

THE GARDEN AT SHEPHERD HOUSE

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When a husband and wife both garden, as we have done for 47 years at Shepherd House, Inveresk nr. Musselburgh it is a true test of marriage. To be asked jointly to produce an article about the garden is an even greater test. To overcome the problem we have each produced our own contributions. We hope our readers will recognise that we are writing about the same garden!

Charlie's bit

When we purchased Shepherd House in 1957 there were ancient high walls but no garden. Both of us had inherited gardening 'genes'. Ann's parents had built fine gardens, near Calcutta and latterly at Sunlaws near Kelso, now The Roxburgh Hotel. My father being a parish minister lived in three fine Scots' manses with large gardens.

In our early years together, Ann was busy with four young boys and I had the garden, about 1 acre (0.4ha) more or less to myself. Vegetables were grown in tidy parade-ground rows. The large lawn was an excellent cricket and rugby pitch. A visit to the map room at the National Library evidenced that in Victorian times the garden had a central axis plan (an essential in any well designed garden according to Sir Roy Strong), so our first attempt at design was to lay a grass path from the lawn to the south wall of the garden.

Inveresk is a rewarding place to garden, the soil is neutral and deep as we discovered when we dug our first pond. We are on top of a Roman Camp. The first conveyance of the house and garden is dated 1690 - I wonder how many loads of compost and dung have been spread since then. There is little frost and almost no snow being as we are so near the sea.

Our sons grew up and left home and Ann with her artist's eye had more time for the garden. My parade ground rows of vegetables were soon to be dismissed. As I have said we early on dug a pond. Here we made a mistake. A liner was the cheaper option. While it lasted for twenty five years, it was unsightly and, as is so often the case, it might have been better to do what we have had to do this year and build the pond properly.

Our ideas have and continue to develop by seeing other gardens. There is no copyright in garden design, so each year we do seven days of intensive garden visiting in England, and occasionally France, Italy or Spain. We know most of the great Scots gardens. We return with many new ideas and in the winter months we put some of these into effect. Our rill which leads from the south wall to the main pond, along the central grass path is an example of this (Fig.1). We had seen the rills at Hestercombe, Cheddon Fitzpaine, near Taunton, Somerset, designed by Lutyens and we had visited The Alhambra at Granada. And so our garden has developed, bit by bit, over the years and not as a result of a master plan.

After 47 years what advice can I offer. We have over-planted trees and shrubs and so annually I prune in a rage and ruthlessly, preferably when your wife is out, otherwise everything becomes very overgrown and sunless. I recommend that you plant herbaceous plants in large blocks and not in ones and twos. Don't believe you can have a low maintenance garden because there is no such thing. Remember that the process of gardening is the purpose, no garden ever being complete. It is a living thing subject to constant change. Perhaps that is it's fascination.

Ann's bit

As I sit and watch the leaves fall after our 47th summer at Shepherd House, I think of how the garden has evolved. It has certainly not been a TV makeover and we certainly never had an overall plan. In 1957 what we inherited was a lawn [a hayfield might be a better description with grass 2ft (0.61m) high], a row of alternate purple and white lilac trees, several ancient apple trees, a large sycamore and one box bush. The rest was wilderness.



The first conscious decision we made, as Charlie has already said, was a vista from the house to the back wall of the garden (Fig.1). On either side of this grass path Charlie grew his vegetables in good old fashioned rows. At that time we needed a generous supply of vegetables to feed our growing family.

The starting point of my real involvement in the garden came in 1984 when we decided to build a conservatory, replacing a Victorian Billiard Room which had been the children's

Fig.1 – The rill at Shepherd House which was put in place in 1996

playroom. From here much more of the garden was visible and after some research we planted an old fashioned herb garden with plants that might have been in the garden in 1690 when our house was built. Fifteen years later many of the herbs had become too large and woody and so this area was replanted in the year of the Millennium. Gradually the wilderness was tamed and each year we have had a new project to develop another area (Fig.2). Rather like decorating a house as soon as you have painted one room the next room seems to need attention. So it is in the garden, one area leads to the next. In the last 20 years we have created two parterres, a potager, a bulb meadow, an alpine wall, a woodland garden, a raised pond with fountains, a rill, a pond garden, a rose bower, built a new Alitex greenhouse, an alpine wall and put up numerous arches and obelisks, and much more. We have even spread out to the roadside, in fact we don't know how to stop.

There is little excitement in a garden where you can see into every corner at one glance. Our aim is to make the visitor want to explore, to find out what is behind that hedge or round that corner. I think it fair to say that over the years we have amassed a good deal of knowledge of what to plant and where to plant it. Visiting other gardens widens our horizons, teaches design and most importantly provides us with endless ideas.

