



The Review

The Group for
Beardless Irises

Issue No 19 WINTER 2022

Ensata Gardens



'Fisherman's Fancy' (James Copeland, Sr., R. 2011)
Winner of the Morgan Wood Medal 2022



'Concord Crush' (Bob Bauer and John Coble , R. 2009)

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The photograph on the front cover is 'Centenary Stardust' check out origins on Page 22.

The photograph on the back cover is a garden that Alun and Jill visited at Ruthall Manor, Shropshire. Photograph taken by Alun.

Editor's Notes

Brita Carson

2022 has ended and the Centenary Year of the BIS has come to an end. What a successful year it has been, including a wonderful Gold Medal at Chelsea flower show. I hope you have been able to attend some of these celebrations and enjoyed looking at new irises.

I want to apologise to everyone who suffered from an email that was sent out supposedly coming from me asking for help. My email address had been hacked and it takes time to get it back when fraudsters have control of your computer. I would not, under any circumstance, ask for monetary help from anyone. I'm very sorry if anyone replied to the initial request which I believe was followed up with another request. It is a horrible feeling and leaves a nasty taste in the mouth but I'm assured it isn't personal and it isn't difficult to hack into your email address.

I am sorry I am unable to have members here this summer for a Hybridising GBI day but to anyone who is still keen to make crosses and would have been coming there is a consolation prize at the end of this publication in the form of crosses already made by Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer and they have very kindly sent me seeds, free of charge, to send to members. I would like you to send me a SAE and possibly an old padded one to offer protection for the seeds.

This *Review* has a new author, Rob Gill, who has written an article on PCIs so I've followed it up with more articles on PCIs. I have to admit to being one of these failed PCI growers but must try again. Thank you Rob and I hope some members will be tempted to give them a go. We don't live beside the Pacific Ocean but our climate should lend itself to growing them?

We certainly appreciate any new authors so please feel free to send me iris news or new ideas. Read the piece below and reply to Alun.

Peat

Please note that we do not advocate the use of peat which, nationally, is being phased out gradually but older articles will still mention the use of it and we cannot change them if they are being replicated in present day *Reviews*. Be pleased it should cut down on vine weevil!

Time for Change

Alun Whitehead

The Group was set up in 1976 under a constitution which has changed over time. The latest amendment was in 2007. The constitution is basically the contract between the members and the committee; members pay a fee and can expect the Group to be run in accordance with the constitution. Time moves on and our constitution needs to adapt to the current situation.

The Group has always had and benefited from an international element. The objective of the Group is "*to foster interest in these plants (beardless irises) around the world by the exchange of ideas, seeds and plants*". The exchange

of plant material has become very expensive, in and out of the UK, and so this part of our objective no longer looks feasible, in any case, not as it has been done previously. When the group was founded, information was scarce as well as the plants. The internet has changed that dearth into a deluge. We have made many good friends over the years and a niche is still possible for the Group, but perhaps we need to change the format?

We have been fortunate in a stable Editor over the last 19 years. Brita's enthusiasm has shone through and kept the *Reviews* interesting and lively. Janet continues the seed scheme despite regulations, and recently strikes. We might be able to tick along, but our constitution is our Achilles heel. A normal society would have an annual general meeting, which being so widely dispersed geographically, our constitution avoided. However, banks rely on the minutes of such meetings for authority to run the account and they expect them. You can understand it from their viewpoint, with the enormous money laundering fines which have been levied, they do not want accounts of minor profitability and difficult paperwork. There is a real risk that the bank could close our account and leave us unable to function. We are currently charged £60 per annum by the bank and are unable to change bank because we do not have the correct paperwork.

What options are possible?

- 1 We become an informal sub-group of the BIS and wind up the Group from the constitution viewpoint. The mechanism would be the repayment of any subscriptions paid in advance and then the remaining assets would go to the BIS. If anything needed to be financed in the future we would have to apply to the BIS or find a way round it. The Group's monies currently are used to produce hard copies of the publications, the website and acting as a cushion for organising the occasional event. Taking money from seed sales would be a problem. The positive side is that the organisation in the future could be as little or as much as people feel they could contribute. It would also clarify our legal standing; the current constitution has us as a sub-group of the BIS, but with independent constitution and membership – a legal nonsense?
- 2 We start having zoom annual general meetings. The drawback with this is that the current officers may not be happy to continue in a new format and nobody appears to be knocking at the door to replace them. We have only the minimum number required by the constitution, so any 'mishap' may finish the Group. We would also need a new Secretary.

We cannot make a decision without your feedback – a simple email will suffice. (admin@beardlessiris.org) Any change will affect all members but particularly those who are not already members of the BIS and those wanting printed copies of the publications.

Please email us with your favoured option or suggest an alternative solution. Many thanks in advance.

Beardless Irises and the BIS Centenary Celebrations

Jill Whitehead

Beardless irises made a bit of a show for the Centenary weekend at RHS Wisley in Surrey. We enjoyed a wonderful array of irises to buy from The Gobbett nursery. Gordon travelled down to Wisley from rural Shropshire, which must have been quite a trek, but it was very much appreciated by the attending members and the public. The GBI also had an information stand and several copies of past *Reviews* found new homes! The digital display of various beardless irises also proved to be very popular with the visitors.



Christine Skelmersdale's talk on 'Using Irises in the Garden' featured several beardless including the use of reticulate irises and PCIs, for which she is well known. Some beardless were also seen on the show bench, admittedly not as many as we would have liked, but Dutch, Siberians and PCIs were in evidence, including *Iris* 'Agnes James', displayed left and exhibited by Sue Bedwell, one of our members who gained a first prize and The German Iris Plaque. It was registered by Carl Starker in 1939, so





Gladiolus carnea pink form



Tritonia securigera

it has stood the test of time. Sue also showed *Gladiolus carnea* pink form as well as *Tritonia securigera*.

