



Summer Newsletter 2025

Editorial

Barbara Williams, Chair, b_williams15@hotmail.com

The last time I attended one of our lectures was in February, when Roderick Woods delivered his lecture Travels of a Plantsman. He finished with a wonderful photo of a sunny open track in Australia, home to an extraordinary diversity of plants and wildlife – and this was where Jon and I were headed for most of March and part of April. While the UK was enjoying a beautiful spring, bathed in sunshine, the Australia we visited was experiencing significant rainfall, cold and wind. Yes, they are at the end of summer down under, but there were times when the rain was relentless; the unseasonal typhoon, which had struck near Brisbane on the east coast in March, was still affecting weather fronts when we were there over a month later. The rise in land temperature of at least 1.5C is taking its toll. The determination to protect the natural heritage is seen in a variety of ways from recognising First Nations People and beginning to hear their voice, to wildlife rescue, to the restoration of forests.

Our first visit, after Melbourne and Sydney, was to Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains, an area of temperate rain forests and home to the Blue Mountains Botanical Garden, Mount Tomah, a real find. Large parts of the forest have been reclaimed from coal mining near Katoomba and silver and gold mining elsewhere. There are still pollution problems from these long-disused mines leaking into the rivers, but the forest is gradually reasserting its authority.



Katoomba temperate rain forest

The prominence of tree ferns in this process is noticeable and as you enter the forest you are engulfed in green and silence, with spectacular rock formations. And more rain than you can imagine.

North of Cairns, from Port Douglas, we visited the Daintree Rain Forest. Here, the rainforest is tropical and coastal, so while there are still many tree ferns and ferns, there is a subtle difference in what you see and hear, with flowers more prominent in some places.

Ferns are obviously prominent and most are varieties which are specific to the area and therefore difficult to identify unless you are a serious pteridologist, but the staghorn fern (more likely

called the elkhorn fern in Australia) *Platycerium bifurcatum*, is plentiful. It is seen in the photo, from the bottom of the picture upwards, in four stages of development.



Daintree Rainforest at Kimberley



Platycerium bifurcatum

I write about these forests with all seriousness, when we read that rainforests in South America continue to be at risk because of climate change and destruction for agriculture. As members of a society which seeks to protect heritage plants, we need to protect the heritage which produced those plants in the first place – our temperate climate in the UK.



With Gwen Hines (PH Chief Executive)
photo Gill Groombridge

Thinking of heritage brings me to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, which we visited in May, where Plant Heritage had an excellent display. Several of the PH National Collections were there, as was Lucy Skellorn, who gave us an excellent talk last year on irises and developments at Benton End. It was an opportunity to meet Gwen Hines (Chief Executive) and Gill Groombridge (Business Manager) and put names to faces.

We hadn't been to Chelsea for two years, so were interested to see how or if, trends had changed. When we last went in 2022, there were still some noticeable display gaps in the marquee in that post-Covid era and it looked as though Chelsea hadn't quite recovered. Some of the gardens

felt over-wilded, as though the skill of the gardener was secondary rather than complementary to nature. I think this year things had changed for the better. Some of those really large displays in the marquee were replaced by smaller nurseries, which I personally enjoyed more. There were six large show gardens, which seemed less focussed on spectacular structures and more on naturalistic planting, while still bearing in mind that structures must be included in the design. But there were ten small show gardens, as well as a section of balcony gardens and two gardens highlighting the positive power of plants on people and the planet. This worked well. Planting was still naturalistic, many with colour palettes of deep maroon (*Papaver somniferum* 'Black Swan' was omnipresent), soft blues and gentle oranges.



Cha no Niwa, designed by Kazuyuki Ishihara

This style of planting was in contrast to the exquisitely planned garden of Kazuyuki Ishihara, Cha no Niwa (the Tea (cha) Garden (niwa)) which won Best in Show. It was Mr Ishihara's first large show garden

and his 13th Gold Medal. Key plants were, among others, *Iris sanguinea* and *Acer palmatum* 'Sanguineum' both seen in the photo.

