/autumn flowers. This does rather mean that the grower has to be a real enthusiast and those who feel the plants ought to be able to do it without any help from them are disappointed because they don’t get the extra show and so the plants get a bad reputation”.

Galen Carter on Laevigatas. “We have had a laevigata which flowered at Christmas and a Rowden ensata which flowered in July 2007, then again in December 2007 and then again in July 2008. I think this unusual flowering is entirely due to our bizarre climate at present.” Galen will let us know of any more reblooming.

Jennifer Hewitt listed all the registered Siberian rebloomers for me but she hasn’t had any real success with them herself. A few have performed well for a few years but not reliably. This is an interesting point. Jennifer lives well above sea level and the heavy soil is slow to warm up in spring.

Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer on Repeat Bloom in Siberian Iris. “Some beardless iris possess the ability to bloom a second time after their initial bloom period. Currier McEwen chose to call this feature **Repeat Bloom** rather than **Rebloom** as the latter refers to bearded irises which bloom a second time several months after their usual bloom time. In beardless iris this second bloom usually occurs after only a short rest period from the initial bloom. Repeat bloom is fairly common in both Siberians and Japanese iris, but we have also seen it in *I. lactea*, *I. setosa*, and *I. ruthenica*”

and expect it might occur in other beardless iris. Since we are most familiar with siberian repeat bloom we will discuss it specifically.

While many cultivars may throw up a late bloom stalk, to be a true Repeat Bloomer an iris should reliably repeat bloom every year or at least every year it is in good cultural condition and there should be a substantial number of bloom stalks, not just one or two. A cultivar may finish blooming, take a week or several off, and then send up a whole new set of bloom stalks. This second bloom may be very similar to the first or the bloom stalks may be taller and more branched. Occasionally repeat bloomers will bloom a third time. Some cultivars may not take any rest but just continue to put up bloom stalks for an extended bloom.

We believe these qualities are genetic and can be passed on to seedlings. Repeat bloom does not usually start until a clump becomes mature so we cannot tell if a seedling will be a repeat bloomer for several years. Also, if a clump becomes very large and overcrowded or if it receives too much shade, it may no longer repeat bloom. We try to fertilize all our siberians lightly with an organic (5-3-4) slow release fertilizer every spring but we do not fertilize after bloom to encourage repeat.

The complicated part of repeat bloom is that a cultivar which repeat blooms every year in one part of the US may not ever repeat bloom in another. We don't know for sure why or what factors cause a cultivar with the genetic ability to repeat bloom to actually do it. We do know that repeat bloom is more common in the northeastern and northwestern US and that it is most prolific on the coasts, though it does occur in the center of the country as well. Currier, whose garden was literally on a cliff above the Atlantic Ocean, had very substantial repeat bloom. Terry Aitken who gardens in the state of Washington thinks that repeat bloom is affected by soil temperature. When his soil temperature is around 60 degrees F, his repeating Siberians and Japanese put up repeat bloom, and when the soil temperature goes above 60 they tend to stop or not start. We have not been so scientific. Over 25 years of growing siberians, we have tried to identify weather conditions that affect repeat bloom here and we haven't seen any. Years with excellent repeat bloom have been very warm, or very cool, and some have been average."

'Dance And Sing'

'Dawn Waltz'

'Devil's Dream'

'Fond Kiss'

'Magnetism'

'Pleasures of May'

'Pretty Polly'

'Roaring Jelly' (the most reliable)

'Ships Are Sailing'
'Springs Brook'
'Sweets Of May'
'Tall Dark and Handsome'
'Turn A Phrase'
'Worth The Wait'
'Careless Sally'
'Dandy's Hornpipe'
'Sea of Dreams'
'Summer Revels'
'Not Quite White'

Sharon Hayes Whitney on Siberians. "Your most recent email jogged my brain to finish talking with you about Currier's reblooming Siberians.

We developed a little collection called **Reliable Repeaters**. It was designed to fill requests from visitors to our gardens asking for Siberians with continued bloom.