Painting plant portraits teaches you how to look at an individual plant and to get to know all it's moods and the different stages of it's development. I am not a botanist or a botanical illustrator but I have a passion for plants and am as happy painting a fallen leaf as I am a perfect specimen. I paint what I see, even if a petal has withered or a slug has been nibbling at a leaf. I use the garden to grow the plants that I enjoy painting - tulips, irises, hellebores and poppies are probably those that I paint most often - they give me an excuse to add to the collection each year. People often ask what came first, the garden or the painting and I find that difficult to answer but I think it is the passion for plants that combines them both.

We all make gardening mistakes and our enthusiasm for acquiring new plants, shrubs and trees has caused us to plant too much too close together. So our main problem now is thinning out areas that if left would again become a wilderness. The most difficult lesson to learn in gardening is to be able to visualise, before you plant, the height and eventual spread of a tree or shrub and the effect it will have on the surrounding area. Now we have to live with our mistakes, a 40 years-old Wellingtonia, two 40 years-old blue cedars, a tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), a Scots pine, a Japanese pagoda tree (*Sophora japonica*) (bought in Woolworths 40 years ago), a handkerchief tree (*Davidia involucrata*), two large magnolias and much more in this one acre garden. With so much going on in the garden it is essential to keep it tidy and Charlie, with the help of Jim, now 80 years-old, is very good at that, sometimes too good as I prefer a bit of blurring of the edges.

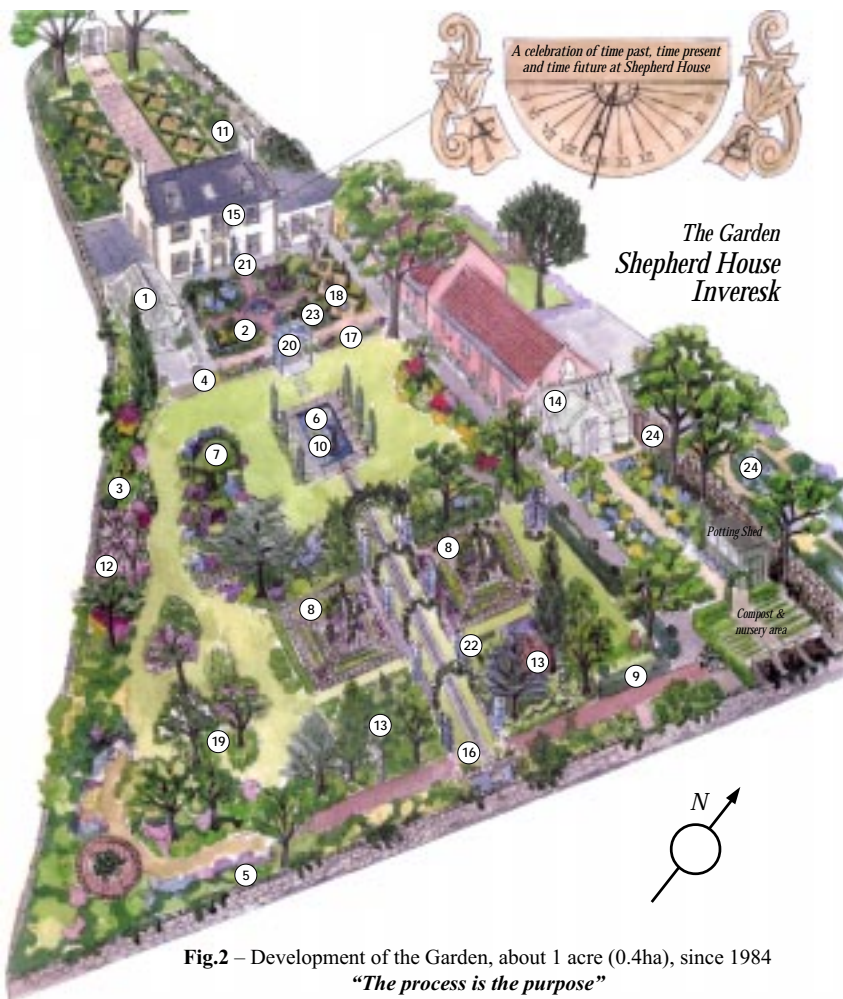


Fig.2 – Development of the Garden, about 1 acre (0.4ha), since 1984
“The process is the purpose”

