

# WEST YORKSHIRE AGS GROUP

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## NEWSLETTER NO. 60 FEBRUARY 2015

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*Witch hazel, aconites and snowdrops*

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### CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

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This is my fourteenth and my final, final epistle. It is also a crunch time for the Group, with the AGM in May and major changes to the personnel of the committee imminent.

I have been Chairman of the Group for seven years out of the last nine since 2005 and on the committee for a couple of years prior to that - I think I've done my bit and it's time for a change of face at the helm. Living as I do, in a far flung outpost of the Empire, I would now like the option of perhaps picking and choosing which meetings I attend and although the pull of the excellent 'fisherman's wife special' has an undoubted appeal to my psyche my waistline dictates otherwise!

So, you all have to face the fact that at the AGM you will need a new chairperson, a new treasurer and a new membership secretary. Anne has done a wonderful job but is no longer able to fulfil this role as well as editing the Newsletter and

running a successful nursery. Beryl has kept her eagle eye on the membership and any interlopers who try and sneak in undetected, in excess of her allotted spell and now needs/deserves a break. These positions HAVE to be filled. I can only repeat two sentences from my notes in Newsletter No.58, 'As to filling vacancies on the committee, I have done my best over the years to raise awareness of the need for volunteers, from 'cajoling' to 'bullying' and all stations between. I can say no more other than - I leave it with you.' You might also take a look at the excellent page 4 of the same issue if you're unsure of what is required and then do something about it!

We held another superb conference in October, with four excellent speakers. Everyone who attended was delighted with the day and our thanks once again to Liz for shouldering the bulk of the organisation - no easy task.

Life in Grange is exciting. While the weather was wonderful, here on this peninsula September and October were positively Mediterranean, I managed to plant upwards of two thirds of the 654 pots I brought with me from Harrogate. Planted out before the frosts and while the soil was still warm everything thankfully appears to have survived. Hellebores are sending up lots of flowers which would seem to explode the myth that they are dodgy to transplant. Galanthus are all splendid and the Rhododendrons and Azaleas are covered in buds, I can't wait for the flowers to burst forth. There is still much to do in the clearing/killing departments. Fifty year old ivy with roots as thick as your wrist is a major annoyance as is the 'thug' Periwinkle. This is pernicious and so difficult to eradicate, however, be assured its days are numbered. It has been cut down to ground level and as soon as it begins to show new growth it will be hit with a commercial weed killer of unprecedented strength and ruthless efficiency which will see it off for good - fingers crossed. I will write further on the garden and its development in the future[Anne will no doubt be pleased/relieved] and illustrate it, to give you some idea of the fun I'm having.

Speaking of which, I've had a lot of fun as your Chairman and my involvement with the Group, especially doing the 'show' things, which have given me a real 'buzz'. My thanks must go to Eric Rainford for his unflinching support and help in this department - I hope he's enjoyed it as much as I have.

It only remains for me to wish the Group well and all of you a very happy, healthy, peaceful and bug free 2015.

Paul Wade.

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## Reginald Farrer and his Travelling Companions

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F H Fisher wrote the article The Farrer Story for a special Conference issue of the 1961 (vol. 29 no.1) AGS Quarterly Bulletin. This excellent article suggests Reginald Farrer (1880-1920) had “thrived on solitude”. This is true but was not always the case, as both Clarence Elliot and E A Bowles accompanied him on trips to the Alps, indeed Bowles collected on four separate occasions with Farrer.

William Purdom had travelled for Veitch and the Arnold Arboretum in China from 1909-1912. He proved to be an ideal companion for Farrer on his first trip to Asia in 1914, collecting again with him in Kansu in 1915.



*Nomocharis basilissa* F.1738

Farrer did not return to London from China until 1916; then worked for the Ministry for Information under John Buchan, before leaving at the earliest opportunity in January 1919 for Burma with Euan Cox, Buchan’s secretary for part of the war.