Currier referred to 'Ever Again' as a **Preferential Repeater** meaning that it is more lovely at second bloom. I have never been certain if it is more beautiful the second bloom time or if its beauty is striking because it is one of the few fish in the pond at that point in the season. I find it lovely at both bloom times. It is his nicest re-blooming tetraploid. Personally I love the delicate diploid manner of 'Chartreuse Bounty', 'Lavender Bounty' and 'Soft Blue'. They make a charming bridge to the Japanese iris bloom season.

The iris that rebloom reliably probably do so because of their genetics. The varieties that rebloom occasionally seem to rebloom due to weather or culturally induced stress. We found that the true reblooming irises rebloom every year regardless of conditions and they look GOOD when reblooming. They get the same cultural care as the others.

'Chartreuse Bounty': D, 38', M-L, WH/GRN
'Chartreuse Encore' T, 30", EML CHARTREUSE GRN/YELL
'Ever Again': T, 34', E-VL, BL
'Harpwell Prelude': T, 26', VE, VIO-BL
'Lavender Bounty': D, 36', VE, LAV-PK
'Soft Blue': D, 30', E, LT BL
'White Prelude': T, 36', VE-VL, WH
'Butter And Sugar' often reblooms as well.
'Little Centennial' continues blooming for 6 weeks.

Sharon on Ensatas. "Currier considered repeat bloom a welcome feature in a garden plant. He introduced ensatas that rebloomed a few weeks after typical ensata bloom season. The bloom stalks from earlier flowering can be cut back to allow the reblooming iris clump to look as fresh as at first bloom.

In 2008 we introduced 'Valerie's Gift', a late and reblooming white ensata. Currier also developed ensatas and Siberians he considered **Continuing Bloomers**. These irises send up a succession of bloom stalks over a period of weeks, never going entirely out of bloom. When breeding iris with re-bloom and continuing bloom characteristics, one needs to be certain that the plants stop blooming in time to harden off before winter. Those plants without the genetics to cease blooming will bloom themselves to death."

McEwen ensatas that repeat reliably:

'Continuing Pleasure': D, 38", M-VL & RE, VIO-BL6F

'Dramatic Moment': D, 34", M-VL & RE, RED-VIO, 6F

'Exuberant Chantey': D, 37", E-VL & RE, VIO-BL, 6 F

'Maine Chance': T, 40", M & RE, WH, 3F

'Returning Tide': D, 36", EM-VL & RE, WH F, BL STAND, 3F

'Thoroughbred': T, 38", E-LM & RE, WH STAND, PRPL STAND, 3F

'Honour': D, 32", M-L, PINK, 6 F, blooms continually for over a month,

'Ol' Man River' just keeps rolling along.

Jennifer Hewitt. "There is a form of *Iris laevigata* named 'Semperflorens' which is reputed to rebloom; I have a slide of a seedling from it with typical blue flowers against orange-brown autumn foliage, once but never again. Some PCI cultivars were recorded as rebloomers and I still (just) have Joe Ghio's 'City Hall' which, just once, produced a second blooming. I forget other names but they may have really only performed in California.

There *may* still be Marjorie Brummitt's 'Violet Repeat' in the Siberian Collection. I gave it to Kim but then lost both my plants. It was never a strong grower and had a tendency to bloom in spring/summer or autumn but not both in one year. Mike McCarthy found 'Coquet Waters' blooming in Northumberland in autumn; it rebloomed here and may be in the Collection. 'Soft Blue' has repeated reliably at Wisley for many seasons as has 'Exuberant Encore' which I'm surprised Sharon didn't list. It, and 'Chartreuse Bounty' (let down by poorly shaped flowers) have been most consistent for me though that's not saying much. Also here, Bob Hollingworth's 'Coronation Anthem' has repeated a couple of times and Marty and Jan's 'Sea of Dreams' has repeated once while my 'Siobhan', grown from their seed, has rebloomed at Wisley".

Ed. The experts' cultural methods and individual theories give plenty of encouragement to try to obtain irises that are known to repeat bloom which would extend the flowering season that little bit longer. Day dreaming of a long flowering iris season is necessary when it is -6°C outside at the moment.