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|---|---|
| 1. Conservatory built 1984 | 13. Woodland garden 1993 |
| 2. Old fashioned herb garden planted 1985 | 14. Alitex greenhouse 1995 |
| 3. Rose border 1985 | 15. Sundial by Richard Grasby 1996 |
| 4. Dove Bird Bath by Chris Hall 1986 | 16. Rill and raised pond with fountains 1996 |
| 5. Shrubbery planted outside the old hen house 1986 | 17. Alpine wall 1996 |
| 6. Pond built 1987 | 18. Herb Parterre 1997 |
| 7. Penninsular border planted 1988 | 19. Bulb meadow 1998 |
| 8. Potager (ornamental vegetable garden) 1990 | 20. Blue Archway to pond garden 1998 |
| 9. Yew hedge round washing green 1990 | 21. Obelisks and planters at backdoor 1999 |
| 10. Girl washing her hair fountain by Gerald Laing 1990 | 22. Blue trellis pillars up grass path 2000 |
| 11. Front garden and well restored 1991 | 23. Millennium garden (herb garden redesign) 2000 |
| 12. Rose Bower 1992 | 24. New Garden door and roadside garden 2000 |

A garden never stands still and in the past 47 years the garden has developed from a children's playground into a giant canvas for us to practice our artistic skills. A garden is a place for enjoyment. Like the interior of a house it can be changed to reflect your own individual taste and to fit into your lifestyle. It should not be a place of drudgery where the same patch of lawn is mown year after year. **Be creative and you will be rewarded with years of pleasure.**

NB: Shepherd House Garden, Inveresk nr. Musselburgh will be open on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 2 to 4pm in April, May and June in 2005. It will also be open in aid of Scotland's Gardens Scheme on Sunday 17th April and Sunday 15th May. Groups welcome at other times by appointment. Email: ann@fraser2570.freeserve.co.uk or go to www.shepherdhousegarden.co.uk

The Frasers have been married to each other for 47 years: they have lived and gardened at the Shepherd House throughout that period. Sir Charles is a retired Writer to the Signet. He served on the Committee of the Friends of the Royal Botanic Garden and is currently President of the Trustees of the Botanic Foundation. Ann paints plant portraits: she has won medals for her work from the Royal Horticultural Society. In addition to having several exhibitions in Edinburgh and London she has been a Member of the Board of Trustees, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.



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BLUE POPPIES AND FRIENDS

IAN CHRISTIE

Christie's Nursery, Downfield, Main Road, Westmuir, Kirriemuir DD8 5LP

As a young boy in the early 1960s I worked in a garden shop in Forfar; the proprietor was one of very few traditional 'seedsmen' selling a wide variety of garden and farm seeds. The shop attracted many customers who came from near and far, one such customer being the late Major George Sherriff who had returned to Scotland from India in the early 1950s. During his time in India, along with Frank Ludlow, he made many expeditions to Tibet, Kashmir and Bhutan in search of seeds and plants. In 1934 a particularly fine and famous seed collection was made which included *Meconopsis grandis* GS600 (formerly known as L. and S. 600).



Fig.1 – A magnificent group of Blue Poppies (*Meconopsis* ‘Lingholm’)

On their return to Scotland the Sherriffs created a garden at Ascreavie House near Kingoldrum in Angus. Situated close to the foot of the Grampian Mountains, at an elevation of 900ft (275m), the winding drive was flanked by *Rhododendron* species with the house and garden sheltered by a plantation of trees. Within this dramatic setting the Sherriffs established a wonderful Himalayan garden. I was

to visit this garden many times over the next few years when I delivered supplies and when the garden was open to the public. An occasion I remember particularly well was when Major Sherriff stopped me on the driveway after a delivery. My initial instinct was to think that I was 'in big trouble' but instead I was led through the garden to be shown some of his magnificent primulas (*Primula whitei*): several months later, with another delivery, Major Sherriff showed me a magnificent group of Big Blue Poppies, I was hooked! (Fig.1).

Early on I was given a small patch of my parents' garden. Although they were very good growers of a wide range of plants my interest was limited by the size of my plot to the cultivation of vegetables but it was sufficient to trigger an abiding interest in gardening. After my meetings with Major Sherriff my enthusiasm was inspired and led to an avid interest in *Meconopsis* and other Himalayan genera. I continued to work in the shop in Forfar for several years and in my spare time raised plants from seed and cuttings. In 1971 I married my wife Ann and a couple of years later we moved to our first house in Kirriemuir. By 1978 I had raised enough plants to start Christie's Nursery on a part time basis.