It was good to meet some GBI members that we hadn't seen for a while and to have a chance to catch up on their news.

Chelsea was our next event, a real challenge but a very enjoyable experience, made even more worthwhile by the result of a Gold Medal. The bowl of *Iris hookeri* was much admired; the plants came from Gordon at the Wisley Show where they were showing just a bit of colour. Fern Harden took them home and placed them in her spare fridge, checking them at regular intervals until Chelsea. They opened perfectly just in time, continuing to flower throughout the length of the show. Needless to say, on breakdown, when we were allowed to sell plants, those were eagerly snapped up by the public and those helping on the stand. The arrangement of PCIs seedlings was also popular and all the PCI seed was sold and much of the Siberian seed as well. Chris Jarvis, the BIS seed officer and a keen GBI member, had packaged 400 packets of seed.



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Two beardless irises featured on the art pottery that Moorcroft created especially to mark the BIS Centenary. The first was 'Margot Holmes' which was appropriate as this was the first Dykes medal winner in 1927, an inter-species cross created by Amos Perry. This was featured on this prestigious Moorcroft vase of the same



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name. At 45cm tall it stood out in the Gallery of the stand.

The other piece was a Ginger Jar featuring *Iris* 'Berlin Ruffles', a Siberian, raised by Tomas Tamberg, one of our members, which was a Dykes medal winner in 1999. Also featured in the Gallery were several paintings which depicted beardless irises including *Iris chrysographes* forms by Paul Furse, above right.

The BIS Centenary weekend based at Stratford was another chance to meet fellow iris enthusiasts. Several talks were presented including Lucy Skellorn's talk on her great, great grandfather Sir Michael Foster. It was interesting to hear more about him and his breeding work, also good to see Christopher Saunders on one of the images.

Troy Scott Smith gave us the background story to his work at Sissinghurst Castle. He is Head Gardener there and enjoys promoting the love of irises of Vita Sackville-West.

Our Zoom talk was next and I was very relieved when we managed to get sound. We did a test run at lunch time and although we could see both our speakers and they were merrily talking – we could not hear a word! But eventually the problem was solved and by the time the audience was back from lunch we were ready to go. Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer are two outstanding and special American hybridisers who have been producing new diploid Siberian irises for nearly 40 years. Apart from being engrossed in their talk myself, I glanced at the audience and they were totally enthralled, rapt attention from all. Jan and Marty took us through their breeding programme showing the crosses they made, some seeming unlikely to us novices but their eyes obviously saw things we couldn't. It was a sheer delight to hear and see the obvious enthusiasm they have for their work and the joy

that it brings them. They make a brilliant team!

Jody Nolin, Immediate Past President of the AIS, followed this with a look at species and how they are for the lazy gardener, not that I reckon she is a lazy gardener as she seems to have boundless energy! Jeremy Handy was next - we will forgive him for covering his passion for bearded as we know he does grow some Siberians! I brought up the rear, ending the day with a few images of why beardless irises are for me, and how they suit our soil.

Beardless irises were not forgotten during our Centenary events and hopefully the word has been spread a little further. So, all in all it was a good year for the beardless irises.

A selection of beautiful PCIs on the Chelsea stand.



Fools Rush In

First blundering steps in growing Pacific Coast Iris

Rob Gill

Pacific Coast Irises must be one of the best kept secrets in the British garden. In my admittedly biased opinion, they have many advantages over the irises normally available to the buying public and can rival them in beauty and form of any iris of whatever type.

They also have a bit of a reputation. Difficult, fussy, prone to dying out. They are not easy to obtain at present, at least in the UK, as very few suppliers offer them, and they certainly do not lend themselves to easy commercial propagation and sales. If you knew me you would realise that they would immediately appeal to me. Rare, difficult, and beautiful. Challenge accepted! There were quite a few mishaps on my journey and a lot of learning by trial and error, usually error, but you may find my journey with PCIs instructive and may save you a few missteps that have caught me out, and I will end by giving reasons why PCIs are as good if not better than most other iris and should be in every garden.

Many years ago when on holiday, I purchased an *Iris douglasiana* (according to the label) from a nursery, I cannot for the life of me remember where, probably Scotland or Cornwall. Put it in a mixed border in clay soil and waited. Next spring there were beautiful blue and yellow flowers, I was smitten. It seemed to be increasing happily so after flowering I dug it up and split it, so I could have bits in other parts of the garden. Mistake No. 1. To my surprise and dismay all died. This was my initiation to the fact that all irises are not equal, and some are best split in the late autumn, not soon after flowering. With work and other commitments and having no nearby source the *douglasiana* was not replaced, but the memory and the name remained.

Years passed and I found myself living on the west coast of Scotland and with a garden to fill. Remembering the *Iris douglasiana* and having access to the new fangled internet I was able to find no plants were available, but seed from a well-known supplier was. Three seedlings were germinated and two successfully planted out. A couple of years later and flowers appeared, muddy purples, only moderately attractive and not at all what I remembered. The plants themselves grew well enough and flowered regularly, never getting very big, but nothing did in that garden, being subject to regular ferocious wind and storms, thin soil and copious rainfall washing out whatever nutrients there were. However the *Meconopsis* I grew loved it.

More time passed and I am back in England, in the Lincolnshire Wolds, with another garden to fill. Going from an area with an annual rainfall of 80 inches in a dry year to one of 25, I now needed to look for plants that like dry conditions, hot in summer, and a bit of a frost pocket in winter. How about bearded irises? My garden is not large and I find tall bearded a bit over the top, but how about dwarfs? So I set about acquiring a few, then a few more, I am sure you know how this goes. Looking for new varieties on the internet I came across some pictures of beautiful irises, called Pacific Coast Hybrids. The numerous types of Iris have always confused me, so I did not at first

connect PCIs with *I. douglasiana*, but digging a bit deeper I began to understand what they are.