The Phenomenological Constitution of PCIs

Philip Jones

At present I am writing part of a philosophy course on the phenomenology of constitution and it seems to have affected my brain. In the past I have always grown my PCIs en masse. But now the new phenomenological Jones brain has a desire to study the phenomenological constitution of the PCIs individually and so I have taken to growing some of them in pots. There is a sense of progress in selecting individual irises that catch the eye and then look at them from every angle. The individuality of an iris is termed the hidden X which appears to us at different times in different ways but remains ever the same identical unique plant.

In the beginning, during the seventies, my PCIs were growing at the bottom of a tall yew hedge. Having to compete with the hedge they were not vigorous but on the other hand the rather weak purples, blues and yellows stood out and looked very attractive against the dark green background. The overall impression was pleasant but I never felt a need to inspect them individually.

In the nineties the irises were grown en masse and much of their individuality was lost in the scrum. They sprawled into each other. I used to throw out those that failed to immediately impress and replace them with plants grown from seed. The availability of seed from different sources seemed to open up a wide range of possibilities. However, spreading the net so wide tends to confuse the vision.

In the last few years my vision has narrowed. I have become more particular. The irises are grown spaced apart in lines, and can be examined more accurately. And as I have mentioned, some of them are even grown in pots!

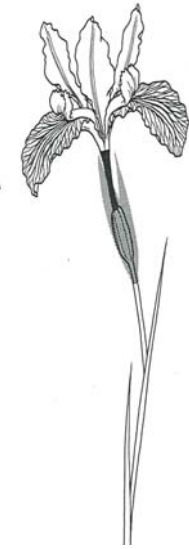
In Victor Cohen's *A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises* there is an open invitation to iris addicts to try and grow the species from seed. And even without that I can start to recognise traces of the species in the hybrid forms.

The main differences between the species are determined by the length of the perianth tube, the spathe-valves and the presence or absence of bracts on the stem. These are clearly outlined in the accompanying drawings. However, there is another determining characteristic which has an immediate and major impact upon the hybrid PCIs that most of us grow. This concerns the flowers.

The three defining and varying characteristics mentioned above concern the flowering stem. But also the structure of the flowers themselves - the size and shape and formation of the petals – differs from species to species.

Add the number of flowers to the stem and we have the most obvious reason why we are drawn to one plant more than another.

Although most of the species are small compared with the hybrids it is clear that the number of flowers to the stem and how they stand in relation to each other are not only factors that distinguish one species from another but they also noticeably affect the constitution of the modern hybrid. Of the sixteen species and sub-species three are described as having one or two flowers to the stem and ten others with specifically two flowers. The remaining three are *I. douglasiana*, *I. munzii* and *Iris hartwegii* subsp. *columbiana*. This last may be the result of a cross between *I. hartwegii* and *I. munzii*.



Iris innominata

The species, that could be described as the most popular choice to represent the single and two flowered majority, is *I. innominata*. These are beautiful flowers in many colours. The leaves are narrow and glossy dark green and bend outwards and with care they can be grown in the garden.

I. munzii is not frost hardy but it is vigorous and has the largest elegant flowers in the species, with two to four flowers on each stem, all in different shades of pale blue to purple. Its growth is upright with no great spread. It has a stout stem and broad leaves 20 inches long which are shorter than the stem.

I. douglasiana can have three flowers to the spathe and has branched stems. In mature plants this can amount to eight or nine flowers to the main stem. Its size is variable and so are the width, length and colour of the leaves. The flowers vary in size and colour. This is a plant that can take over the territory with large plants growing into each other.



I munzii

I have chosen four plants to grow in pots as representatives of the modern hybrid. What I am seeing as representing *I. douglasiana* are two plants, one large and one small, that have the distinctive branched stems and many flowers. These

tend to flower consecutively and so have a long flowering season. The stems grow in all directions - these plants sprawl.



Iris douglasiana

1111

In the third plant the leaves and the rather stout stems are upright. Perhaps there is an *I. munzii* influence at work. What is also distinctive is that the stems divide into two flowers in a symmetrical Y formation and almost flower simultaneously. This is a distinctive characteristic of *I. hartwegii* subsp. *pinetorum*.

The fourth plant is similar, I believe, to *I. innominata*. The narrow leaves droop gracefully outwards and the flowering stem is upright.