My visits to Ascreavie continued and at every Open-day I would buy several new plants including various species/cultivars of *Meconopsis*. Mrs Sherriff was very generous and always gave me extra packets of seed, she also provided me with some invaluable sources of information which included some notes written by the Major himself about his plant hunting experiences: she also allowed me to borrow '*A Quest for Flowers*' written by Fletcher. By good luck I also heard about a film that the Sherriffs had made (modified by the BBC) entitled "In Search of the Dream Poppy". The Sherriffs owned a holiday home in Kalimpong near Darjeeling and Mrs Sherriff had apparently dreamt about a wonderful blue poppy. The location of this poppy was revealed to her in her dreams. So vivid was the dream that she set out with some local porters and was able to collect some specimens. I have been assured that live plant material of the poppy in question, named 'Betty's Dream Poppy', was transported to Ascreavie several years later. I was given plants of this poppy by Mrs Sherriff but unfortunately confusion now reigns. Although poppies designated as 'Betty's Dream Poppy' have been cultivated it is unclear whether the 'true' plant still exists. The *Meconopsis* Group (formed in 1998 with the express initial aim of attempting to sort out the identities and names of the big blue poppies) further investigated this and have found that plants being sold as 'Betty's Dream Poppy' are unlikely to be the genuine article – they are most probably hybrids. They belonged to the 'Infertile Blue Group' and not the 'George Sherriff Group'. To lessen confusion plants previously known as Betty's Dream have now been re-named '*M. Bobby Masterton*' (Fig.2) - the late Bobby Masterton created the garden at Cluny House near Aberfeldy and since his death his daughter Wendy and her husband John Mattingley have continued to maintain this wonderful garden which includes some marvellous specimens of *Meconopsis*.

By 1982 Christie's Nursery had expanded so much that we had to look for a



Fig.2 – *Meconopsis* ‘Bobby Masterton’

site with more land - we moved to Westmuir: Ann and I managed to take several Blue Poppies with us and with more space available we substantially increased our collection over the next few years. Several purchases were made from John Lawson at Jack Drake’s, Inshriach Nursery near Aviemore. The most notable of these were *M. grandis* GS600 and *M. ‘Slieve Donard’*. John offered open-ground divisions of *M. grandis* GS600 in his mail order catalogue. (These particular plants were grown from seed given by the Renton’s at Branklyn Gardens, and in due course selected plants were divided for sale.) The plants of *M. grandis* GS600 are superb: they have become firmly established in Christie’s Nursery growing to 5.5 - to 6ft (1.7 – 1.8m) in height. When they flower at the end of May they produce large blue bowl-shaped flowers that sometimes feature a purple streak when opening: as the days go by the purple fades leaving the whole flower a magnificent blue. *M. ‘Slieve Donard’* is not so tall but is still a very distinctive plant with large blue, bell shaped flowers. As a hybrid between *M. grandis* and *M. betonicifolia* it was originally raised by Dr Curle of Edinburgh and then reached the famous Slieve Donard Garden in Ireland where it was given its name - I was to learn much more about these plants as my collection expanded.



Fig.3 – *Meconopsis* ‘Cruickshank’

A regular visitor who became a good friend, was the late Noel Pritchard who until his retirement held the post of Curator of the Cruickshank Botanic Garden in Aberdeen. He and I swapped several plants during his visits and these included a very fine form of *Meconopsis* from the Cruickshank Botanic Garden in Aberdeen. Now identified by the Meconopsis Group as part of the Infertile Blue Group *M.* ‘Cruickshank’ has large pure blue pendant flowers (Fig.3). Plants of it slowly form clumps and are best divided regularly. Noel sadly passed away recently but I will continue to remember his visits when he kindly shared his knowledge and love of plants.

I became friendly with several members of the Scottish Rock Garden Club including Fred Hunt a member from Invergowrie, a superb grower of all plants; he gave me a plant of *M grandis* GS600. When this flowered I could see that it was very unusual - with its large toothed leaves, very tall flower spike and open blue flowers whose petals resemble the sails of a windmill. Two years later I was given plant material from Dr. Evelyn Stevens which proved to be the same [subsequent trials at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (R.B.G.E.) resulted in this being named *M.* ‘Ascreavie’] (Fig.4). *Meconopsis* flowers within the George Sherriff Group are a complex mixture of red, purple and blue which I believe result from a combination of factors including temperature, sunlight, light intensity, amount of moisture available when flowers open, soil type and possibly geographical location. I have no doubt that *Meconopsis* spp thrive best in the



Fig.4 – *Meconopsis* ‘Ascreavie’

cooler, shadier parts of gardens with Northern Scotland an ideal growing location but I know of several gardeners in the south of England, including those working at the great Savill Garden, who, going to extreme lengths to please these wonderful aristocrats, manage very well with *Meconopsis*.

My next lucky meeting was with Col. Andrew Houston and his wife Mary from Lintrathen (not far from Ascreavie). *Meconopsis* from their garden have large blue flowers, are fertile and appear very similar to *M.* ‘Lingholm’ (Fig.1). They were given to the Houstons by their friends the Sherriffs. I grow them in a separate colony for further observation.

