

A Golden Year - a glimpse
at the history of the
West and Midlands Iris
Group
affectionally known
as W&MIG

Jill Whitehead
West & Midlands Iris Group Hon. Secretary.

The West & Midlands Iris Group

*Founded in 1974, as The West Midlands Iris Group, the **and** was not added until 1992. Seven members of the BIS met after being contacted by Jennifer Hewitt and several others expressed interest. They agreed to publish newsletters, to hold meetings and visits throughout the area. John Taylor became the first Chairman and Jennifer the first Secretary.*

BRITISH IRIS SOCIETY



West & Midlands Iris Group
Newsletter 81 February 2011



The first Newsletters were duplicated A4 sheets, with a change of format in 1994 to printed A5 publications. The real breakthrough was in 2011 when Pat took over the reigns and we had COLOUR!!

BRITISH IRIS SOCIETY



Orinoco Flow AGM, Cy Barrett - Border Bearded
Dykes Medal 1994

West & Midlands Iris Group
A Retrospective: 1974–2007



West & Midland Iris Group
Newsletter 87 April 2016

West & Midlands Iris Group



Newsletter
January 2023

Each Editor has brought their own unique style which we have enjoyed and all have given freely of their time. In 2007 a 'Retrospective' was published to mark 33 years of the Group.

Malvern over the Years –

We missed the first Malvern Spring Gardening Show, as our first stand was in 1987. Over the years many members have contributed, stand design has changed but the ethos stays the same -

***A chance to
share our iris
enthusiasm!***





*Our first exhibit at the Malvern Spring Show -
1987*



Malvern in the early years



Jennifer and Suz Winspear



2007 - Pat was responsible for our stand for many years

In 2010 we ventured into RHS judging - our 2012 stand won a Sliver Gilt Medal





*2012 Fern Harden as
Artist in Residence*



2015



*Our first RHS
Gold medal in
2014 came as
a surprise!*





RHS MALVERN SPRING FESTIVAL

2018

BEST NATIONAL PLANT SOCIETIES EXHIBIT



***2018 Best National
Plant Societies exhibit
and a Gold medal –
wow!***



In 2019 the Group and the BIS jointly exhibited at Gardeners' World Live and were thrilled with their Platinum Award.





This year we were in the Floral marquee for the second time and were very pleased with our Silver Medal.



*2019 - Sue showing off the
new W&MIG aprons!*



*2024 - Jeremy and Tony wearing
theirs with Arit Anderson*

*Members and
their irises*



***John & Mary
Taylor***

***Many Group visits were made to
'Saltwood' – their home at
Moreton-in-Marsh – the first was
in 1975***



1976

***Peggy
Chambers***



Bob Nichol was one of our founder members and he and his wife Jean often hosted Group visits and even AGMs



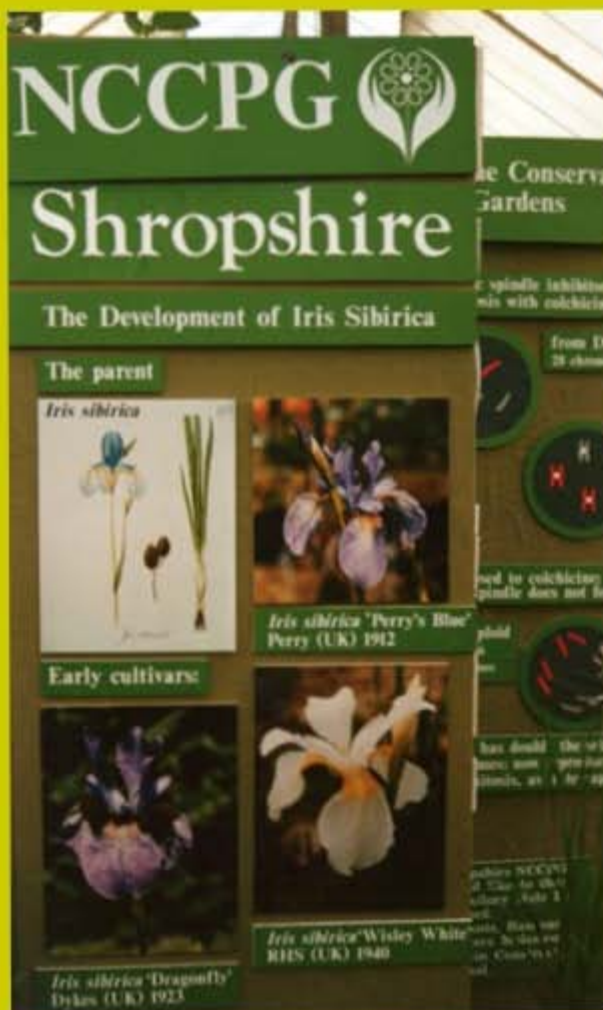
Jean presented 'The Bob Nichol' trophy to the BIS in 1999 - 'Amadora' & 'Trenwith' two of Bob's irises



