

SHEFFIELD & DISTRICT ORCHID SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2010



**SEPTEMBER PLANT OF THE MONTH
DENDROBIUM VENUSTUM**

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BUSINESS

As this was the first meeting at Ranmoor that Richard had attended since the Bakewell show there were a few matters to attend to, particularly with regards to the show itself. We had moved away from Chatsworth to a larger venue at a supposedly busy location. The show wasn't a success, and lost money. As this is the first year at a new venue, we could expect a few teething problems, but there were more than just a few. Our publicity didn't seem to work around the town, nor could we encourage the tour companies to direct the tourists our way despite them being parked just yards away. Poor organisation was also a factor with a show committee rather than a single person who could have managed the whole event. We haven't had a dedicated Show Secretary for a few years now, and it is becoming a serious issue. New blood is desperately needed on the committee as some members have 2 or more roles – e.g. Richard himself is Chairman, Treasurer and Membership Secretary.

Sheffield has long been regarded as a premier Society for many years, and the fear is that we lose this perceived status and standing, fail to attract trade and other societies to our shows, and slowly fade away. If you think that you can

spare some time (and it isn't a lot) to help run the society, Richard would love to hear from you prior to the AGM.

The treasurer would like to inform members that subs are now due for 2010-2011, and he will gratefully accept £12 at the next meeting.

TABLE SHOW

With no other volunteers Ted Croot once again gave us the benefit of his experiences with the plants – which were a nice display for the time of the year. The Phals were on the left side this month, and Ted started with a rather dusty Phal. Black Diamond that was only a shade of purple! The equally dusty Phal. New Jersey had several nice coloured purple flowers that were well spaced. Phal Everspring 'White Tiger' was a tall harlequin type of large white flowers with a few purple blotches (not stripes). Phal. Brother Success was a medium sized purple with good flat flowers. Doritis *pulcherrima* var. *champornensis* had interesting small pink flowers flecked with orange.

Btc. Golden Mul 'Orient' was a pretty small yellow flowered Cattleya with a spotted lip – quite effective, and thriving. Pot. Burana Beauty is a well known hybrid with red stripes on a yellow flower. It is in good condition, and doing well.

Habenaria *radiata* was a smallish terrestrial that grows from a pea sized tuber, and had a single small white flower with a frilly lip, more usually called the white egret orchid. A taller and more robust Habenaria was *myriotricha* (formerly *medusae*) with a lip that was mostly hairs (*myriotricha* = many hairs). It is very pretty and well grown. An unnamed paph had a tall spike with a couple of good spotted dangly flowers – it is a likely hybrid between *philippinense* and section *barbata*. Claire de Lune 'EVB' is an old classic with 2 flowers just starting to end. It is a noted good doer.

Den. *venustum* was a smallish plant with several spikes of many tiny yellow flowers, and was adjudged to be the plant of the month. Masd. Mary Staal is a well known and oft seen hybrid with pretty white/yellow flowers held proud of the leaves. Masd. *ignea* was a good plant with shorter than usual spikes of flowers more to pink than red. Coel. *massangeana* was a small plant with a small pendant spike of pale pink and brown flowers.

Darwinara Charm 'Pink Star' had very small off-pink flowers that demand closer inspection. Aeranthes *virginialis* had 2 spikes with 3 small yellow-green flowers that 'cross their legs' – hence the name. Aerangis *distincta* (x *violopa*?) was an unusual plant mounted on cork where it appears dry despite daily dunking. It had a pendant spike of a few pale pink star shaped flowers with long tails. Ascda. Meda Arnold was the final plant with a huge spike of over 20 large cerise flowers – a real eye catcher. Thank you Ted. **JG**

PLANT OF THE MONTH

DENDROBIUM VENUSTUM

I bought this plant from Willi Kennntner's nursery during our expedition to the D.O.G. Congress at Ulm in Germany in March 1999. It is an unusual Dendrobium, not often offered for sale in this country and this particular plant doesn't quite fit the description of the species given in Baker and Baker's monograph on the genus. *Den venustum* is an intermediate-growing species from what used to be known as Indo-China (Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) and it is very closely related to *Den delacourii*. It is quite distinct from it though – *D delacourii* flowers in May on short (c.5cm) compact pseudobulbs, with fewer, larger flowers (mine was usually on our stand at Chatsworth) whereas this one flowers in September on longer (c.15cm) thinner, pseudobulbs. *Den ciliatum* is probably a synonym of *D venustum* differing only, it seems, in the length of the cilia on the lip of the flower.