Last year I happened to come across Nicola Shulman’s short biography of Farrer. There I read that a Derrick Milner was to have been Farrer’s companion to replace Euan Cox, but pulled out at the last minute.

I knew that the family of Sir William Milner (1893-1960) had sometimes called him Derick as a boy. Could this Derrick possibly be the same person? Milner was much younger than Farrer and was still at Christ Church, Oxford when war broke out in 1914. He then spent the war years in the Lothians and Border Horse. It seemed very unlikely that Farrer’s and Milner’s paths ever crossed.

However documents at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) do confirm it was indeed this William Milner. Further letters revealed that he was pulling out of the expedition as his eldest sister, Violet, had just died (November 1919) and not that “a word with Cox put him off” as suggested by Shulman in her book. This early death left four children motherless and William’s father took this very badly, maybe especially as his own wife, Adeline, had died when William was only 8 years old.

Milner must have agreed to be Farrer’s companion for 1920 at least a year beforehand, as he went to Glasgow to see Farrer off before he left for Upper Burma with Euan Cox early in 1919. And Milner must have had no intention of pulling out in the summer of 1919, as he went to meet Farrer’s mother and was “charmed” with her.

The RBGE were expecting to give Milner some “initiation into the plants” that he and Farrer “were likely to come across” and “the methods of their preservation” just before he went out to join Farrer, but the timing was such that this did not take place.



*Primula agleniana* F.1712

By 1927 Milner had purchased Parcevall Hall in Wharfedale, together with over 300 acres of land. In the C16 and early C17 this farmhouse had been the home for the second sons of the Yorke family of Gouthwaite Hall, but by the 1920s was in an extremely sad state. Milner used his architectural skills to restore and extend the Hall, and embellished the natural limestone outcrop above to create a large rock garden with waterfalls, pools and rills.

He wrote in 1932

“The gardens contain many shrubs and plants collected by the late Reginald Farrer, of Ingleborough

Hall, and the late George Forrest, in Western China and Tibet.”

Milner was obviously a passionate plantsman by 1927. The despatch books at the RBGE revealed that many seeds and plants were being sent to him through the RBGE from 1927 onwards. These included over 45 different primulas. Also other documents there show he was one of the sponsors of George Forrest’s last expedition in 1930-2.

It had been known that Milner had a great passion and knowledge of rhododendrons and old roses but this new information reveals he already had a great passion for alpinines long before he bought Parcevall, and maybe is an explanation of why he immediately created a collection of Farrer introductions.



*William Milner*

**Picture credits:**

Nomocharis basilissa, F.1738, from a painting by Reginald Farrer in the field and discovered in Upper Burma in 1920 (Illustration from *The Plant Introductions of Reginald Farrer* edited by E. H. M. Cox, 1930)

Primula agleniana, F.1712, from a painting by Reginald Farrer in the field, dated 6 August 1920 (Illustration from *The Plant Introductions of Reginald Farrer* edited by E. H. M. Cox, 1930) The description of this primula is Farrer at his best “...2-3 pendant flowers, in the purest sikkimensis style, but about twice the size of any sikkimensis ever bloomed, and more Byzantinely bell-shaped? And of the most solid, carved ivory whiteness, very rarely and very faintly tinged with that lovely pink which my paintbox calls *Rose Antique*; with buds like drops of sunset and calyces of maroon-crimson, and a vivid blush of pink or apricot over the tube”

William Milner (courtesy Walsingham Trustees)

Ann Tupholme

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## Show Business

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Local Group Autumn Show 13 September 2014

It was pleasing to see the show benches with many more plants of late, together with two new exhibitors.

The George Thorpe Trophy was awarded to Chris Weavers for her fine plant of *Cyclamen hederifolium*.

Other plants of interest on the show bench. A very fine *Cyclamen graecum* 'Glyfada' (Fred & Pat Bundy) its leaves a strong silver. *Cyclamen mirabile* (Trevor Whitaker) another fine plant both in leaf and flower. A three pan exhibit (Fred & Pat Bundy) *Colchicum parlatoris*, *Crocus autranii*, *Crocus gilanicus*.