*Jennifer with one of her three
Dykes medals.*



***‘Clee Hills’ one of the
first irises that
Jennifer registered -
1979***



Margaret Owen did much to support our Group and also to spread the word about irises.



In 1992, she organised a Plant Heritage exhibit at RHS Chelsea which featured irises.



*'Godfrey Owen'
Margaret Owen*

'Orinoco Flow'
Cy Bartlett



'Splashdown' Doris Hansford



'Eardisland'
John Taylor

'Wyevale' Maureen Foster



'Glamusk' Harry Foster



'Aldridge Visitor' Phillip Allery





Cy Bartlett joined us in 1980, he organised several Cannington events, called 'Cannington Capers' which proved to be very popular. His garden was one of the host gardens for the Convention.



Ken & Beryl MacLeod were both very keen supporters of our Group. Ken raised a number of seedlings but only registered one 'Honeyhole Prelude'



*2017 - Fred Raines was
awarded the Souvenir de
M. Lémon Trophy by the
BIS for his 'Canary Girls'*





c. Jeremy Handy

*2024 Jeremy Handy, our
Chairman registered his first
iris 'Arden Splendour'*



*Some of the
Groups Events
through the years.*

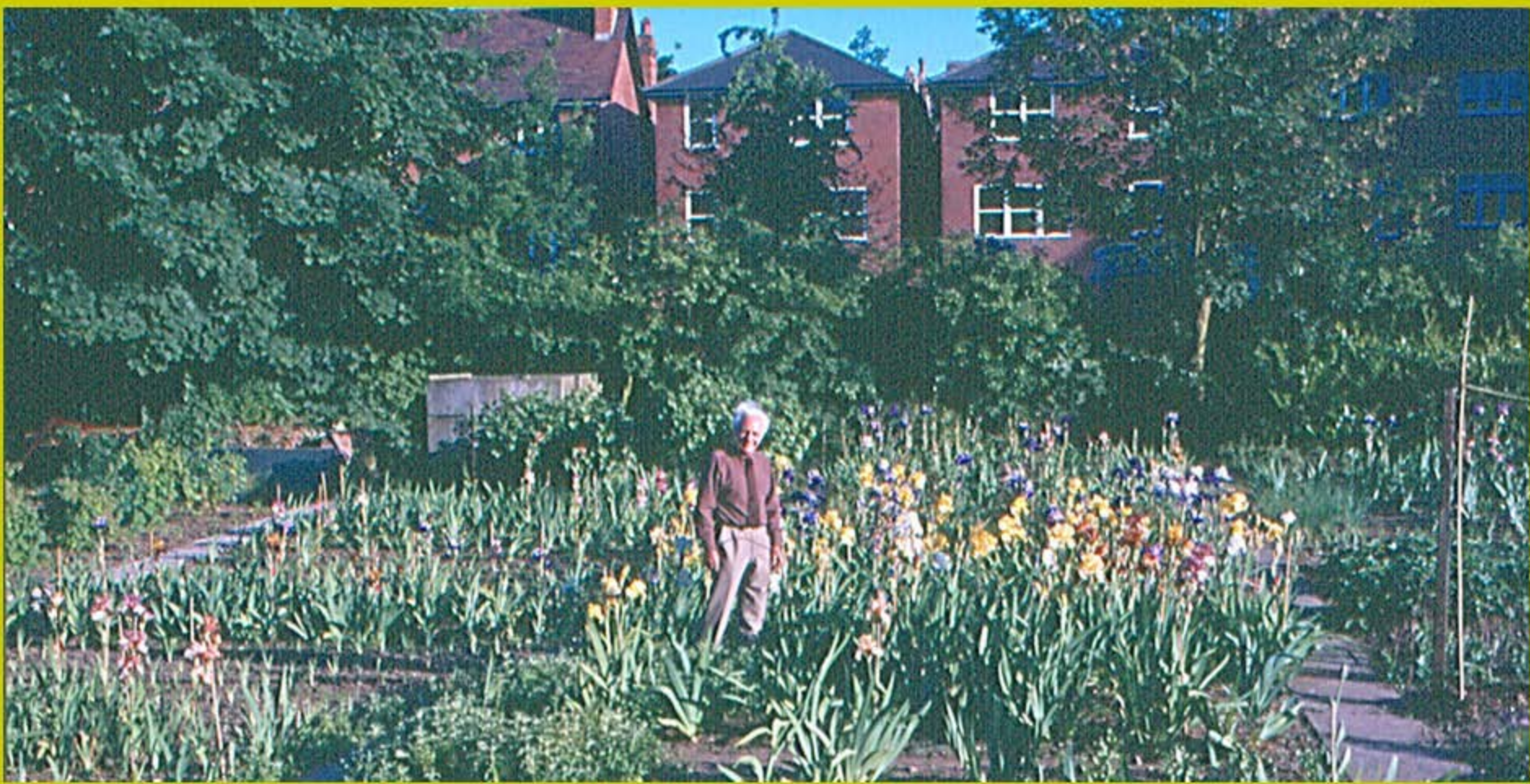
West & Midlands Iris Group Shows



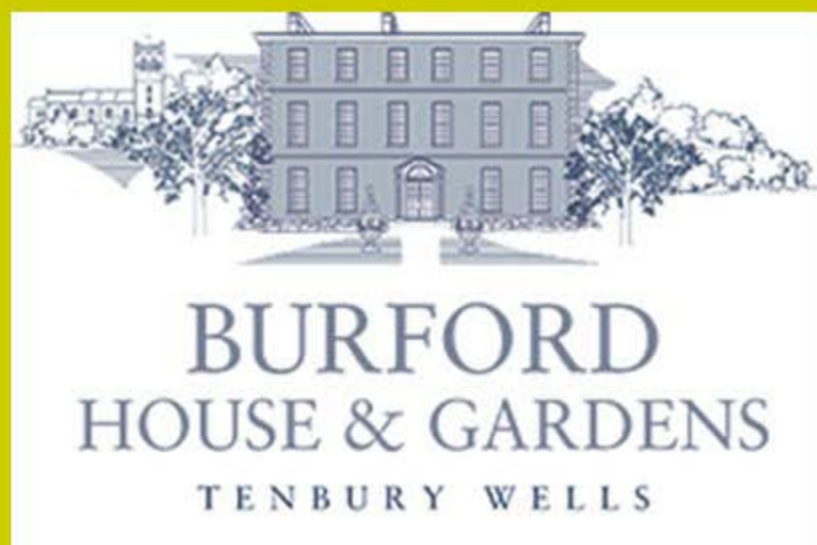
Our first display was at Acton Pigot in 1980 but our first competitive Show was 1982

1985 At Cleeton St Mary, Bob Nichol won the best spike in the Show





*1982, we held our first Show at the Grove Hall,
