

Speakers for the coming year – A Star-studded Cast

We have, as usual, a star-studded cast of speakers lecturing this coming year and I have often felt that we haven't broadcast enough just how brilliant these speakers are. Here is some more information on each of them so please do tell your friends and neighbours and feel free to invite them along – they will not be disappointed and it's no use telling them after the talk is over!

September – First talk of the year sees **Averil Milligan**, Head Gardener at Rowallane, who needs no introduction to local people as we hear her broadcast frequently on BBC Ulster *Gardeners' Corner*. Widely travelled, knowledgeable on many aspects of gardening and floral art, I hadn't realised that she had also developed the art of making soaps and creams from plants and natural ingredients and I am sure there will be more surprises in her lecture.



October – brings our first visitor, **Ian Christie**, from Scotland where he has been running the Alpine Nursery at Kirriemuir for many years. He has travelled round the world to see alpinists growing in the wild and the nursery is recognised as one of the best for alpine plants. Many of our older members will never forget the sight of Paddy Duffy – alas no longer with us – struggling with a large wheelbarrow needed to bring all his choice purchases from Ian's Nursery to the Ulsterbus. I remember the beautiful gentians but Ian's name also hit the headlines in connection with one of the most expensive snowdrops, 'Elizabeth Harrison'. As well as being a plantsman par excellence he is also an expert rock garden designer and builder so there should be a lot to interest alpine gardeners.



November – has our second Scottish speaker, **Ken Cox**, who is Managing Director of Glendoick Nursery and Garden Centre. Ken is the 3rd generation of his family which has introduced so many rhododendrons, azaleas and countless other plants to the British Isles from around the world. His grandfather, Euan, went on expedition with Reginald Farrer, sometimes described as the 'patron saint' of alpine gardeners. Ken himself has led nine plant hunting expeditions to Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh and has been the author or co-author of quite a few books – I especially enjoyed his account of reexploring and reintroducing Frank Kingdon Ward's 'Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges'. His book on 'Garden Plants for Scotland' also applies to our gardens here and is full of common-sense advice so I look forward to his new book on Woodland Gardening. All who were at Termonfeckin last year enjoyed his talks – I just don't know how he finds time to play Brazilian music!



NB: Change of venue for this lecture to Malone Presbyterian Church Hall and the Irish Garden Plant Society are welcome.

December - Back home **Seamus O'Brien** is our Irish authority on the temperate plants of China and currently manages The Kilmacurragh Botanic Garden, Co Wicklow. It is a real pleasure to walk round Kilmacurragh with Seamus where he brings every tree, bush, plant and stone to life with an encyclopaedic knowledge of its history and story. He brings this talent along with his experience of travelling widely to his books. Following the success of 'In the footsteps of Augustine Henry' in which he traced the travels in China of the Irish plantsman and collector, Dr Augustine Henry, he continues with the launch in October of a book 'In the



footsteps of Joseph Dalton Hooker- A Sikkim Aventure'. As one of my best memories was seeing *Chionocharis hookeri* flowering at well over 14,000 ft on the Baima Shan in Yunnan, I am interested in learning more about Joseph Hooker.

January - To open the New year we have **Jamie Chambers** who originates from New Zealand but is now firmly planted as Chairman and Web master of the Dublin Group of the AGS. Those who have been to Termonfeckin will know Jamie well from his cryptic gardening quiz in which he has us all racking our brains for answers. I am sure this talk will prove to be interesting, thought-provoking but above all, entertaining - just what we need to start the new year.



February - First time to the Ulster Group **Julian Sutton** comes from Devon where with his wife Sarah, he runs the Desirable Plants Nursery. Being a trained botanist as well as a gardener Julian brings both together to increase our knowledge and appreciation of plants. The nursery specialises in new and interesting plants with a special emphasis on South African bulbs and plants. Having heard him speak in Carlow I was very impressed and envious of his real gift for lecturing - so again don't miss this talk.



March - last but not least our own **Brian Duncan MBE** gives the final talk in this year's programme. Like Maggi Young I have pinched part of a blog from the American Daffodil Society- "Brian Duncan is one of the best known and most successful daffodil hybridizers and exhibitors in the world." To list all Brian's gold medals, cups and awards from the Royal Horticultural Society and the American Daffodil Society and to name all the committees he has served would fill this newsletter. Yet over the years I have come to know Brian and his wife, Betty, as the most young-at-heart and fun-loving couple it has been a real pleasure to travel with into the world of bulbs. Brian is both the founder and now President of the Northern Ireland Daffodil Group to whom he gave this lecture, a most appropriate and enjoyable talk to end our year and right in the middle of the daffodil season.