Most Iris specialists did not seem to offer these, with a couple of exceptions, one being a nursery near Coventry, which did not offer mail order. Luckily Coventry is between where my daughter lives and where I do, so it was not a problem to visit, so I did, and came away with three named PCI hybrids: 'Banbury Gem', 'Broadleigh Peacock' and 'Forever Trevor'. "Warm and sunny" read the label so they went into a stoney south-facing bed. That was when I started reading more about how to look after PCIs. "Semi shade, acid soil rich in organic matter". Oh well, that was Mistake No. 2, I thought, but I was not going to move them as I had no better place to put them. My soil is certainly not acid, I live in the Wolds, and the Wolds are chalk. Although I am not exactly ON chalk as the chalk layers are above my valley bottom garden, the soil has been generated from it courtesy of the last glaciation. You cannot dig a spit of soil that does not have stones of chalk in it. Oh well, another failure to put down to lack of pre-planning — but I was wrong.

They thrived, and continue to do so. Starting from a 10 cm (4 inch) pot to plants a metre across in about 4 years with 50+ flowers, so I bought some more, more success! Still finding it difficult to obtain plants I joined the GBI and ordered some seed. Two years later I had more plants than I knew what to do with so I planted them in different places all over the garden to see where suited them best. The answer seems to be anywhere — I have not found anywhere they will not grow, though the more shade the less they flower, and some of the shady ones produce a flower stem which wants to flop too much for my liking, though that may be the variety rather than the location, I am still experimenting. They even will grow and flower in pots, which they are not supposed to like at all.

Why then are they so difficult to buy? PCIs have many advantages: long flowering, 'Forever Trevor' flowered for 6 weeks nonstop last year; each flower lasts longer than Siberians or bearded; the plants produce more of them, 30 or so open at one time on one plant; and they are beautiful and varied. I think the problem is their reputation for being difficult. My local Iris nursery told me that they would not grow here. I suspect he has not tried, having plenty of work to do with his stock of bearded. I can see that they do not lend themselves to commercial production methods, and we are unlikely to ever see them on the benches at the garden centre, but we are missing out on something quite special.

The future for PCIs in the UK is more worrying. As far as I know there is no-one breeding PCIs in the UK at the moment. There certainly used to be, and many fine plants have been left for us to enjoy. USA, New Zealand and Australia have active breeders producing and registering stunningly beautiful hybrids, which we cannot obtain due to new phytosanitary restrictions. These also are now starting to apply to seed, which would not produce the true named variety even if we could get hold of some.

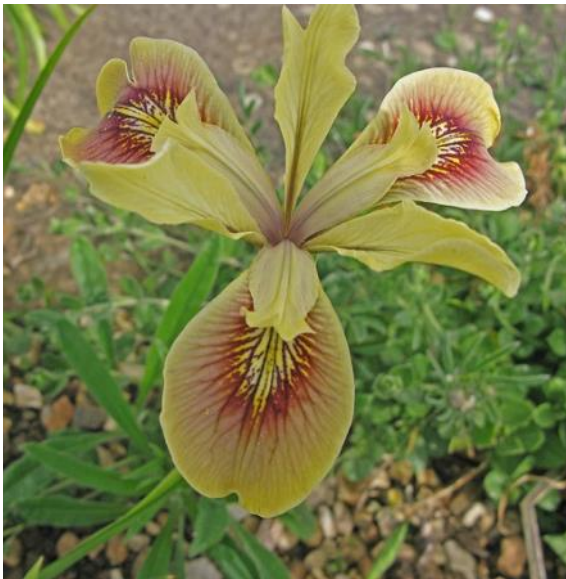
I fear that unless an effort to promote PCIs in the UK is made then we will gradually lose the named varieties that we now have available and that list is

not large. We are not allowed to import new stock (at least not at an affordable cost) so the varieties we have are effectively all we have, and we need to take care of them. Compared with Siberians, which already has many people breeding them, PCIs seem at risk.

Maybe I am wrong in this, I will admit to being a newcomer to the iris world, and would love to be proved wrong. If you are able to do so I would be more than happy to hear about it.



'Banbury Gem'
(Marjorie Brummitt 1972)
(*I. innominata* X
I. douglasiana X same)



'Broadleigh Peacock' from
Broadleigh Gardens
(R. 1973)
(*I. douglasiana* X
I. innominata) hybrid



‘Forever Trevor’

Rob has a website showing his new irises. They are all prefixed with Harden’s but are not yet registered so cannot be called by “Harden” until they are.



Harden’s Damson is a beautiful PCI and Rob would like anyone else who has also been hybridising PCIs to send in photo examples of their new irises.



Harden's Camiato



Harden's Sloe

Beautiful detail in all the new PCIs.



Harden's Lemon



Harden's Apricot



Harden's Guava

Against the Odds? – a survey of British PCIs

Alun Whitehead

Species

These are frustrating beauties that capture our hearts, but bring their many disappointments after their delightful pleasures. This article attempts to get a feel for what has been happening to the Pacific Coast hybrids in the UK, but before that, a quick look at the species.

tenax Douglas ex Lindl. 1829

douglasiana Herb 1840

macrosiphon Torr 1857

hartwegii Baker 1876

bracteata S Watson 1885

purdyi Eastw 1897

chrysophylla Howell 1902

tenuissima Dykes 1912

innominata L F Hend 1930

munzii R C Foster 1938

fernaldii R C Foster 1938

The species list in classification date order shows that the names have not been amended in recent years. The subspecies of Lenz reflected in Cohen have been dropped and are now considered synonyms of the species. *Iris X thompsonii* R C Foster 1936, sometimes shown as a species, is now considered a hybrid between *douglasiana* and *innominata*. Confusingly, there was a classification by Rodionenko in 2007 which shifted the *Limniris* section out of *Iris* and into its own genus *Limniris*, but thankfully *Iris* is still well accepted, and our Group does not need a name change!