### **Plant Profile**

*Crocus autranii*

The plant on show was grown from Archibald seed JJA 340-410 sown January 2006.

One of the rarest and most sought after of crocuses. Autumn flowering, in nature it is found only in a single gorge at about 2100m in the troubled region of Abkhazia N W Georgia where it grows in alpine meadows. A member of series *Crocus kotschyana* and related to *C. vallicola*. It flowers before the leaves appear, rich violet flowers with a large white centre and with a trifold orange style.

I only know of one nursery, Ruksans in Latvia at 60 euro, who has stock of *Crocus autranii*.

Eric Rainford



*Crocus autranii*

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## Featherstone Show 2014

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Eric received this email from a visitor to the show last year:

*Good evening Eric,*

*I am not a member nor do I know much about alpines ..... yet!!!*

*I wanted to drop you a line to say what an enjoyable afternoon Featherstone was, although not huge it kept me well entertained for a full 3 hours with an impressive selection of plants and a number of interesting folk taking the time to say hello.*

*This was the first AGS show I have attended, and I wanted to say THANKS to all involved.....*

*all the incredibly skilled people who have grown and brought along the wonderful plants (they are an inspiration!!), the lovely ladies with the coffee and cakes (and especially the chap who happened to be in there whilst I was getting served who apparently was from Devon?! he was ace!!), the plant sales folks who were very patient with my question and indecisiveness, all the people I was eavesdropping on as I busied myself taking far too many photos..... I listened to many interesting conversations!! and obviously all the organisers, results recorders, box tickers, judges, stewards ..... and well everybody!!!!*

*Kind regards, Jenny*

(I think we'd all like to echo that sentiment, but how nice that someone actually took the time to say so. Well done to all involved! - Ed)

Below - some of the outstanding plants shown at Featherstone.



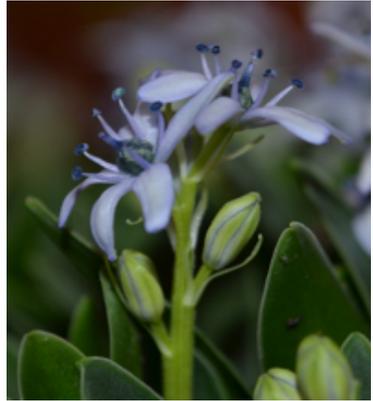
*Correa alba 'Pinkie'*



*Nerine masoniorum*



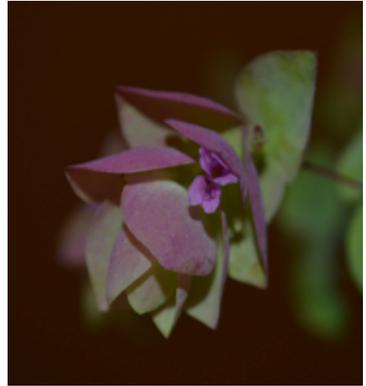
*Fuchsia procumbens*



*Scilla lingulata v. ciliolata*



*Petrocosmea aff. iodides*



*Origanum 'Kent Beauty'*



*Grevillea 'Pink Lady'*



*Nerine masoniorum*

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## \*\*\**Editor's Note*\*\*\*

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**Many thanks** to all the contributors to *this* newsletter.

**The editor, Anne Wright is ~~very very keen~~ DESPERATE to receive articles, news items, tips etc., for inclusion in future issues.**

All it takes is a paragraph, or a photograph, or both. Have you visited an interesting place or nursery?

Have you grown an unusual plant - or one which you particularly like and want to recommend? How did you grow it?

Have you got a tip to share? News about an upcoming event or open garden?

Are you looking for a plant you can't find anywhere?

You don't have to be a literary genius, or even to be able to spell (because I can..)