When visiting and supplying alpinists to Branklyn, the National Trust Garden in Perth, I often meet Bob Mitchell a well respected plantsman and at the time the new curator. Branklyn boasts a wonderful collection of *Meconopsis* including many that may have survived since the first introductions were raised from Sherriff’s seed. I had long admired one special plant growing in what is called the ‘Avenue’ garden. Bob kindly gave me a large plant of this - it is quite unique: when its flowers open they are mostly a warm pink shade and then take several days to become blue. I am delighted to say that a few weeks ago the *Meconopsis* Group agreed to name this *Meconopsis* ‘Dorothy Renton’ in memory of the owners

of Branklyn who started this oasis of tranquillity (Fig.5). (A plaque will be located within the garden where the *Meconopsis* are growing, a fitting memorial to someone who raised such an outstanding plant.)

On an arranged visit Dr Evelyn Stevens came along to discuss the variants within the genus *Meconopsis* which we were both observing. Evelyn arrived with a car-load of superb plants the most outstanding being *M.* 'Jimmy Bayne'. A builder, Jimmy Bayne, who was working at her house in Dunblane in 1980, had noted her interest in *Meconopsis* and gave her a plant with large bowl-shaped blue flowers displaying just a hint of purple and growing in a dense spike on strong tall stems. Plants readily multiply vegetatively: they are strongly perennial.



Fig.5 – *Meconopsis* 'Dorothy Renton'

By now the nursery had acquired a large tunnel 65ft long and 25ft wide (21m x 8.2m). It was erected in the lower area of the nursery alongside a tall hedge to give some protection from the sun and fierce south-westerly winds experienced at Westmuir. The structure is covered by a 50%-shade, green netting from April to the end of July again for added wind protection and shade. Because the nursery is sited on heavy clay, the several raised beds within the tunnel have been improved with the incorporation of well rotted cow manure, compost and plenty of gravel. This enabled different *Meconopsis* to be planted side by side so that their flowers and foliage could be compared. This has proved very successful and plants have performed well with visitors enthusing about the many variants. At this stage Evelyn Stevens and I were in regular contact exchanging variants each time we met.

With a head of steam building I and many others were delighted when in 1998 Evelyn, along with the late Mervyn Kessell formed the Meconopsis Group. Members owe a great deal to Mervyn who first suggested forming the Group when he read the draft of an article by Evelyn about naming *M.* 'Jimmy Bayne'. The paper was destined for *The Rock Garden* – the journal of the Scottish Rock Garden Club. Members are also indebted to Evelyn Stevens who has continued the work set-out by the Meconopsis Group: she has devoted every ounce of her energy towards sorting the Big Blue Poppies. The Meconopsis Group has committed itself to a programme of investigation with trial beds set up within RBGE where garden supervisor John Mitchell and his team make valuable observations while routinely managing the plants under observation. Evelyn arranged a web site (meconopsis.org and meconopsis.org.uk) dedicated to Meconopsis and has written many in-depth articles in *The Rock Garden* and *The Plantsman*. Evelyn is happy to be contacted at: evelyn@thelinnis.org for further details.

After lengthy discussions about *M.grandis* GS600 and its clones it was decided by the Meconopsis Group in 2000 to establish a taxonomic Group (until recently called a cultivar-group) to accommodate them, i.e. *Meconopsis* George Sherriff Group. Each clone has been given a number which will be displayed so that the pedigree of the different clones can be separately identified. All clones are planted in the trials in Evelyn's garden and at the RBGE under the supervision of John Mitchell and his team. The plants established in the tunnel at Christie's Nursery attract regular visitors who often bear gifts of yet more Meconopsis. Nial Graham Campbell from Pitlochry delivered some divisions that his mother had been growing in her garden in the South of England. These were carefully moved to each new garden over the years before finally reaching Pitlochry and then to Christie's Nursery. It is yet another fine plant in the George Sherriff Group that unfortunately has not yet been given a name. However, considering the care and attention given through the years to ensure its survival, I hope it may be given an appropriate name in the near future.



Fig.6 – *Meconopsis* ‘Hensol Violet’

Evelyn and I (the author) now observe our stocks of plants at all times of the year. The leaves of the *Meconopsis* George Sherriff group unfurl in spring in large rosettes from the over-wintered underground buds: they have a distinctive beetroot red pigment. This can vary in intensity and again I think that temperature is a strong influence. Generally, plants outwith the George Sherriff Group lack this distinctive leaf colour but several do have similar flowers. The extent of variation seems endless. In 1998 I exhibited a very special plant *M.* ‘Willie Duncan’, when Gardening Scotland was inaugurated. Willie had grown it from Scottish Rock Garden seed and then multiplied it by division. Unlike Evelyn I do not find it easy to grow but the effort is certainly worthwhile. With regular splitting it produces a handsome plant with beautiful dense flower spikes. I have also received plants of *Meconopsis* from Les Newby, of Castle Douglas - a skilled propagator. We met at Ayr Flower Show where he delivered *Meconopsis* for me to both sell and plant in my garden. On one occasion he brought a new form of *Meconopsis betonicifolia* which produced violet/magenta flowers. I was not enthralled with its colour at first but it has an attraction when planted alongside the blue *Meconopsis*. It originated from the Scottish Rock Garden Club seed-exchange and thereafter was raised by Lady Henderson of Hensol Castle in the Borders. At Kirriemuir we now raise plants of it from seed and so far they have remained true to colour: it is a good perennial garden plant now named *M. betonicifolia* ‘Hensol Violet’ (Fig.6).