The third and fourth plants do not bear as many flowers as the first two, but - unlike them - they are tidy. The proportion of greenery to flower favours the flower and makes it stand out. Also, there appears to be more space within the plant. Phenomenology has much to say about presence and absence – what isn't present is as important as what is. The spaces between leaves and flowers are defining moments of the individual constitution

and a special attraction in the irises that we most admire.

I will be crossing the four plants with other PCIs to widen the colour range. But I am more interested in finding a general pattern in the way the constitution of these hybrids is passed on. The plan is to cross the first and second with the third and fourth and then fertilise the stigmas of the original plants with pollen from the offspring. This procedure is used in some alpine species and it would be interesting and helpful to see if it will work with PCIs. It is part of an attempt to see more clearly the assortment of plants that can be found among the PCI hybrids.



Iris hartwegii subsp. *pinetorum*

These illustrations have been copied from Victor Cohen's booklet "A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises", published by the BIS 1967. Victor gives a very comprehensive description of all the PCI species and it is an invaluable booklet for information for anyone interested in PCIs.

The Louisianas

Jane Cole

I have 22 robust seedlings from last year's cross at various stages of growth. Germination is very patchy and the last two of them I potted up in mid August whereas the first one was just being potted on into a 10 inch ex-rose pot. I'm afraid seed bought from the Beardless Iris Group has only produced half a dozen seedlings from 3 batches. Fresh seed is best!

Owing to a patch of ill health, the LAs were a bit neglected at the beginning of the year so they have not done so well and subsequently they were a bit short on bloom. *I.* 'Black Gamecock' was planted in the garden with plenty of farmyard manure but it has diminished so I have to conclude that it is not happy growing in the garden. To compensate for that disappointment a variegated sport that I got from it last year has been potted on and looks well. I am really looking forward to seeing it flower.

I was going to try a few more this year in the garden. *Ii. brevicaulis* and 'Fulvala' are happy overwintering out of doors so if you have neutral to acid soil they are worth trying. They are greedy feeders, like damp conditions and sunshine. Although they grow in the swamps of southern USA they cope surprisingly well in less wet and warm conditions. I have experienced rot in some plants, usually at the base of the fan. I don't know why, they love damp, wet conditions, don't they?

The main pests are slugs and snails who, instead of damaging the leaves, make their way up the stems and have a good chew on the flower buds. I go out almost every evening, in season, with a torch, picking off predators and squashing them. (Bodies are recycled into the flower beds.)

Greenfly can be another pest in the winter when they get down into the base of the fans. They don't seem to do any damage but are removed just the same, squashed with thumb and finger and discouraged with a bit of environmentally friendly insecticide.

Vine weevils can occasionally be found climbing up the leaves at night. Their favourite diet seems to be the leaves of my *I. unguicularis* and my lilies and any small vulnerable potted plant in a forgotten corner. When I was repotting I found a few of their grubs amongst the compost of Louisianas this year and a few rootless fans but no severe damage. In pots I use Provado Vine Weevil Killer, but only in pots, because it kills the worms and goodness knows what else. I have also used nematodes in the beds when there was an infestation suspected.

Although the usual problems affect LAs as they do most other irises, they are much less trouble compared to other herbaceous perennials. Another good reason for growing LAs.

The Algerian Iris, *Iris unguicularis*

I feel this iris is sometimes quickly dismissed as a second rate plant which is a pity because the flowers are very welcome at the back end of the year and they continue over winter before the *reticulatas* flower. Sometimes plants known to be difficult to cultivate are easily ignored without giving them a fair trial. Taking up the defence I've asked for some help from the experts to promote these lovely irises and to give us their secrets for successful growth and abundant flowers. You are the prosecution if you don't grow these innocent beauties and I hope after reading "the expert's how to" anyone who doesn't grow them now will give them another chance.