History

The Iris register shows the first hybrid ‘Watsoniana’ by Carlton Purdy of California in 1897 but sadly besides being colour BL3 (light blue?) that is all I can find about it. The next record is of two by Dykes, one in 1914(?) and one in 1923. Nothing is known of the first, ‘Douglasiana Alpha’, other than that implied by the name. ‘Merton’ was a blue bitone form of *I. douglasiana*. Dykes is shown as raising two more. One, ‘Tota’, a cross between *I. purdyi* and *I. tenax*; the name implying a small plant and ‘Douglasiana Gladys’ registered possibly in 1936, eleven years after his death. Its survivability was probably due to the robustness of *I. douglasiana*.

Contemporary with Dykes, Amos Perry registered ‘Douglasiana Rosea’ in 1923 and thirteen more followed in the years to 1938. Amos was crossing *douglasiana*, *tenax* and *bracteata*. Presumably his intention was to grace the strong qualities of the first two with the beauty of the last. ‘Watbract’ received an RHS Award of Merit in 1926 but it was not just crosses *within* the Pacific Coast species that interested him. He registered one cross between *douglasiana* and *forrestii* (a sino-Siberian) and of course in 1927 he registered ‘Margot Holmes’ (*I. chrysographes* X *I. douglasiana*) which was awarded the first British Dykes Medal in the same year. It added the golden

signal of the former to the rich reddish-purple of the latter. Amazingly, it survived in the UK until recent times, though some plants now under this name are clearly misnamed. In 1928 Amos also received a Silver Medal for 'Tebract Brilliant' (*tenax* X *bracteata*). The colour range amongst the PCI hybrids he achieved was pink, reddish, yellow, blue, purple and white on red, much like the range of base colours you would expect today.

Amos must have considered 'Margot Holmes' to have commercial potential giving it a lady's name to join his bevy of 'Lady French', 'Mrs Rowe', 'Nora Distin', etc. However, generally his other names seem to celebrate the scientific interest in the species and their crosses. This must have been the atmosphere in 1927 when the only(?) cultivar from Northern Ireland 'Tenax Purpurea' was registered by Thomas Smith of Newry.

The baton passed to the US in the late 1930s and 1940s with such breeders as Starker, De Forest and Nies. The next interest in the UK came from Herbert Senior Fothergill, with thirteen cultivars between 1950 and 1959. He continued hybridising after this period, but perhaps his interest in tall bearded irises had taken over by that stage or frustration had set in? His names often evoke the ephemeral or supernatural beauty of the plants; Elfin, Fairy, Goblin, Leprechaun. All his introductions were crosses between *innominata* and *douglasiana*. We find *innominata* very difficult to keep here at Aulden – we clearly haven't found the right spot yet. It can be very beautiful, but with typically one flower per stem, the attraction of crossing it with the branched stem of *douglasiana* is obvious. Most PCI cultivars are about 30cm, 'Senior's Fairy' and 'Elfin' would have been about half that size. The colour range has not changed from that given above, but the patterns have become more intricate and there is mention of orange and mahogany, not forgetting a flush of heliotrope. Perhaps the weakness of *innominata* compromised the irises. As far as I know none have survived which is in contrast to our next entrant on the stage.

Marjorie Brummitt registered her first of 32 cultivars in 1955, and the last in 1982, 27 years later; so this was no brief affair. The first was a form of *douglasiana*, 'Fawn Ruffles' and then there was a gap of five years before naming four in 1960 and a steady trickle thereafter. As well as *innominata* and *douglasiana*, Eric Nies' 'Amiguita' was used. In fact, 'Banbury Beauty' has very similar flowers to 'Amiguita' and it would be worth growing the two together to see the difference. 'Minster Lovell' was an exception where two cultivars from Dr Lenz were used as parents. Marjorie mainly used her own seedlings after that with just an occasional interloper. There was some experimentation going on as 'Banbury Sunlight' (1962) has involvement of *bracteata* and *munzii*. All her irises were about the normal height (30cm) with 'Banbury Welcome' being a bit taller. The broad colour range appears the usual. 'No Name' was awarded the British Dykes Medal in 1976; the name was probably inspired by the flower's appearance reminiscent of *innominata*, but this species was not used in the cross.

In 1964 Harold Castle Fletcher, a former BIS President and bearded iris hybridiser, registered 'Dorothy Walker', a creamy white self as his sole foray into beardless irises.

The 1970s brought two fresh registrants. The first, Nora Scopes, a retired head mistress from Hertfordshire, registered about 150 irises, nearly all bearded, but including 27 PCIs. Her first 'Phillida', a creamy orange-yellow, was registered in 1971, gained an RHS Award of Merit in 1985 and it was introduced to the public in 2000, so it had some staying power. Its parents were un-named seedlings and her second 'Sevres', a near white, was raised from seed bought from the BIS seed exchange. There is a gap until 1982 where more deliberate crosses were made – though if I remember correctly, Nora considered herself a 'pollen dauber' rather than a hybridiser. 'Banbury Velvet' and 'Banbury Gem' were used in part. 1993 saw her first use of Ghio parents, 'Las Olas' for 'Duenna' and 'Spring Daze' for 'Peacock Pavane'. Later irises had a mix of parents, known or unknown, but 'Spring Daze' crops up again as well as Peter Maynard's 'Goring Sunrise' (see below). With the Ghio introductions we tend to think about stronger colours and patterns that cry out for attention in the garden. My impression is that Nora preferred a gentler colour pallet, for flowers that could play their part without trying to dominate. Many of her PCIs were introduced by Tony Dickerson's Westonbirt nursery in 2000, but I imagine most have since faded away – although you never can tell when something will be uncovered. Nora died in 2004 and was 'daubing' irises almost to the end.