Harborne and we also visited Bob's allotment.*



We held several very successful shows by invitation of John Treasure. The gardens attracted the crowds, which certainly helped us! Another excellent venue was David Austin Roses, David being one of our members.



*2008 saw us at
Persnore College,
that was the year
when we ran out
of vases but we
saw the variety of
wine that our
members
consumed!*



Audrey Fox, a keen exhibitor with Sidney and John Beale. John was Show Secretary despite living in Doncaster!



*2009 saw a new
Show Secretary,
Ian Powell*



*Sidney Linnegar often
judged our shows and
Pam Roberts always did a
sterling job on the teas*



Iris angustifolia
(cultivar Mary Buxton?)
Type: Beardless iris.
Flowering time: November to March.
Soil preference: neutral with drainage.
Growth habit: flowers in pairs, flowers white or
blue.
Size of plant: Height 60cm.

Iris angustifolia



*2011, we were in for a treat -
Michael Castle displayed some
of his art work*



Michael Castle



*Alan Sedgwick was a keen exhibitor
and in the 1980's he offered to
finance our first trophies.*





*Doing an 'Acton Pigot'! 1980, 1981 and 1984.
Margaret Owen offered to open her garden and
hold a plant sale and everybody got involved.*



The crowds turned out in force and so did the sun!



Margaret Owen, with a hat as always and Bob Nichol



***Plant sales were very popular – Bob Nichol,
Jennifer Hewitt and John Taylor - 1981***



So were the teas!