Berney Baughen "Anyone who was familiar with our garden at Copper Beeches, Downe in Kent knew that it was a very steep south-facing plot. To make it manageable I created six levels. On the fourth level I planted *Iris unguicularis* in 1996 at the foot of a wall in very poor soil that contained some brick rubble and builder's discarded mixture of both soft and sharp sand over chalk, plus a thin top layer of loam. Two small patches, each approximately 4" (10cm) diameter were planted with 12" (30cm) spacing between and with a light feed of Vitax Q4. They duly settled in and within three years had formed one nice sized clump. The evergreen foliage grew to some 15" (38cm) tall and each year the number of flowers gradually increased, but were half-hidden amongst the leaves. I made a habit of cleaning up the foliage and removing damaged leaves annually in early August and provided their feed of Vitax Q4, but in 2001 I decided to cut the leaves down in early September to a height of 8" (20cm). The idea was to allow the flowers to show above the foliage and this seems to have encouraged more flowers to develop each year. I persisted in cleaning the foliage annually and in the late autumn and winter of 2004 they provided a magnificent display in a mild spell that lasted over three weeks. The 2005 winter display was not as good, though friends who viewed the clump expressed wonderment at the mass of bloom. We moved the following winter to Otford, and having left the plants *in situ* I am unaware how they fared. We hope that the new owners enjoy this lovely iris and it performs as well for them as it did for us."

Lawrence Ransom "*I. unguicularis* 'Fée d'Hiver' (translation - winter fairy) was introduced by my nursery *Iris au Trescols* in 2000. It was one of three seedlings from seed labelled as 'Mary Barnard' having come from the BIS 1985/86 seed list. Thus it could have been selfed (M.B. x M.B.), or (M.B. x another *unguicularis* cultivar growing near it). Note: I have a plant here of 'Mary Barnard' that is SO inferior to 'Fée d'Hiver' in colour and in shape. It's hard to imagine 'Fée d'Hiver' came from that 'Mary Barnard'. As *unguicularis* cultivars are visited by winter bumblebees, and often produce a lot of seed, it is quite possible that many iris growers think they have the

true cultivar when they really only have one grown from bee seed. My M.B. is probably one of these rogues!

'Fée d'Hiver's colours are strong and clean, and the shape is very elegant. Standards violet blue (RHS 86B); style arms light violet blue (90D); falls deeper violet blue (83B), slight plum blue (89C) flush either side of orange yellow signal band, hafts white veined violet blue. Ht. 8 inches.

The flowers blooming during the colder months of its long bloom period are the best shaped and coloured. Those flowering at the very end, in March or early April when it's warmer, are not quite so pretty. The plant multiplies very fast. I now have many clumps and the flowering here is spread over an astonishing six months. It started to bloom two weeks ago. Conditions here are very favourable with generally long hot dry summers, so I guess its performance in the UK might not be quite so good. The ideal time to plant out the unguicularis is late August to the first half of September when the new roots appear on the rhizomes."

Anne Blanco White "Starvation is no way to treat them; in fact, Angela Marchant of the S.G. was giving *Tomorite* to her aubergines when she knocked the can over and it spilt onto a clump of unguics. She mopped up as fast as she could and bade them a fond farewell thinking that they wouldn't survive. There was a splendid show of flowers the following season.

And I heard of another interesting way to deal with under-performing plants. The narrator had a garden in Epping Forest where cattle roam freely. On this occasion they came into the garden and started eating the leaves. This involves wrapping their tongues round the leaves and heaving. Again, the owner said a sad farewell, but the following season was most satisfactory. The answer here was probably that only some of the roots were totally wrecked and the plants had to grow fresh ones. As with pruning a shrub, the work of the cows encouraged the plants to better efforts. All the same, don't do it too viciously in the garden.

One does hear of clumps of these plants which are neglected for many years and still flower well. When the leaves are always left to die down, they just develop a personal local ecology that sees them through. Unlike the good gentleman who said he never fed his unguics. and always got masses of flowers. Yes, he grew them as the border to his vegetable beds.

And incidentally, looking at the Davis & Jury paper, it is clear that the only way to be sure precisely which species you may be growing is to have the exact details of who collected it and from where!"