Another fellow enthusiast and Meconopsis Group member, Allan Jamieson presented me with a quite exceptional *Meconopsis* which he had purchased on a visit to the famous garden owned by the McCosh family at Huntfield in the Scottish Borders. Now named *Meconopsis* ‘Huntfield’, this clone has very tall flower spikes with large dark blue blooms: it is a sound vigorous perennial. (Before being named this clone was distributed as *Meconopsis* George Sherriff Group MG).

As this story of my love affair with Blue Poppies reaches the present day I, with John Mitchell from RBGE and others have been able to inspect what used to be George Sherriff’s garden at Ascreavie where several *Meconopsis* plants have stood the test of time having competed successfully against large Rhododendrons and trees. Thanks to the present owners I have been allowed to cultivate several plants from this famous garden. Bearing in mind their historical background you can imagine my delight on discovering a plant which we reckon has survived undisturbed for 25/30 years against the odds (prolific weed growth). Its flowers open violet-purple but as each day passes they change to the finest blue. Imagine the exquisite combination of colours with flowers of different ages. The Meconopsis group are considering naming this clone ‘Barney’s Blue’ (Fig.7) [after the present owner of Ascreavie – Barney (Roderick) Barnes]. Approval for the name is expected to be given by the members of the Meconopsis Group at an imminent meeting.



Fig.7 – This Meconopsis has tentatively been named *Meconopsis* ‘Barney’s Blue’
Its flowers open violet purple changing to blue with age

Although not the final stage in the process of unravelling the identity of the many variants of *M. grandis* I have again spoken to John Lawson. He recounts enthusiastically the early 1950's when *Meconopsis grandis* GS600 was grown every year at Inshriach from seed. As seed and plants were sent by mail order throughout the country I believe it is possible that the majority of *Meconopsis* within the George Sherriff Group could be descendants of the original plants raised at Jack Drake's Inshriach nursery. It has been my hope that when all of the clones, now within the Christie's tunnel at Kirriemuir, flowered that cross pollination would result in the production of some fertile seed but alas this has not proved to be the case. The clones appear to be resolutely sterile and therefore their survival probably rests on repeated division and replanting. Evelyn Stevens has been granted National collection-holder status for her plants at 'The Linns' so hopefully ensuring their future. However, in time a successor or successors will need to be found to take forward the responsibility for these marvellous plants.

Meconopsis have long been fashionable plants with a magical charm. This has recently been recognised by the City of Edinburgh which has adopted the Big Blue Poppy as its floral emblem. This initiative should go some way to help secure the high profile of the Big Blue Poppies. Although we have had the good fortune to see *Meconopsis* in their natural surroundings in Nepal and China, Ann, my wife and I hope that our friends and visitors will continue to show us their own special Big Blue Poppies – a privilege indeed.

Ian Christie has had a lifelong interest, as grower and exhibitor, in alpines. He joined the Council of the Scottish Rock Garden Club in the 1970s and has been a member of the *Meconopsis* Group from its start.

WHAT'S NEW AT THE BOTANICS?

DAVID RAE

Royal Botanic Garden, 20A Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5LR

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) can trace its origins back to 1670 when it existed as a small physic garden near to Holyrood House. After a number of moves and changes in purpose it became established at Inverleith in 1823. However, it did not occupy the full 32ha now enjoyed by the public- this required the addition of two separate parcels of land. The first, in the southeast corner of the garden where the Rock Garden is now situated, came from the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society in 1864. Two buildings constructed by the Society still stand (a) The Caledonian Hall (for many years known as the Exhibition Hall and then used as the Herbarium between 1864 and 1964), now accommodates short-term exhibitions and functions and (b) the Superintendent's House, which now provides staff accommodation. The parcel of land on the western side of the Garden came from the Fettes Trustees in 1874 and the Rocheid Estate in 1879 – Inverleith House is the main surviving feature of the latter: it is now used for art exhibitions.