© Anne Blandemer

John's garden in 1982, when we visited it rained!



As it did for our 2024 Golden Summer Celebration!



1982 saw us at Jennifer's, Cleeton St Mary for a plant sale and garden visit. Peter Hewitt and John Taylor



Group visit to Bryan Dodsworth's garden in 1991, he was one of our members and a very successful hybridiser - gaining 12 Dykes medals.



National Garden Festival Ebbw Vale April – October 1992

The Festival attracted over two million people, 550,000 plants were planted but it was not all about plants, of course there had to be a dragon – in fact I suspect there were several!



Harry Foster was the driving force behind our involvement, he ensured that irises had a very high profile with iris being one of the five festival flowers.

An 'iris rainbow' featured about two thousand spikes, naturally arranged delighted the visitors. The BIS Summer Show was held there and W&MIG mounted a publicity stand. Some 52,000 visited on the first day of our Show, which was a show record.





Filming 'Name the iris' Competition in the Maureen & Harry's garden for Gardeners World TV.



Rainbow Fantasy - Maureen Foster

Iris was the June flower of the month which gave us a huge amount of publicity.



'Festival Crown' was the name chosen by the viewers



Maureen Foster at Ebbw Vale



1998 – a visit to Jennifer's with some judges training in progress – all paying attention!



*Judy and David Pollitt have
always welcomed us – this was
in 1999*

*Judy is very successful at the
Shows, often gaining the most
points.*





In 1999 we celebrated our 25th anniversary with a members lunch at the Feathers Hotel, Ludlow followed by talks from Cy Bartlett and Jennifer Hewitt.



*2001 - The W&MIG Stand at HollyBush
nursery - Phillip Allery*

Convention Guest Irises at Cy Bartlett's Garden



TOP LEFT
"Berlin Tall Boy" (Tamberg unreg.)
Photo: Helena Butcher



TOP RIGHT
'Dunkler Wein' (Tamberg '95)
Photo: Jennifer Hewitt

CENTRE
'Snow Job' (P.Black '98)
Photo: Jennifer Hewitt

LOWER RIGHT
'Ribands' (Grosvenor '93)
Photo: Helena Butcher

LOWER LEFT
Lane to the iris beds.
Photo: Glyn Roberts

See page 59



In 2002 the BIS held its first iris Convention, it was organised by W&MIG. 86 members joined us, from France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Australia. USA and of course some from home!



Guest Iris Beds
Photo: Glyn Roberts



LEFT TO RIGHT

'Devonshire Cream' (G.Sutton '99) TB *Photo: Glyn Roberts*

'Emily Anne' (Hollingworth '99) Sib

'Salamander Crossing' (Schafer/Sacks '99) Sib



LEFT TO RIGHT

'Walker Ross' (Chapman '96) AB *Photo: Jennifer Hewitt*

'Headline Banner' (G.Sutton '98) BB *Photo: Jennifer Hewitt*

'Volatile' (Craig '96) TB *Photo: Helena Butcher*

*Some of the
guest irises at
Claire Austin's*



*Despite the weather,
there were smiles to
be seen!*



*Mike Lowe (USA) at
Hadspen Garden*



*At Spetchley Garden
the sun came out!*



In 2004 we were approached by Gardens Illustrated, could they feature our Show!!





Even exhibitors are allowed 'forty-winks' while the judging takes place!



In 2009 we visited Trentham Gardens, John Trinder organised an iris garden tour for us.



2010 - a visit to see The Bliss National Collection, Anne and Suz Winspear – who was once the BIS Historian and our Chairman.



*2012 AGM
was held at
Ashwoods*

*We said thank you to
Peter Farrell who had
been our Treasurer for
years and welcomed Rex
as Treasurer and
Membership Secretary.*





*Our 2013 AGM was at Sue Bedwell's – spotting the
irises in the snow was a little tricky!*



In 2013 we presented Jennifer with a painting of her Dykes medal winning Iris 'Peter Hewitt' in recognition of her work for W&MIG.



For our Golden Year we have instigated a new award, The Hewitt Award for outstanding service to our Group. Ian Powell was the first recipient.





In 2015 we went to Birtsmorton Court, a moated manor house, most were impressed by the garden but it was the tools which impressed me!



