

Ulster AGS Seventieth Anniversary Show, 2009

On twenty-fifth April the Ulster group staged their seventieth Show which proved an unqualified success with the benches packed with a diverse array of very fine plants. After a week of rather damp weather the sun shone and brought a sparkle to the lovely grounds of Greenmount campus. The fine weather also tempted a large number of visitors to the Show, hopefully reversing the decline in the number of visitors in recent years. As a result both the group plant sale and the commercial sellers had a very good day.

To mark the prestigious occasion the Joint Rock Garden Plant Committee of the RHS met in conjunction with the show and considered some eighteen plants for award. Six members of the committee, augmented by three judges from Ulster and three from Dublin, under the direction of Ray Drew made a formidable judging team. The standard of entries was high and in many classes the judges faced difficult decisions.



Harold McBride of the Ulster group had clearly made a determined effort to ensure that the benches would be graced by some spectacular plants. His large pans of *Pinguicula*



grandiflora, *Androsace sarmentosa*, (pictured above) *A. studiosorum* 'Doksa' and two forms of *Anemone trullifolia* were greatly admired. Harold was awarded Certificates of Merit for the first two. I was particularly taken by the two anemones, which are the result of crosses Harold has made between *A. trullifolia* and *A. obtusiloba*; one exhibited as *A. trullifolia* 'Cream Form' and the other as *A. trullifolia* X *obtusiloba* (yellow form). The latter was particularly attractive with its bi-coloured blue and white flowers (left). Harold also won the

Festival of Britain (Northern Ireland) Trophy for class 2 (3 pans rock plants distinct) as well as the Phebe Anderson Trophy for class 62 (3 pans rock plants raised from seed).

Anemone thalictroides 'Oscar Schoaf', shown by Susan Tindall was a splendid example of this species as was Susan's large *Daphne petraea* 'Grandiflora' and her impeccable *Celmisia semicordata* which was judged the best plant from Australasia.



Liam Byrne from Dublin won the Cooke Cup for the most first prize points in the open section. Liam was also awarded a Certificate of Merit for his lovely *Ramonda myconi*, grown from seed, a Farrer Medal winner in Dublin a couple of years ago. His *Shortia soldanelloides* was also much admired.

The Eightieth Anniversary award and the SRGC Quaich for the best plant in a pan not exceeding 19 cm was awarded to another lovely Shortia, *S. x 'Leona'* (pictured below), exhibited by Frank Walsh. Frank grows his

plant in peaty compost in a pot which is kept in a shaded frame.

Lionel Clarkson from Blackpool won the E. B. Andersen prize for his fine six pan entry in class thirty-eight.



Ulster growers are well known for their success in growing ericaceous plants and the impressive specimen of *Cassiope selaginoides* exhibited by George and Pat Gordon provided ample evidence of this.

Bob Gordon's well flowered *Veronica bombycina*, a plant I find quite difficult, stood out. Bob grows it in his alpine house in a gritty compost in a plastic pot. He keeps it quite dry in winter watering only when growth is evident in early spring.

Primula bardeliana (right) shown by Ian Christie from Scotland was new to many of us, including this writer, and provoked considerable discussion.

The Farrer Medal was awarded to *Primula bracteata* (Billy Moore). This primula was seen by Kingdon-Ward at 3300-3700 m in Sichuan growing 'on the driest barest limestone cliffs', a clue to its successful cultivation. It is an alpine house plant and needs a very gritty compost and great care with watering. It is a variable species both in flower colour and proportion of flowers to



foliage but the award plant is typical of the species.



Miriam Healy from Dublin won the J. A. E. Hill Trophy for the most first prize points in section B and her very attractive *Rhododendron impeditum album* (below) was adjudged the best plant in that section.

It was good to see strong entries in section C where Kay McDowell of Limavady won the award for the most first prize points in that section. The award for the best plant in flower in section C went to Paddy Smith

from Navan for his well grown exhibit of *Aquilegia viridiflora*. The award for the best pan of Ericaceae in section C went to Gavin Moore, Dublin, for his *Rhododendron impeditum* in its more usual blue colour.

The artistic section was impressive and very competitive. The John McWhirter award for most first prize points in the photographic section went to local photographers, Joan and Liam McCaughey, while the Muriel Hodgman Art award was won by Kathleen Baker, Llanarthney, for the most first prize points in the Art section.

A display of new Irish primula hybrids by Joe Kennedy, Ballycastle was awarded a Bronze Medal.

A very successful show was celebrated by a special seventieth anniversary reception and dinner held in the stately surrounds of Stormont Castle. Congratulations are due to Pat Crossley, the indefatigable Show Secretary and her team for all the hard work that ensured that everything ran so smoothly.

Billy Moore