But somewhere in between these two styles, we will all surely find our own way of constructing our gardens, with the plants we are so passionate about.

(All photos taken by Barbara Williams unless otherwise stated)

Membership Matters

Linda Hall, Membership Secretary
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A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

Mr Nick Belfield-Smith (Norwich); Mr Don Smith (Norwich) has re-joined; Mrs Margaret Behm (Cringleford) joined via the Plant Heritage website. At our very successful Plant Fair held on 4th May four new members signed up on the day: Ms Karen Rosebery (Rockland All Saints); Ms Lesley Cox (Norwich) and Miss Ann Rostron and Mr Anthony Fielder (Wymondham).

Our membership now totals 202.

The National Collection of Gunnera

Simon Harrap, PH National Collection holder, writes about the collection and about some of the characteristics of this unusual plant:

The family Gunneraceae contains just one genus, *Gunnera*, comprising 63 species, mostly found in the Southern Hemisphere. The best-known *Gunneras* in cultivation are the two largest species, *G. tinctoria* and *G. × cryptica*, sometimes



Part of the collection photo Simon Harrap

known as 'Giant Rhubarb' (despite being unrelated to rhubarb). Their leaves can be 3 metres across. It was the impressive stand of *G. × cryptica* that lines the entrance to the Bayfield Estate and Natural Surroundings

that first aroused our interest in the genus, but it took a while to realise just how special this family is. These two giant *Gunneras* are now banned from sale and you are not even allowed to plant them, although happily those already in the ground, especially the non-invasive *G. × cryptica*, can stay where they are and delight visitors to our gardens and nursery. Other hardy *Gunnera* are available, and with our interest aroused we started to collect these rather smaller species and now our National Collection focuses on these.



Gunnera x cryptica photo Simon Harrap

Amongst living plants the family Gunneraceae is one of the more ancient – fossilised pollen suggests an origin in South America at least 95 million years ago, and *Gunnera* have survived more or less unchanged ever since. Within 10 million years of their first appearance, *Gunnera* had spread widely, and until recently it was thought that *Gunnera* had spread from South America all across the ancient super-continent of Gondwanaland and that their modern scattered distribution is a 'relic' following its break-up to form the modern southern continents. Genetic reconstruction of the *Gunnera* family tree indicates, however, that the timings don't match. It is now thought that the majority of *Gunnera* species, even those found on entirely different continents, diverged from each other *relatively recently*, well after the break-up of Gondwanaland. For at least some the modern distribution is the result of *long-distance dispersal* from South America across the oceans. How this happened is a mystery.

Gunneraceae are one of only two families of flowering plant to form a relationship with cyanobacteria. – popularly known as 'blue-green algae', which live *inside* the plant. The cyanobacteria provides its host with fixed nitrogen. In return, the *Gunnera* provides a protective environment and stable source of nutrients. The relationship is very close – the *Gunnera* is dependent on the cyanobacteria for nitrates, which are essential for growth. Only one other flowering plant has a similar relationship (*Oryza* – in the grass family); all the other plants associated with cyanobacteria belong to even more ancient lineages, including mosses and liverworts, aquatic ferns and cycads.

All *Gunnera* are herbaceous, non-woody perennials: despite their size, even the giant *Gunnera* die right down in winter. The flowers are wind-pollinated and neither large nor colourful, but in many species they are clustered together into conspicuous spikes. Many *Gunnera* are dioecious, with male and female flowers found on separate plants, while the fruit (in those species that produce it) is a berry, again clustered into spikes. With attractive foliage and fruits, the hardy dwarf *Gunneras* are useful as ground cover for damp places in sun or light shade, so do come along to see our collection of *Gunnera*. Our gardens also contain a great variety of other interesting hardy plants. We aim to demonstrate that you can have a lovely garden with varied and interesting planting in a relaxed, 'cottage' style and still be wildlife-friendly. On a sunny day in summer the variety of butterflies, bees, dragonflies and other insects suggests that it works!