This plant is deciduous: the leaves fall in late autumn and then it is kept almost dry until the new growths appear in spring. Careful watering is started now (the new roots are easily drowned by standing water). When growth is well-established it is watered more freely provided that drainage is good. I feed with Orchid Grow until the flower spikes show in mid-July, when I change to Orchid Bloom, gently increasing the feed in spring and tailing-off in autumn.

The compost I use is a very little chopped sphagnum moss with medium bark, charcoal and coarse Perlite – drainage must be good. It is kept hanging up, in good light and in continuous breeze from a fan. The drop in temperature from a minimum of 70F in the daytime to a minimum of 60F at night that my thermostat provides, is apparently important in inducing flowering. My plants always get this, so I can't say what happens if they don't! **Ted Croot**

BRIAN RITTERSHAUSEN - AN APPRECIATION

Hearing of the death (on 24th September) of Brian Rittershausen brought back many memories of my early years in the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Orchid Society, as we were then known.

I remember particularly a weekend trip, organised by the late Ruth Brown, to Devon. We stayed in the Queen's Hotel in Newton Abbot, not far from the Rittershausens' nursery which was then in Kingsteignton. Brian and Wilma joined us for dinner in the hotel that evening. After the meal, we all retired to a nearby room and Brian gave us a fascinating talk on his recent expedition to India with Keith Andrew, searching for Cymbidiums, especially *Cym devonianum*, which

Keith and others used to produce a number of small-growing hybrids, including the various “Bulbarrow” hybrids which were quite famous for a while.

It was probably the most interesting talk about orchids that I had heard up to that point. Earlier that afternoon, we had visited the nursery and saw both the enormous *Grammatophyllum* that had been transported to what was then the BOC Orchid Show in London (now the RHS London Orchid Show) with such difficulty that it had figured in a number of newspaper articles, and one of the very few plants of *Vanilla planifolia* in the country big enough to sport flowers and seed pods. Brian’s sister, Wilma, was there and Arthur Bell too but Sarah was probably still at school!

Some time later I remember another talk he gave, this time about the first years of orchid hybridising. He spoke about (obviously!) John Dominy, of Veitch’s nursery in Exeter, who was the first to flower a man-made hybrid orchid, and John Seden who succeeded him. Once again, Brian gave an excellent talk with no pauses or hesitations, apparently without notes but including a lot of precise detail and dates. His knowledge of orchids and the manner of his presentation were impressive; he could certainly keep an audience enthralled.

Visits to his nursery when it moved to Forches Cross were always enjoyable and he was always very hospitable. He fought the cancer that afflicted him with great fortitude and determination and his cheerfulness, in public at least, was an inspiration to all who knew him. We will miss him. **Ted Croot**

ORCHIDS MY WAY

CHRIS SQUIRE

As a member of the Society Chris requires little by way of introduction, but isn’t a regular attendee due to living in Abergavenny (since 1997).

Chris started growing orchids in 1966 at the same time as his father Eddie following a trip to Mansell and Hatcher. This developed collaboratively, and soon mushroomed into 2 lean-to greenhouses and around 350 plants – built up from various shows and trips, often abroad. Some flasks were imported, and some seeds were sown creating more variety, especially with Disas.

The current greenhouse is an Eden Chelsea at 12’ x 9’, which is aluminium (not wood) for durability with an added polycarbonate division to allow the creation of 3 climatic zones. The outer zone is 45F minimum, the inner is 54F, and the inner sanctum is 68F (in reality this is a plunge bench with extra cable heating). The greenhouse has aluminium benches with a galvanised mesh to hold the plants. Bubble wrap is in place all year round for extra warmth. Rainwater is collected from the roof, which also has cedar laths on 1 side for shading. These can be rolled off/on, so aren’t secure, and can blow off in a serious storm. An under bench fogger is used to maintain humidity in short summer bursts. Other

plants are grown on the floor to aid in humidity – bromeliads, begonia rex, ferns, and a ginger plant.