The Palmhouse (now the Tropical Palmhouse) was built in 1834 and the larger Temperate Palmhouse in 1858. A fine and extensive range of wooden glasshouses were constructed for the display of non-hardy plants and, once beyond repair, was replaced by the modern range in 1967. The original office and laboratory buildings on Inverleith Row were extended greatly in 1964 by the construction of the Herbarium and Library. These examples show that change is not new at the Garden - the site at Edinburgh and those at the three Regional Gardens are constantly changing and developing. However, after a relatively quiet period in terms of construction since the 1960s (but this is not to overlook the Herbarium extension, the Chinese Hillside and the Scottish Heath Garden at the RBGE and the Chilean Hillside at Benmore) the Garden is now embarking on a series of ambitious gardening and building programmes.

Gateways

Edinburgh (Fig.1)

Soon after his appointment as Regius Keeper in 1999 Professor Stephen Blackmore initiated a strategic review of all aspects of the Garden's work. One of the many conclusions that emerged was that, while the visiting public enjoyed the Garden and were extremely loyal and affectionate towards it, they actually knew very little of its real work or purpose. From this important revelation grew the plan to develop a new building at the West Gate of RBGE. Christened 'the Gateway' as a simple working title, the idea is that it will be a place of information, orientation and inspiration- a building where visitors can discover the purpose of the Garden and the importance of plants. However, it will be much more than 'just another visitor centre'. The vision is that it will be a major biodiversity



Fig.1 – The Gateway Building

centre that will house temporary and permanent exhibitions in addition to a ‘Real Life Science’ studio where staff from the Garden can explain topical issues on a regular basis in a studio setting. It will look onto a new Biodiversity Garden that will be an integral part of the centre and there will be a new shop and restaurant, education room and members facilities. The building will be constructed to the highest standards of sustainable best practice and the biodiversity and sustainability messages will run throughout the building from its structure and exhibitions to merchandise in the shop and food in the restaurant. The important point is, however, that the Gateway will not stand as an entity or destination in itself. It is being

designed to complement and enhance the experience and enjoyment of visitors - the Garden will still be the main destination. It will involve and inform, but not in an obtrusive way that might be too formal for traditional garden visitors. Regular visitors will be able to pass through very quickly, simply ‘dropping in’ to see if there’s anything new, while first time visitors will be able to stay for longer and be initiated into the work of the Garden and discover why biodiversity matters.

From an international competition launched in 2002, four firms of architects were eventually short-listed. From a series of presentations Edward Cullinan Architects, London were appointed under the leadership of senior architect Roddy Langmuir. After considerable discussion and consultation exciting plans have been drawn up which meet the needs of each of the major uses that the building will be expected to serve. While the plans are currently passing through the various planning stages it is most encouraging to note that, to date, they have received praise from the Cockburn Association and the Royal Fine Arts Commission. Now that the vision, concepts and initial plans have been agreed the Development Team at the Garden is starting work to raise the £13m required to build the Edinburgh Gateway. Fundraising is likely to take at least two years but it is hoped that construction will be well under way by 2007.

In the Regions

In addition to the major Gateway at Edinburgh new entrance buildings are becoming increasingly necessary at the three Regional Gardens. Facilities at Dawyck, for instance, are wholly inadequate now that the Garden regularly attracts

in excess of 20,000 visitors per year. At Benmore the current facilities are bigger than at Dawyck but the geographical layout, where different staff are required in the shop, restaurant and ticket sales point, is inefficient. Add to this the location of the Garden at the south west entrance to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and the requirement for a bigger, better and more efficient gateway becomes more pressing. At Logan, the third regional garden, the facilities are good but will need modernisation within the next few years to maintain standards.

Temperate Palm House (Fig.2)

While the architecturally striking display glasshouses built in 1967 were excellent, in every way, when originally built they now have two major design problems. Currently, visitors enter the front, downstairs area, walk through the house, up the stairs at the back and then re-enter the upstairs walkway where they can turn left or right. The problems are that the stairs do not comply with recently-introduced Disability Discrimination Act regulations and the left-and-right turn option makes it impossible to present a straightforward uninterrupted narrative. A further problem existed with the stairs outside the Arid Land House, which visitors had to descend after leaving the building, as they also contravened the Act. A seemingly distant, and yet related, problem existed in the magnificent Temperate Palm House where, in recent years, visitors have only been able to leave via the glasshouse system. A very neat solution to these problems has been identified namely the complete reversal of the 'traffic-flow' along the upstairs walkway with the functions of the entrance and exit being reversed. From March 2005 visitors will enter the Temperate Palm House and will be able to walk through the system on one level to the end of the Arid Land House. They can then visit the Peat and Rock houses to the north of the Exhibition Hall before descending a ramp that runs along the front of the range back into the garden. Visitors will still be able to enter the lower level through the original entrance but will not be able to progress upstairs from this entrance.