Read all about it

National Collections News

Anne Ashington, NPH National Collections Co-ordinator

A new collection of *Galanthus* comprising Norfolk snowdrops is in the making. This is the idea of Jack Lindfield, Head Gardener at the Sandringham Estate. The collection will be held in the garden at Sandringham and will consist of snowdrop cultivars which have been found or bred in Norfolk or have an association with the county.

There are around ninety cultivars which meet these criteria and so far this spring about twenty had been planted in the garden with many others to follow.

Several snowdrop enthusiasts around Norfolk have contributed to the collection, along with Brian Ellis who describes himself as a galanthoholic and is a long-standing member of NPH. Brian has been involved in setting up the collection, advising Jack on best practice for establishing these Norfolk cultivars.



Galanthus 'Brian Ellis'
photo © David King

A proposal for a National Collection of Norfolk snowdrops was approved by the Plant Heritage Collections Committee in March. This will be followed up in the future by an application for full PH National Collection status.

Norfolk Plant Heritage Gala – 13th April 2025

Nicola Cooke, NPH Secretary

Our two speakers at this year's Gala - *Out with the old or in with the new – two creative gardens* - were Nick Bailey and Steve Edney. Nick is a familiar face from his television appearances, and particularly as a regular contributor to

BBC Gardeners' World. Steve is passionate about creating gardens that are homes for people and wildlife. Both talks were highly entertaining and very informative.

Steve described how, having purchased a house near Sandwich in east Kent, he and partner Louise Dowle set about creating "a high impact low maintenance garden" - an "exotic jungle paradise that is home to plants, people and wildlife" - in the back garden - and a delightful cottage garden at the front. Steve and Louise have also been working on their project known as "The Land", since 2109, a three acre site where they have established The No Name Nursery, grow stock plants for the nursery, and have developed a wildlife-friendly area described as their "plant playground", which is divided into a number of different themed compartments. They also hold four National Collections.

Nick's talk - *Revive Your Garden* - focussed on a wide range of suggestions for reviving and reinvigorating a garden, using simple ideas, techniques, and solutions for design and layout. Nick included advice on how to deal with existing planting and suggested new plants to consider for various situations, for example, plants to grow through other plants, under roses, under trees, in long grass, up north-facing walls, in sun traps. Successional planting was also discussed, and how to enhance existing plants with colour. Nick went on to tell us about his own new garden in a village situation, which he has been busy developing since moving there recently, adding many exciting new plants.

Steve and Louise plus Richard Hobbs brought an excellent range of plants for sale.

As always, many thanks to everyone who organised and helped with the Gala (including the delicious Ploughman's Lunch), without whom this very enjoyable event could not take place.

Hethersett Plant Fair, May 2025

Barbara Williams, Chair

Our Plant Fairs are a firm fixture in the calendar and remain very popular with the local nurseries, several commenting that it remains a favourite and one of the best organized that the nurseries attend - and they attend a good number!

We thought our attendance numbers were down on May 2024, but this was not the case. Numbers were broadly the same, around 750, and given that the weather was cold and windy, it would seem the turnout was good, if short of our post-Covid record of around 900. Our Plant Fair remains an important fundraiser for NPH and enables us to keep general costs relatively low for members, as well as funding bursaries for PH National Collection holders in Norfolk, the schools' bursary and this year, updating our technology and purchasing a new (and now safe) gazebo. Most of what we raise in membership fees is retained centrally by Plant Heritage, and this year, only £1,192 was returned to us in support of our running costs, so our fund raising is an important activity.