Electricity is an essential (albeit expensive) part of the jigsaw, and has quite a complex set of controls governed by an RCD. A 3KW fan heats the inner section, and a low voltage cable warms the sanctum. 3 x 4” fans circulate air, with a 10” extraction fan in the gable end (warm), and a 7” inlet fan in the door (cool). The roof vent is run by wax expansion lift.

The greenhouse currently has about 160 plants, of a large variation. As with all growers, some succeed, and some don't. Never be afraid to experiment to find the right microclimate for something new. A tendency towards smaller plants does allow the collection to grow.

The cooler section holds Odonts, Lycastes, cool Dendrobiums, Draculas, cool Vandas & Coelogynes. The warmer section holds Cattleyas, Laelias, warm Coelogynes & Dendrobiums, and Stanhopeas (in baskets). Chris is currently trialling Cychnoches and Catasetums here. The sanctum is much smaller, and holds Angraecums, Aerangis, Renanthera, Huntleyas, seedlings, and the odd rescue Phal.

Each year Chris sets himself a bit of a project. The one for 2010 is to add an epiphyte branch to add more plants. A decent oak branch has been obtained for this purpose, and so far is settling in well.

Compost wise, a variety of mixes can be used, based on requirements. A standard mix is bark, sphagnum, perlite, charcoal, bone meal & dolomitic lime. Rockwool is used separately, but demands a differing watering regime. Peat and perlite has been tried, but he hasn't tried coconut chips yet. They all have their pros and cons of course. Plants are repotted when necessary, but no more than 2 years apart. Watering is always in the mornings with either tepid tapwater or rainwater. Usually 5-7 days in summer, and 10-14 days in winter. Never overwater, and keep an eye on humidity at the same time. A mixture of Focus feed and Dynagrow is used to feed – never any urea. He feeds every watering, and flushes on the third one. Every 6-8 weeks a dressing of Calcium Nitrate is applied.

Greenhouse hygiene is important. A weak spray of Physan is used weekly on benches and staging. This leaves only a few pests such as scale and mealybugs which are controlled by sprays and meths. A nightly slug patrol can prevent an opening bud from disaster.

Chris has a few guiding principles that he adheres to as well as preaches to converts. “Science begins with observation” is certainly true – do some geographical and climate research on new plants. Maximise use of your microclimates. Take a few seconds to sense what is happening in the greenhouse once you open the door each day. Join an orchid society, visit nurseries and shows. Better still visit the rainforest(s) or take an orchid focussed holiday.

Make changes one step at a time – be disciplined. Understand when, where, why etc.. Make notes on your plants to refer back to. Don't forget, in a small greenhouse the environment can change quickly.

Several of Chris's plants were shown to us, and after a few questions a hearty round of applause was given. **JG**

CANWOS SHOW SEPT 19TH

Up to a few years ago CANWOS used to hold their annual show in a decent sized hall just off the centre of Northwich (adjacent to the car parks). This used to attract several members of the trade as well as several amateur displays (incl. The Chester parks/zoo collection). I guess that the cost increased, and they missed a year or 2, before restarting at the present venue at the Four Oaks. The first year had a decent representation, albeit with a cold night in an unheated greenhouse. Last year the show was smaller, and this year quite tiny with just 3 societies and 2 trade displays. Any visitors to the site could easily see that there wasn't much to see, and after a fruitless hour or 2 the trade were so alarmed at the lack of visitors that they requested the entrance fee be dropped. Things only improved slightly, and the outcome must be a bit of a disaster to the host society. There must be some question over the future of this show.

The SDOS display was fairly modest as is often the case at this time of the year, but we won a couple of classes with *Habenaria myriotricha* (any other plant), and *Doritis pulcherrima* var. *champornensis* (Phal species). NEOS won the best display and had a superb *Angraecum Longiscott*. Best plant in show was a huge *Onc. longipes* on the CANWOS stand.

Thank you to all who supplied plants and helped out. **JG**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

MONTHLY MEETINGS AT RANMOOR – 2PM

Oct 10th Chris & Jean Barker – more on Taiwan

Nov 14th Tina Stagg, Aesthetics of Orchid Growing

Dec 12th AGM

Society website - www.sheffieldorchids.org



Above; SDOS display at CANWOS

Below; *Habenaria myriotricha*