I'm pleased to say, the other significant 1970s entrant is Lady Skelmersdale from Broadleigh Garden nursery and she has named 20 cultivars. The first three in 1973, a few more in the years following and eight in 2006. These PCIs are well known from the Chelsea displays of cut flowers and for an iris enthusiast, always good to see. None of the parentage of the cultivars is known, the only hint being 'Broadleigh Peacock' which is listed as an *I. douglasiana* X *I. innominata* hybrid. The colour range is again what we tend to expect from above and there is a tendency for slightly muted colours that will mix well in any garden



'Sugar Candy'
(M. Brummitt '66)



'Blue Ballerina'
(Knowles '71)
BIS slide library 7



'Broadleigh Peacock'
(Bootle '73)

setting.— that doesn't mean dull or boring. And do remember, the flower isn't everything, it's the ability to survive and flourish in a British climate which is as important.

The years from 1978 to 1997 brought a smattering of cultivars from a few new people. Alex Back, our founding Chairman named one, V.H. Humphrey (1), Ivor Knowles (3), John Taylor of SBD fame (3), Maureen Foster (2), Bert Bailey(2). In this millennium, odd plants came from Nigel Service (2), Jill Dodsworth (1), Jennifer Hewitt (1), Thelma Naylor (2), Fred Webbing (1) and Fr Philip Jones (1).

In between those two groups, we find Bob Wise and Peter Maynard. Bob was interested in some of the more modern American patterns and seeing if he could produce more UK-tolerant forms. This was the Pinewood series, some twelve



'Pinewood Charmer'
(Wise '94) BIS slide library :



'Goring Ace'
(Maynard 1990)
BIS Slide Library :



'Ring O Roses'
(Scopes 1991)



'Floating World'
(Scopes 1993)

plants in total, though four were registered after Bob's death in 1997 by his wife. Jo Ghio's 'San Lorenzo' and 'Idylwild' were used along with a couple of Marjorie Brummitt's and also Humphrey's 'Arnold Sunrise'.

The other breeder from that period was Peter Maynard. He only registered four pure PCIs, but he did try to push the boundaries. 'Goring Sunrise' was a colchicine treated seedling, i.e., he was hoping to produce tetraploid plants. This was important in the creation of Calsibs. The Sino-Siberians and the PCIs both having 40 chromosomes means you can cross the two. However, they don't usually produce fertile off-spring. Using tetraploid plants, tetraploid calsibs can be produced which are fertile. 'Goring Steeple' was one of Peter's and, I am very pleased to say, 'Goring Butterfly' the other is still listed by Broadleigh Gardens.

The Survivors?

Well with this background, let's see the position today. Out of about 1200 registered PCIs, only 149 are British. Out of those only 12 are listed by the RHS Plant Finder together with 2 non-registered names and one non-British. 7 are Broadleigh cvs., along with Brummitt's 'Banbury Gem', 'Banbury Beauty' and 'Banbury Melody', Bob Wise's 'Pinewood Charmer', Brian Price's 'Little Tilgates' and surprising the American 'Agnes James' (Starker 1935). The two strong survivors are 'Broadleigh Peacock' and 'Broadleigh Rose' listed by five and ten nurseries respectively. All the others are listed by just one or two. However, that is probably far from the whole story as the PCIs do not suit themselves to the normal pot routine of a plant nursery. Someone kindly sent us a piece of Brummitt's 'Sugar Candy' (1966) and there are probably other cvs. surviving in gardens waiting to be found.

There is also another side to the PCIs; one hidden from us and leaving little trace. Nora Scopes' reference to a Hargraves seedling as one parent raises the issue of all those hybrids that were never registered. If you think of the PCIs tending to be short-lived self-sowing perennials, then does naming make sense? We have seen some beautiful photos coming from John Taylor in Australia (not to be confused with the British hybridiser of that name), but not one registered to date. We can sympathise with that viewpoint. We at Aulden had one PCI we were thinking of naming, but the extremely cold winter of 2010 decided the matter for us. Is it better to just enjoy them for their time with us? It will be a shame for future generations who will not be able to learn from our tribulations, though modern social media will certainly leave a trail assuming it remains as available as it is today.

How to Grow

So how do you nurture these dazzling gems? I can't offer any magic bullet, but you can learn from our experience. We are on solid clay and these generally need good drainage. *I. douglasiana* is a toughie and one plant performed here in solid unadulterated clay for 17 years without attention before giving up. You can't expect much better than that. They do need neutral to acid soil, and we are lucky enough to be neutral. We once sowed some PCI seed into alkaline compost to see what would happen – they germinated, became chlorotic and died. Not a single resistant seedling survived. However, the late Berney Baughen on Kent's chalkier soil managed to grow them in his garden. He put it down to the liberal incorporation of pine needles, but I wonder if the plants might not have had a lot of *I. douglasiana* in their background. The Broadleigh website says that PCIs are not suitable for pots/containers. I can confirm that during the cold winter of 2010, all the PCIs in pots here died. (Surprisingly all the tet Calsibs in pots survived!). The PCIs that survived were in the ground or the seed left behind on the crowns of the dead plants. We still grow PCIs in pots, but we know the risk. We have a sloping field and plants will thrive there for a bit before succumbing. Their demise is probably due to too much moisture in the summer. Where we have success is near deciduous trees which give some shade and frost protection, but also keep the ground on the dry side after the plants have flowered. From having

seen a few PCI trials on RHS Wisley's well drained sandy soil, I know the results were variable and that they didn't always show their best on such an open site. Dead areas would appear where several neighbouring plants would succumb, probably the problem of one spreading to the next.

Despite their drawback, PCIs are still exciting and vibrant irises to grow. Inexpensive, as they can be grown from seed relatively easily. The seedlings can flower when young, the swiftest we have had is 13 months from seed to flower, but flowering in the second year would be more typical. Why don't you have a go and let us know how you get on and do look out for the survivors in the gardens you visit — you might find a friend from the past.