I. lazica has an interesting flower pattern, wide leaves and prefers a fairly shady spot: *I. unguicularis* feathered emphasizes that occasional feathering isn't necessarily the result of virus: *I. angustifolia* - Species Group *Bulletin* 1

of 1968. A paper on Series Unguiculares was provided by Mr Patrick Syngé and this is his comment on a form in those days known as *I. stylosa angustifolia*. "*I. stylosa* var. *angustifolia* Boiss. probably in part only. A smaller plant in all its parts than *I. unguicularis*. Dr. Turrill refers to forms from Greece, Corfu, W. Asia Minor and N. Syria which are intermediate between this and the more typical *I. unguicularis*". 'Ellisae' – the name would be unacceptable, better as Ellis' form and no connection with Jack Ellis. But the markings are interesting and it may have been a collected form. 'Walter Butt', 'Mary Barnard' and 'Starker's Pink' are all genuine species – named collected forms.

Ed. On the CD are photos of *Ii. unguicularis angustifolia*, feathered, 'Abingdon Purple', 'Alba', subsp. *cretensis*, 'Ellisae' or Ellis var., 'Starker's Pink' and 'Walter Butt'. Anne apologies for the poor quality of the photographs due to their age.

Forms of *Iris lazica*

Jennifer Hewitt

This is an iris I'm very enthusiastic about as it performs far better in my cool, damp conditions than *I. unguicularis*. Flowers appear off and on, in mild winter weather, from autumn through to March. Unfortunately snails, and possibly slugs, admire them too but for different reasons, as gourmet food, and this means little seed is usually set. However the pods, unlike those of *I. unguicularis*, are carried on stems which lengthen as they mature so are easier to find.

Since I learnt of *I. lazica* some twenty years ago and acquired my first one, I've been on the lookout for different forms. What is probably the typical one is similar in flower colour to *I. unguicularis*, a light violet, and my plant was collected near the Black Sea by Admiral Paul Furse in the late 1950s and '60s. A "dark form" proved to be nearly identical but later another nursery provided a really dark one, a lovely deep purple which is also readier to flower. Two others are in commerce thanks to Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers. I gave him the first which I got from a BIS Species Group auction via Primrose Warburg; this came from Joy Bishop and was collected but she had no record of where. It has been named after her, being registered in 2001. It has bright reddish-violet flowers with large white signals and a deep yellow central stripe on the falls, and blooms well. Intermediate in tone between 'Joy Bishop' and the Furse plant, but a stronger colour than the latter, is one that the late Richard Nutt picked out. It would be nice to name it after him but under AIS rules permission from a relative is necessary and so far no contact is known to Bob or myself. It has a prominent bright yellow stripe on the signal and a darker patch below it. This too is generous with flowers and like the others a vigorous grower. 'Joy

Bishop' is usually the earliest to bloom and the Nutt one doesn't normally get going till after Christmas with me.

When not in bloom the leaves, in shades of bright green, quite broad, and glossy, are an extra asset. *Iris lazica* is said to grow in moist soils and some shade in its native habitats near the Black Sea, though here I find it does better with a fair amount of sun, and flowers better when the preceding summer has been warm and sunny. Now I would like someone to have a really good look over a period in the appropriate area and collect a range of forms. If these included a white one I could not ask for more.

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The Photographs

Brita Carson

Photographs in *Review no 5* have been dominated by the Siberians this time. My excuse is partly due to Jennifer's achievement at winning a Dykes Medal but also the new beginning of the National Collection of Siberians which is of great interest to me. There are so many beautiful Siberian introductions this year, all of which I would like to use but, just like any woman, I find it difficult to make up my mind.

The photograph of 'Peter Hewitt' was in a recent *Review* so the front cover this time is another of Jennifer's — 'Stephen Wilcox' (R. 2003) Sdlg. T971/2. SIB (Tet.), 27" (68 cm), ML-VLS. rich lavender pink, centre veined violet; style arms lavender pink, turquoise band either side of pink midrib; F. deep wine red (near RHS 77A), bright violet halo around darkly veined gold signal; lightly ruffled, S. broad and semi-flared, F. broad, arched and flared; slight sweet fragrance. PT8618/1('Reddy Maid' x 'Harpswell Happiness') x 'Shall We Dance'. Received an AGM this year. Could it be heading for another Dykes Medal?

Olga has a series of Siberian introductions prefixed by *Wealden* which capture the original Siberian elegance. Awarded an AGM in 2005 'Wealden Butterfly' ('Flight of Butterflies' x 'Cambridge'). Could it be going higher? Alison Cundy took the photograph and kindly gave me permission to use it.