This is not just the committee's newsletter! Have your say too! **PLEASE** give your contributions to Anne at the meetings or post to Mrs A. Wright, 130, Prince Rupert Drive, Tockwith, York, YO26 7PU, **to arrive before end JULY 2015** (e-mail attachments or CDs preferred but not essential). Articles via E-mail to be sent to [anneswright@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:anneswright@hotmail.co.uk) Most formats accepted, e.g., Microsoft Word/Works and graphic formats like BMP, TIF, JPG.

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## ***GARDEN VISIT - Anne Wright's***

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Several people have asked if I still open my garden - the answer is always "No, I can't keep it tidy enough". However, I'm willing to have an afternoon when group members can come and look at my bulbs and hepaticas, and wander round the garden, even though it's not pristine.

If you would like to visit on Saturday 28 February, 1-4pm, you would be very welcome, but please let me know if possible so I can arrange refreshments for the appropriate number. Tea/coffee and cake will be available. There are unlikely to be any plants for sale. There is no entry charge, but a donation to group funds would be welcomed!

Please let me know on 01423 358791 or email as above.

130 Prince Rupert Drive, TOCKWITH, YORK, YO26 7PU. Please do not park in the cul-de-sac.

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## SOME NEW SNOWDROP HYBRIDS

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A kind of snowdrop flower which has only emerged in the last 15 years is the so-called INVERSE POCULIFORM. A **poculiform** snowdrop is one in which the inner segments have changed to become identical to the outer ones. A **inverse poculiform** is one in which the outer segments have changed to become identical to the inners. See examples below:



*Poculiform*



*Normal*



*Inverse Poculiform*

It will not surprise you to know that an abbreviated form of inverse poculiform is used by most growers - I favour iPoc! There are relatively few varieties of iPocs in commerce, most self-sown seedlings from the original variety, Trym.

Those who know me, know that I can't leave well alone when it comes to plants - I have to be in there pollinating and seeing what happens. Starting in 2008, I began to cross the iPocs I had in my collection with other likely parents - with other iPocs, and with yellows to aim towards a yellow Trym-type.

One curious phenomenon associated with iPocs (and also with green-tipped snowdrops) is that some of them are unstable when chipped to propagate them. I first became aware of this when my first 'South Hayes' flowered looking like a completely normal snowdrop, after I had bought it as a sub-flowering size bulb. I asked the seller about it, and he agreed to send me a new one, already in flower, correctly formed. The moral is: if you are buying an iPoc, make sure you either see it in flower, or that the seller guarantees that they have already flowered and the markings/shapes have been verified.

No-one has so far explained how this can happen - they should all be identical since they are clones, that is, they are all genetically the same. How can some look completely different to the others, when they are all cut from the same

bulb? If you have experience in plant genetics - please enlighten us!

In case, dear reader, you are one of those who reach for a crucifix and string of garlic when chipping is mentioned - you might be interested to hear that a new seedling iPoc, which split naturally into 7 daughter bulbs last year (to my great excitement), has displayed different markings on several of the offsets. Not the knife's fault, then.

Below are some new iPoc seedlings which flowered for the first time this year, it's great fun watching the buds, as they show the extent of green on the outers through the enfolding spathe, to whet your appetite as you wait for them to open. Anne Wright



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# CALENDAR

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28 FEB	Harlow Show
7 MAR	Loughborough Show
14 MAR	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Tony Goode - Alpines for the Time Challenged
14 MAR	Kendal Show
21 MAR	East Lancs Show
28 MAR	Hexham Show
4 APR	Cleveland Show
11 APR	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Jim Almond - Digital Plant Photography
11 APR	Chesterfield Show
18 APR	Midland Show
9 MAY	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> AGM, Quiz and Cakes *** <b>LOCAL SHOW</b> ***
14 JUN	Bakewell Show
12 SEP	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Prof John Good - Making the most of the Site

***P S - Did I mention I need articles for the next newsletter?***