In the village hall this year, we welcomed Simon and Anne Harrap from Natural Surroundings – they will be hosting a talk and visit at Natural Surroundings in August – Kathy has provided the information for this in her Programme Round-Up. Also in the hall was Lucy Skinner, who did a talk for us in January, with a wide range of unusual pelargoniums for sale. We were very glad to welcome for the first time Peter Blake and Matthew Reeve from The Exotic Fern Group. This is a relatively new group on the scene for fern enthusiasts with a special interest in tropical, sub-tropical and indoor ferns. The basic membership is free. More information is on their website www.exoticferngroup.org



Matthew Reeve (left) and Peter Blake founders of the group, photo Barbara Williams

Programme round-up

Kathy Gray, Programme Secretary, kathygrayc@gmail.com

Hello and welcome to the latest Programme Round Up. I am writing this in early May when, despite the lack of rain, much is looking good in our gardens and the blossom has been exceptional this year. Let us hope that by the time you read this in July we will have had a nice balance of sun and rain! Below are details of the programme to take us up to October. I always hope that you enjoy what is on offer and look forward to seeing you at the various events

Thursday, 14 August at 4.45pm: *Wildflowers in the Garden; the good, the bad and the ugly.* In past years we



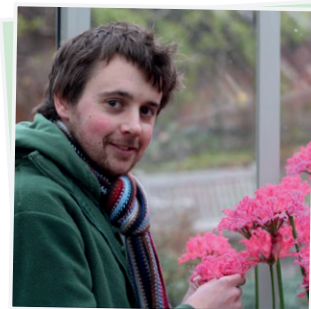
Natural Surroundings, photo Simon Harrap

have had a wildflower walk with Simon Harrap, giving us the opportunity to see wildflowers in various habitats within Norfolk. This year, for a change, the event will be held at Natural Surroundings which Simon, along with his wife Anne, run and offers the opportunity to see what wildflowers will do well in our gardens and those that won't. See the enclosed letter giving further details of the event.

Sunday, 24 August 10am to 1pm: Plant Fair at Hethersett Village Hall and field, NR9 3JJ. Flyers for you to display in your cars etc. are enclosed with this issue. For this Fair we have Norfolk Herbs showcasing Salvias in the Hall along with Fullers Mill, on behalf of the charity Perennial. Gary Bean, Garden Manager at Fullers Mill will be on hand selling plants and talking about the work of the charity. The second hand book stall will be open for business and the Plant Doctor will be in attendance. Refreshments will be served as usual and (I say this every time but it's still very relevant) any donations of cakes will be gratefully received. On the field, there will be 20 plus nurseries, including our own stand; once again,

plants for our stand will also be gratefully received. They should be well potted and correctly labelled. And don't forget to bring cash for buying that special plant or two or.....not all nurseries have card readers.

Sunday, 21 September at 2pm: At the first of our two autumn lectures, both at Bawburgh Village Hall, NR9 3LL, we will welcome Nigel Hopes with a talk entitled *Autumn in the Garden*. Nigel started his horticultural career at Ashwood Nursery, owned by Chelsea Gold Medallist John Massey VMH and, after gaining much experience and qualifications over the years, has come full circle by becoming Head Gardener at John's wonderful eight-acre garden. Nigel will bring plants for sale – hopefully a mix of those from Hopes Nursery that he runs with his wife Samantha and some from Ashwood Nursery.



Nigel Hopes



Photo Richard Hobbs

Thursday, 9 October at 10am:

The Surprising World of Plant Breeding – a workshop with Richard Hobbs at Wheatfen Nature Reserve, NR14 7AL An opportunity to join Richard for another of his popular workshops – this time learn more about the many aspects of plant breeding with Richard. See the enclosed letter giving further details of the event.

Sunday, 19 October at 2pm: For this meeting we will hear from Bob Brown talking, in his own inimitable style, about *Payback: do your garden plants really earn the space they occupy?* Bob, of course, founded Cotswold Garden Flowers in the 90's and is a fount of knowledge having grown and critiqued thousands of plant varieties over the years. This is guaranteed to be a lively and informative talk. There will be plants for sale.



Bob Brown

As ever, I look forward to seeing you over the coming months.

**Plants are our passion
but people make us successful -
our thanks to all who help and support us.**

Norfolk Plant Heritage

www.norfolkplantheritage.org.uk

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