Having decided to make the Temperate Palm House the main entry point to the glasshouse complex thoughts moved to redesigning the landscape to create a more functional and enticing welcome. Up until now the Temperate Palm House has been a sort of dumping ground for botanically interesting but visually rather uninteresting plants. The landscape consisted of narrow twisting concrete slab paths and a rather overcrowded assemblage of plants that blocked out the interior views of the Temperate Palm House. Based on ideas put forward by David Mitchell (Curator RBGE), Stewart Brown, of architects Simpson and Brown, has developed an interior landscape for this house which is simple, elegant and uncluttered. Gone is the unstructured layout and gone too are the concrete slabs and noisy fan heaters. Visitors will be able to look up and see the internal detail of the building, while below they will be walking on a new 75mm (3in) thick sandstone floor with finely detailed ogee edges. The floor has been opened up to create a central hall: it has underfloor heating with cast iron grilles and an elegant stone bench has been added for the display of small pot grown plants.

While the new entry and exit system may initially cause some confusion to regular visitors it is very much hoped that everyone will soon benefit from this more logical layout.

Inverleith House

Inverleith House, for many years the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, returned to the safe keeping of the Botanic Garden in 1982. Since that time it has been used to house many wonderful exhibitions including works by Andy Goldsworthy, Rory McEwan and Stella Ross-Craig. However, by 2003 the toll of time and the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act had combined to demand a programme of renewal and refurbishment. Together monies from the Garden and the Scottish Arts Council have been used to give the Gallery a new lease of life under the guidance of architects Reiach and Hall of Edinburgh. To start with, basic long term maintenance such as roof and widow repair has been undertaken. Following this, all of the galleries have been upgraded and a new access route for disabled people constructed. Downstairs, a teaching room has been installed so that classes and workshops can be run in conjunction with exhibitions. Next year the external landscape will be upgraded to complement the newly refurbished building.

Queen Mother's Garden

In 2003 the RBGE was given the honour of being selected to house the Queen Mother's Memorial Garden. A number of sites had been scrutinised by a selection committee but in the end the Grey Garden in the northeast of the RBGE site was chosen for the Memorial Garden. This site was thought to be perfect because it is an enclosed, rather intimate, area within an established garden. It is, free, open at no charge every day of the year (except Christmas Day and New Year's Day). The selection committee was no doubt impressed by RBGE's standards of maintenance. Lachlan Stewart an architect/landscape architect, was appointed to develop plans and RBGE was consulted closely about plant selection. The plan shows a formal garden based on a maze inspired by the form of a Celtic Cross. There are enclosed circular areas at each corner which will display plants from each of the continents most closely associated with the Queen Mother. A grotto will act as a focal point: it will align with a gap in the existing pleached lime screen.

The Garden will be funded through public subscription and it is hoped that construction and planting will start in 2005. When completed it is hoped that the Garden will be opened by the Queen.

Herbarium extension

In 1996 a single storey building was erected in the small car park at the Herbarium entrance of the Garden that cleverly linked the 1960s Herbarium with the 1830s Balfour Building in a more coherent way than had hitherto been the

case. More office space was created along with a better reception area and an extension to the Library. The original plan included the provision of a second storey to provide extra space for the Herbarium but could not be built because of the lack of funds. Since then, and predictably, the needs of the Herbarium have intensified and now, happily, the necessary funds have been found by the Garden's sponsor-department, the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD): work will start in December 2004.

Miscellaneous

Money has become available to undertake a large number of relatively small but important works to enable the RBGE and the Regional Gardens to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). This work will be programmed over a three year period: it will include improvements of toilets, provision of ramps, electric doors in glasshouses and much more.

The Garden has a number of other ambitious plans but, as always, these depend on money. Major capital works, planned to take place after the Gateway has been completed, include a new Education Centre and the complete engineering and landscape refurbishment of the display glasshouses. Two of particular interest are (a) the construction of a modern alpine house to complement (not replace) the existing alpine house which is located close to the Palm House. The plan is to use tufa rock internally for the display of alpinists in more natural surroundings and (b) to have more natural plantings instead of the displays of potted plants in the large display glasshouses.

Alpinists are involved in another planned (but not yet resourced) project. While the Rock Garden scree is a classic of its type it does not really represent the ruggedness of a true mountain boulder scree. There is no intention of removing the existing scree. Instead, it is planned to create an east-west valley at the back (south side) of the Rock Garden where there is at present a road. The ground level will be lowered and the sides increased to create more of a valley-feeling and within this area the intention is to make a harsh boulder-strewn scree more reminiscent of those in mountainous areas.

With significant new plantings at Benmore, Logan and Dawyck and the diversity of projects at Edinburgh it is hoped that the early part of 21st century will be regarded as a period of growth and renewal for one of Scotland's treasures, its National Botanic Gardens.

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