References:

Lee W Lenz *A Revision of the Pacific Coast Irises* 1958

Victor A Cohen *A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises* 1967

The Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris <http://pacificcoastiris.org>



'Celtic Copper' (Foster 1986)
BIS slide library



'Pinewood Drama' (Wise 2001)



'Banbury Pageant'
(M Brummitt '76)
BIS slide library

Results from Hybridising Pacific Coast Irises

Father Philip Jones

In this first photo is the iris I once regarded as the best – the “special one.” Sister Eileen made it into a lovely Christmas Card. This clump of iris is the result of crossing the “special one” with another of the PCIs that I have. This iris is not only a neat flower but it is also neat in its foliage and formation and hopefully all its progeny in the future. The leaf colour is fresh with slightly yellow/green foliage. However, unfortunately I don’t expect this hybrid to flower for another two years. PCI growers have to have endless patience waiting for probably three years from seed to flowering here in Dysart on the east coast of Fife. Other places are perhaps luckier and flowers may develop in two years.

Other photos show the iris bed which is just inside the front gates of the Monastery. The irises here are all the PCIs which I have had for a long time. The flowers are nice but they weren’t from



any special location or source. They are just typical Pacific Coast Irises. However, I am starting to grow these plants in a rather different way.

Many of these irises were moved from the long bed to make room for the “special ones.” Now in their new bed near the entrance to the Monastery they had become rather large clumps and were not particularly attractive. The dust bins are near the entrance and the irises seemed to be telling me that it was time to give them a break. “Dig us all up and put us somewhere else,” they said, “become normal like everyone else.” I had dug the large clumps out and they were lying upside down on the soil. It was touch and go. Why not grow ordinary common garden plants for a change? Like everyone else?

I began to break up one of the clumps and then I noticed that one small part of the clump in my hand was interesting. It was not a single plant like one stem growing down into one root. PCIs don’t grow like that. Their root is a rhizome and so it is horizontal and not vertical. Compared with the roots of the ordinary garden iris, the roots of the PCIs are rather thin and a number of stems tend to grow up together. It is all on a rather smaller scale. It struck me it would be nice if it was to stay with the ‘small scale’ and limit the clump formation so there was a narrower version of the plant. This would allow it to be seen more clearly, with the formation of the long arching leaves and the subtle differences of the shades of green – warm greens to cold bluey greens.

But the main emphasis was on the space between the individual plants and allowing the soil above ground to be part of the picture. In this new approach the soil is the background to the leaves. Anything else competes with the

colour of the leaves and it is no longer possible to see the long arch of the narrow leaves or to notice the colour.

In the photos you can see this new approach. It will need working on to decide what is the best way of keeping the plants heading away from the clump and towards a thinner version of their natural selves.



Philip sets out his seedlings in long boxes to grow on before moving to their final positions, while the rest of us fear to move them at all.

And Philip has the last word — these irises seem to be unlike most other common or garden plants in that they should only be dug up to be replanted or divided up just after they have flowered or in the autumn.

New Siberian Introductions for 2022

Brita Carson

This has been a disappointing year for new registrations and embarrassingly I am the only registrant with Beardless irises. It does mean I have the stage to myself, or rather the pages, for new introductions.

I had expected Jennifer Hewitt to have a new iris ready for the Centenary year but when she didn't I had to find one of my own so that the Beardless Group was going to be represented. This one is perhaps introduced a year earlier than I expected but I hope it will be stable. I don't like to see any irises introduced before they have at least shown a stable flower colour and form for two years in a row. Although Jennifer didn't produce this, her influence was strongly represented with this iris having 'Peter Hewitt' in its early ancestry when it was crossed with 'Spencer'. It was then crossed with 'Tranquility Base' which had been crossed with 'Edge of Tomorrow', both from Jeff Dunlop's stable. All these irises are tetraploids and easier to hybridise than diploids.

I would like to suggest to new hybridisers to use tetraploids to start your programme. They have more substance and are more forgiving to grapple with when you first attempt to hold the style arm and implant stamen from the pollen parent. It is very easy to snap the style arm by just bending it over and you can feel the break in your fingers with a sinking heart. That cross is



'Centenary Stardust' Sib
tet,

(Carson, Brita R. 2022)
('Spencer' x 'Peter Hewitt') X
sdlg 19n042(B), ('Tranquility
Base' X 'Edge of Tomorrow')

no good.

Unfortunately it is not easy to tell if a flower is a tet or a diploid and although we say the tets are stronger, have more substance and are larger in flower

structure, needless to say not all of them are and there are, as always, exceptions to that rule. It is a case of learning which are tets and which are dips and that is not so difficult once you know what you have yourself.

Jan and Marty's website shows the flowers and their clumps and they only work and sell diploid Siberians which might be helpful. Check on wiki to find out the status of an iris.



These two irises were named for one of our son-in-law's mum and one for his gran, sadly, both of whom have passed away. The piercing blue of **'Sandra Jackson'** is the striking blue colour she loved. Tomas Tamberg produced 'Blaue Milchstrasse', the pod parent and a particular favourite of mine which I use a lot in my hybridising.

'Sandra Jackson'
(Carson, Brita, R. 2022)



Left is **'Mae Strachan'**, hybridised using two of Jeff Dunlop's hybrids—'My First Kiss' and 'Edge of Tomorrow' are both hybrids of Jeff's.

('My First Kiss' x 'Bournemouth Ballgown')
X ('Prussian Blue' x 'Edge of Tomorrow').

'Mae Strachan'
(Carson, Brita R. 2022)

The Japanese Iris

Gordon and Chris Link

Well, what a summer, another extremely hot and dry one, the third year running here. Loads of watering and no real rain until late October. Not a great year to be growing Japanese Iris.