Sharon kindly sent me a photo of 'Ever Again' the Siberian which Currier referred to as a Preferential Repeater meaning that it is more lovely at second bloom. Would be a winner for me.

The following all won Morgan–Wood Medals and were hybridised by Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer who also took the photographs. Jan and Marty are catching up on Bob who has won 7 awards. However he is in runner-up position this year with 'Somebody Loves Me' but then Jan and Marty also have a runner-up this year with 'Salamander Crossing'.

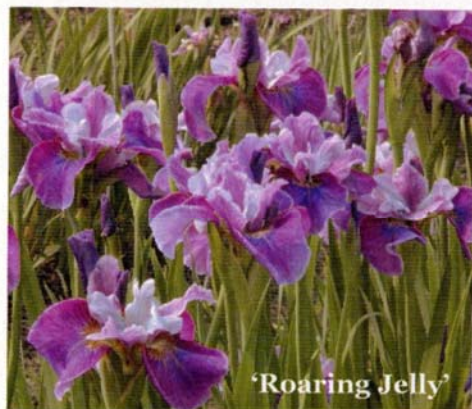
'Roaring Jelly' 1999: 'Riverdance' 2006: 'Ships are Sailing' 2007 and 'Fond Kiss', the winner this year. Congratulations Jan and Marty.

The GBI would like to thank several people.

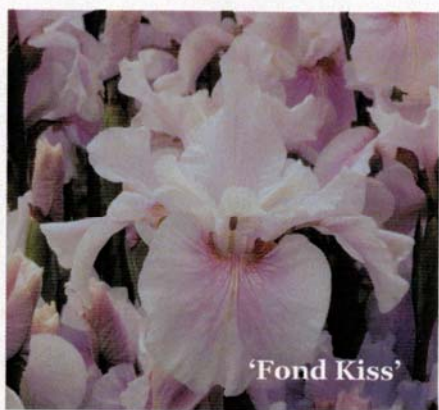
David Hardman, who is the Head of the Living Collections at Wakehurst, kindly gave Alun permission to take the photographs at Wakehurst.

Photographers - Bob Hollingworth, Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer, Alison Cundy, Sharon Hayes Whitney, Anne Blanco White, Chris Saunders, Clive Russell, Alun Whitehead, Berney Baughen and Lawrence Ransom.

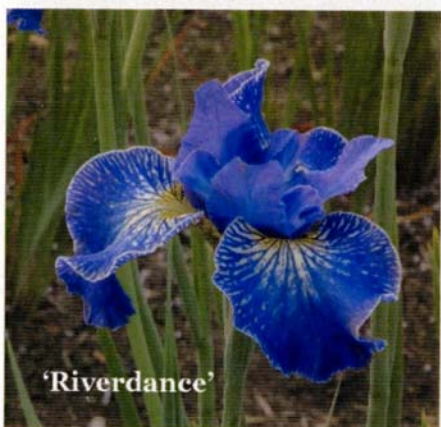
As always I would like to thank Jennifer for the very necessary job of proof reading my editing of *The Review*.



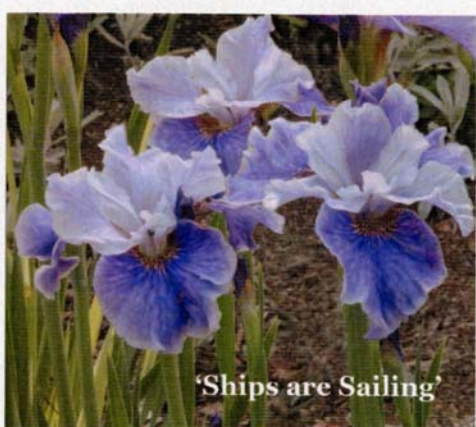
'Roaring Jelly'



'Fond Kiss'



'Riverdance'



'Ships are Sailing'



'Wealden
Butterfly'



'Ever Again'



Photograph Lawrence Ransom. See page 29



I. unguicularis with the leaves cut back to show off the flowers. Photograph Berney Baughen. See page 28



I. lazica with broader leaves than *I. unguicularis*. See page 30