*We revisited in 2022 as part
of the BIS Centenary
Celebrations – what a
venue for our cream tea!*



In 2015, we were invited to Claire Austin's nursery and garden



Claire invited us again this year with BIS members and even provided a very tasty lunch!



In 2016 we visited 'Covertside' the home of the late John Sales and made a new friend!



West & Midlands Iris Group
Tea and Talk

British Iris Breeders & Sir Cedric Morris
Sarah Cook



Ex Head Gardener at NT Sissinghurst
National Collection Holder of Sir Cedric Morris Irises
2015 Chelsea Gold Medal Winner

2.00pm - Sunday 6th November 2016
Highnam Community Centre
Highnam, Gloucester GL2 8DG

£5.00 including tea & home-made cake

All Welcome

*Our first members'
lunch and Tea &
Talk was enjoyed by
all*



Wherever we visit, it usually involves cake!



*But sometimes,
irises as well!*



2024 – *Our Golden Year*





As part of our Golden Year we joined with BIS members to visit Florence and the International Iris Competition.



The Award Ceremony is quite formal, we had to dress posh!



***RHS Chelsea 2024 and
Emma Bossons, one of the
Moorcroft designers.***



MOORCROFT



Irresistible Irises A GOLDEN YEAR

The world of irises is like no other with its variety range in height from 6 inches to a phenomenal 4 feet! These perfect perennial bloomers often come in complex combinations, as well as varied colours, with white, purple and yellow, being the most common – the latter causing names to emanate from a unique variety of sources due to the showy multitude of yellow buds, with the design Canary Girls being testament to this fact. Some irises bloom in colours so dark that the flowers appear jet-black. In the world of Moorcroft, as we are good! Try to our spring flowers, these early summer bloomers fill the gap brilliantly with their rapid, upright habit and ruffly, complex blooms, just as they do in your gardens – nodding and creeping in unimaginable colours and forms from the delicate to jaw-dropping strange ones.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of The Woot and Midlands Iris Group, the Moorcroft design team have created a collection of six designs featuring varieties that have never been named by Moorcroft, unknown before – none, like Rachel's deeply spiritual Chinese Flower holds an assemblage of colour and form, while all hold a palette that is utterly mesmerising. Most designs are named after the plants themselves which are to turn around after proved people in the Group's this golden year. This is as it should be. For each iris design sold, Moorcroft will make a donation to the Woot & Midlands Iris Group to help support them in their anniversary year.

**Woot & Midlands
Iris Group
1974-2024**






Crocus Romance



The West & Midlands Iris Group
Virtual Show 2024
Class 1 - Bearded Iris

Awarded to Sue 'Bedwell'
Exhibiting: *Iris 'Burnt Toffee'*

Date: 1st September 2024

Chair: Jeremy Handy
Show Secretary: Ian Powell



*Our Golden Virtual
Show had 177 entries!*





*We hosted the BIS AGM weekend
near Oxford*





*Our Golden Summer
Celebration at
Fownhope - July 2024*



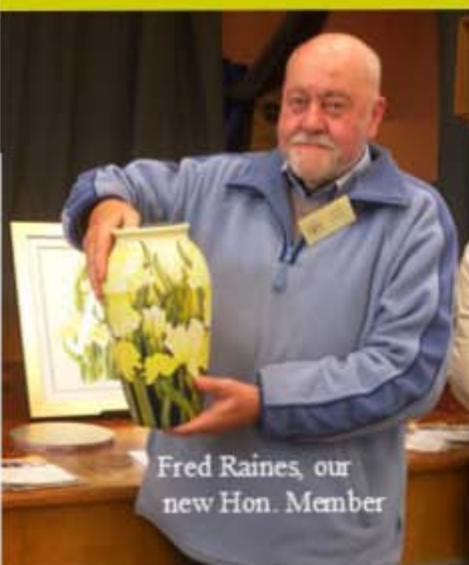


*Some of us at the 2024 Annual Show –
smiles all round!*



Our 2024 Golden Talk and Lunch

October 20th 2024



Fred Raines, our
new Hon. Member



Judy & David
Pollitt, our new
Hon. Members



Anne Milner, Peter, John Taylor's grandson
and Anne Blandamerr

Thank you to all our
members past and
present. Without you all,
we would not be
celebrating our Golden
Year.

In particular we thank our seven original members:
Jennifer Hewitt, Ernest Bomford, Ray Bomford, Pat Foster,
Doris Hansford, Bob Nichol, John Trinder.