Yet again they have had to put up with hardly any water; whilst they have survived quite well, you can tell they are looking rather stressed. Time will tell next year if there are any losses.

On a positive note, some did put on a good display. The stand out ones this year included 'Evelyn White', an extremely showy variety, standards white with a violet/red border. Also 'Silken Charm', one of my favourites, a Bob Bauer/John Coble introduction with white standards again with a narrow pink rim and pink crests.

A variety not often seen is 'Cukrova Vata', a plant I received from Zdenek Seidl three or four years ago, one from his own breeding programme and has now made a substantial clump. Quite an early bloomer, white falls veined violet/red and red/violet style arms. But the stand out plant for this year must be *Iris ensata* 'Kogesho', a plant that's been around for some time even though, as far as I know, was never registered. It was one of the first to flower and just went on and on. Originally slow to get going, now making a very floriferous clump, white overlaid lavender/violet.



Ensata 'Evelyn White'
(John White, R. 2004)



Ensata 'Cukrova Vata'
(Zdenek Seidl, R. 2015)



Ensata 'Kogesho'
(This iris has not yet been registered.)



Pseudata 'Yasha' (Shimizu, R. 2010)

A group of irises that have surprised and delighted me have been the Pseudatas. Whilst I have grown several varieties in the field for a few years, others have been grown in large pots which is fine for a couple of years but if I don't get them repotted after that they start to lose vigour. About twelve months ago I got them all planted out into an existing iris bed, reinvigorated them with lots of well rotted manure. I can't believe

how well they have responded and grown. Even after one of the hottest and driest summers on record, they received no irrigation whatsoever, and are all looking vigorous, green and glossy (*shows what a bit of muck can do! Ed.*).

We only had a few blooms on them this year but looking forward to many more next summer. Varieties that did flower this year were 'Byaku no Kumi', 'Yukiyanagi' and 'Yasha' bred by Hiroshi Shimizu. We have planted several new plants last autumn and we are looking forward to seeing these bloom, maybe next year. We also managed to get hold of *Iris Pseudacorus* 'Gubijin', the pod parent of many of these pseudata varieties, so will maybe try our hand at breeding a few of our own sometime in the future.



Pseudata 'Byaku no Kumi'
(Not yet registered.)



Pseudata 'Yukiyanagi'
(Shimizu, R. 2010)

Japanese Iris

Jack Venner

I must confess that until about five years ago my personal experience of them was mainly from youthful memories of the very old varieties seen growing by lake sides in large public parks. Now I am growing some of the finest modern named varieties. And now I appreciate what I have missed in former years whilst being fully occupied growing TBs.



Naturally it was in Japan that centuries of selective breeding took place and resulted in large-flowered spectacular plants being exported, handicapped to some extent by long Japanese names. Since the last world war, eminent American irisarians have worked with the best strains from Japan to produce some really outstanding garden plants that any iris enthusiast with a lime-free soil should be proud to grow; so there must of course be reasons why these irises have not stirred more than a casual interest among British growers. One of the reasons may be that the flowering period, normally July in Britain, is too late for blooms to be exhibited at the usual summer shows. Another possible reason could be a mystique surrounding them that may lead one to suppose that they are difficult to grow. Of course there are ideal conditions in which these plants can be grown to perfection, and it may be worthwhile restating the kind of advice given from time to time by successful growers.

To give their best, Japanese irises should be grown in a sunny position in rich acid soil. They should have adequate moisture, especially before and during the flowering. Watering with hard tap water containing lime should be avoided if possible. In lime-free gardens it should be possible to satisfy most of these requirements.

The soil in my garden is clay with a natural pH of 6.5. I have found that incorporation of compost and peat soon produced the necessary acid condition, so I imagine that any soils up to neutral pH7, even light soils, can be suitable. During the growing season periodic applications of liquid fertilisers are of great benefit as Japanese irises are gross feeders. This year during the mini heatwaves in May and June I found that the rainwater in the water-butts had become stagnant. Nevertheless I used it from watering cans

in which a pinch of permanganate of potash was added and dissolved. There were no noticeable harmful effects such as yellowing of the foliage. However, if one has to use hard tap water it would probably be safer to mix in some Sequestrene crystals. For the inexperienced grower wishing to try these irises a few tips to remember are as follows:

The name *Iris kaempferi* has been changed to the now correct *Iris ensata* but the former name may persist in some plant catalogues. Flowers are referred to as “single” and “double”. These terms do not mean quite the same as they do when used to describe other flowers. Singles have 3 flaring falls and short (approx. 1 inch tall) upright standards.



Doubles have standards and falls of equal length and flare out together; this form is often referred to as “six-petalled”, a much better description.

New plants acquired in the autumn die down, and in the following February the remaining short brown stems look quite dead. No need for despair, as with the onset of warmer weather, green leaves appear from the withered stems and new shoots spring up from below ground level. With the continuation of warm weather, growth is rapid.

As the plants increase they will need division to prevent deterioration. Varieties that are extra vigorous may need dividing after 3 years; others of slower growth can be left longer. As well as digging in compost before planting one's first acquisitions, extra nourishment in the form of manure (preferably from cattle) should be given to provide nutrients and moisture.

Philip Allery

This is written by request as a complementary article to that by Jack Venner who had started to compile his article but unfortunately became very ill and died.

The growing interest in Japanese irises in the UK is due in part to the activities of several enthusiastic hybridisers in the USA over the last 20 years. Beginning almost 60 years ago with the outstanding, meticulous documented work of W.A. Payne, followed by Walter Marx, other hybridisers have worked tirelessly during the past two decades to produce diverse and stronger varieties, with great clear colour forms. Japanese irises are becoming more

readily available in this country.

The varietal improvements in the USA have been matched by similar work in Japan and there have been exchanges of plants, information and visits between leading nurseries of the two countries to an extent that was formerly unknown. The outcome is that amateur and commercial growers now have available to them, at reasonable cost, a wide range of well proportioned cultivars of good substance and rich colour. Imports from the USA can be sent from April to May and from mid-August to mid-November. Plants from Japan are normally sent during their dormant period i.e. November to February. And a selection of several hundred varieties is now available to suit all tastes. It is unwise to allow imported plants to bloom in the first season, so if a spike is produced, cut off the buds.

Until recently very few nurseries in the UK have made serious efforts to grow or stock Japanese iris varieties but this situation is improving. With the introduction of fourth and fifth generation of tetraploid varieties and new diploids, which are a marked improvement on earlier introductions with only a limited breeding base, the hybridiser is in a good position to select new lines of development and make positive contributions to the future. The Japanese iris offers a number of areas where improvement programmes can be undertaken, not only in the flower itself but in the foliage. By its very nature of variable form, colour and substance, it is the ideal subject for continuing development and much remains to be done.

Possible areas of investigation include development of strains resistant to dryness as well as calcium. The late Max Steiner of Germany showed that calcium-resistance is an achievable goal given patience, determination and development and since all his work was lost after his death, more work is needed to find out the many areas of different soils with different pH levels. The phenomena of variation of colour intensity and of remontancy (rebloom) also merit further work. Periods of bloom range from May to late July, with some remontancy now firmly established in some varieties, so the future offers a distinct challenge which should bring considerable satisfaction.

There are new short-stemmed cultivars on the market at present but most range in height from 24 inches (60cm) to 45 (114cm). The need for development of dwarf JIs for border plantings was identified in the early 1970s by Dr William Ackerman and Dr Currier McEwen and it seems that they should be available from 8 inches (20cm) to 18 (45cm) in the near future. Substantial progress has been made between dwarfness and poor flower quality and the progress has been made in overcoming the problem of apparent genetic linkage between these two issues.

Growers who have a neutral soil should not be deterred by this fact. The addition of humus and peat should achieve a rich, slightly acid soil and is not a difficult exercise. Aim for a pH factor around 6.0 and take twice yearly readings in March and August, to ensure that it does not exceed 6.5. Water quality too is of utmost importance and the need for conserving rainwater supplies cannot be too strongly emphasised.

As to location, many alternatives exist: bog and bogside; beds in lawn settings; pocket planting in the herbaceous or mixed border; and patio planting, where the various forms of troughs and containers are now available from simple pots to linked modules, allowing the most imaginative layouts. Those seeking aesthetic settings should use pool or poolside, stream or waterside plantings whenever possible. In situations where the intrusion of roots etc. into the growing medium might present a problem, simple measures can be taken to prevent this.

Whatever type of planting is preferred, it is essential to ensure conditions are conducive to unhindered for a plant.

Editor — these two articles are from the 1989 Year Book and are still very relevant today. Both authors were very keen growers of Japanese irises.

Top LH photo — ‘Columbia Deepwater’; RH photo - ‘Angelic Choir’

Lower LH photo — ‘Dalle Whitewater’; RH photo — ‘Asian Festival’



The photographic examples of the Japanese irises on the previous page and this page have all been hybridised by Chad Harris. The new ones being produced are remarkable with unbelievable beauty © Chad Harris.

You can find all these examples and many more on his website:

www.mtpleasantiris.com

Photos on p.26: left ‘Coho’; right ‘Artesian Spring’.

Photos on p.27: left ‘Bushido’; right ‘Flamingo Waltz’.

A Consolation Prize



S15-10BL-20 (It's A Date X Dusky Dawn) X



S11-15-13 (Theme and Variation X So8-7-10)



S19-15-12A (Rounding Third X S15-83-12) X



S14-61-13 (S11-59-2 X Dance All Night)



S19-45-12 (S15-83-10 X S15-86-10) X



S19-48-10 (S15-83-13 X S17-26-1)



S19-56-10 (S16-16-10 X Cape Cod Girls) X



S19-17-15 (S15-2-10 X S16-33-10)



S19-57-19 (S16-16-10 X S15-30A-11) X



S14-3-12 (So8-8-1 X So8-125-1)

Below is a very generous note from Jan:

"You are welcome to do whatever you want with these seeds. Once the plants bloom you may want to make crosses with them. That is fine. If you decide any of the seedlings from these crosses are worthy of introduction, you are welcome to do so under your name as registrant. You do not need our permission. There is a place on the registration form for "Source of seed if other than registrant" and you would put Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer there. I have attached a page with photos of the parents of each cross (with the grandparents in parenthesis after each parent and photo), so you have an idea what you are getting.

Ed. I was going to number the crosses but I have decided that I would like you to write out your request in full so that I hope not to make any mistakes.

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My sincere thanks to all the contributors of articles and photographs for this edition of the *Review*. Please do get in touch if you have something to say and would like to write for the next edition.

A special thanks to Jill and Alun Whitehead for all their help doing 'gofor' work, if you can describe it as that when it is by email on computer.

Proof Readers: Julia Carson, Marina Jackson, Alun and Jill Whitehead.

Photographers: the photographs are provided by the authors or have their providers written below their photographs. No name means the photograph was taken by the author of the article.

Website Update

As you know, all the Group's *Newsletters* and *Reviews* are online – many hours of research or relaxed reading are possible. They do pop up in web searches, but it can be difficult otherwise if you are looking for something in particular. To help, I've now added a list of articles by date and by author to the publications page. I've also added a copy of Dykes' *The Genus Iris* (1913) as a handy reference – so many later references rely on him, it is always good to see the original.

www.beardlessiris.org/publications.html



‘Banner for Iona’, (Joyce Prothero, R 2010)
Award of Merit 2017



‘Going Bananas’ (Joseph Ghio, R. 2010) Sydney B Mitchell Medal

