



THE

# FRITILLARIA

GROUP



The Fritillaria Group of the Alpine Garden Society  
Journal 36 Spring 2015



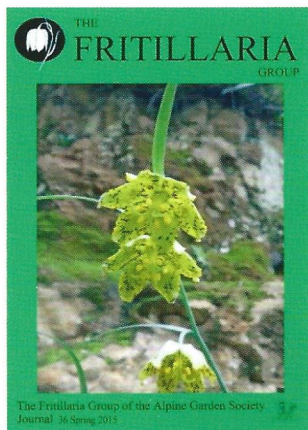
**Committee members and contact details can be found on  
our website: [www.fritillaria.org.uk](http://www.fritillaria.org.uk)**

The image on the back cover is of  
*Fritillaria purdyi* and is one of Lesley Crowden's plants.

The beautiful painting of *Fritillaria imperialis* on the back cover is by  
Dianne Sutherland. We are grateful that she agreed that we could use  
the image and hope to see more of her work in the future.

# Contents

## Spring 2015



*Fritillaria ojaiensis*. Photo  
Courtesy of Jane and Michael  
Delgado.

2 Details of Spring Show

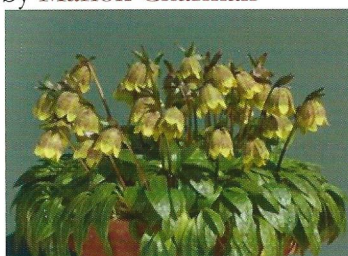
3 *Fritillaria meleagris* by  
Rannveig Wallis

4 Details of field trip to  
*Fritillaria meleagris* sites

5 *Fritillaria meleagris*, The  
Snake's-Head Fritillary  
By Andrew Smith



9 Jean Morris's *Fritillaria*  
cross stitch embroideries,  
by Marion Charman



10 *Fritillaria davidii* by  
Brian Walker



12 Kaydale Lodge by  
Bob Charman

15 Meritorious Frits by  
Rannveig Wallis



## THE *FRITILLARIA* GROUP OF THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

### Spring Show and Meeting

22 March 2015 at Theydon Bois Village Hall,  
Theydon Bois, Essex CM16 7ER

**Please note change of venue** (See link at bottom of page)

#### PROGRAMME

- 10.00 Doors Open and Coffee. Plants and Bulbs will be on sale during the day.
- 11.00 Speaker Martyn Rix: “Some Fritillaries for the open garden – the Western European and alpine species”
- 12.00 Speaker Peter Taggart: “A discussion on microclimates in pots”
- 12.30 Lunch Break
- 14.00 Discussion panel chaired by Bob Wallis with Martyn Rix, Brian Mathew and Laurence Hill as panel members
- 15.30 Raffle
- 16.00 End of Meeting

Entry fee £2.00 for members of the *Fritillaria* group and £5.00 for non-members.

All Visitors Welcome

**Please bring as many plants as you can  
for both the show and the discussion!**

Membership details are available inside the Hall. Subscriptions: £8.00 per annum single membership and £10.00 per annum for family, €10.00 for European membership and £10.00 for world-wide membership. Two newsletters are published each year in February and August and a seed exchange takes place.

Further information can be found on our website [www.fritillaria.org.uk](http://www.fritillaria.org.uk)  
[www.theydon.org.uk/Pages/villhall](http://www.theydon.org.uk/Pages/villhall)

## *Fritillaria meleagris*

By *Rannveig Wallis*

Bob and I have spent the last 30 years visiting many places in the world where fritillaries grow in order to see them in their wild state. It is really thrilling to find such plants after spotting the right sort of habitat in the right area. Recently, it occurred to us that we have not made the effort to see our native *Fritillaria meleagris*. So in 2012 we put the matter right and spent a wonderful couple of days around Ducklington and Cricklade. The fritillaries were fantastic: certainly the populations were larger than any we had seen abroad. What a treat to be able to walk amongst the plants, taking care not to tread on them, in order to take photographs and just enjoy the moment as we did in Ducklington. As we walked across North Meadow on the well-trodden path the number of fritillaries increased from a handful at the start until there were literally thousands at the far end of this huge 110 acre site. It is claimed to hold 80% of the British population of this rare species.

Paradoxically and rather sadly, in 2013 the number of flowering individuals in North Meadow was down to single figures. We were told that the likely cause was that the grazing animals had been allowed in too early. Since this is a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation with grazing supposedly managed for the Fritillaries the episode was a bit of a travesty. In Spring 2014, there was a short article in the Daily Telegraph about this population. Open University researchers with the help of volunteers carried out a plant count. The results indicated that the plants which had declined dramatically from nearly 2000 plants to just 5 in 2013 had had a startling revival. As we know it thrives in water meadows so to quote the Daily Telegraph: “The monsoon-like conditions for the winter swamping the fields while the Frits were hibernating\* has led to a bumper crop.” Anita Barratt, the Reserve manager, was relieved that the population was recovering.

The field in Ducklington is, and has been for hundreds of years, managed traditionally, being left untouched until about July 1<sup>st</sup> each year. Then, when all the plants have set and dropped their seed, a hay crop is taken. Only then are the animals let in to graze until about Christmas time depending on the weather. Perhaps Ducklington does not have so many individual plants but the permission to be able to walk amongst them, which is denied in other reserves, is just a wonderful experience. This is doubly enjoyable when the village holds its celebration of the flowers on Fritillary Sunday each April.

Why not join us in 2015 to see how the populations of *Fritillaria meleagris* have done?

\* I should add that the Daily Telegraph is not too rigorous when it comes to scientific terminology but hibernating bulbs is not quite such a howler as the reported “tentacles” of Japanese Knotweed seeking out the light!



---

**Field trip to two sites of *Fritillaria meleagris* in Oxfordshire  
on 19 April 2015, meeting at Ducklington Village Hall at 11.30am**

Please check Fritillaria group website  
in case of any changes due to the weather

**Venues:**

**1. Ducklington Mead near Witney, Oxfordshire. Only open for one day a year when the local church, St Bartholomew's, hosts 'Fritillary Sunday'. (Ploughman's lunch, cream teas, plant stall are available in the village hall with proceeds going to the church funds.)**

<http://www.ducklingtonchurch.org.uk/fritillary/>

<http://goo.gl/maps/L6eNj>

**2. Iffley Meadow Nature reserve next to River Thames in Oxford, OX1 4UP. Parking available at Falcon Rowing Club, OX4 4BJ.**

**Once parked, cross the river and then walk along the Thames path going downstream. The fritillaries are in the meadows by the river just before you get to the Isis Pub.**

<http://www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/iffley-meadows>

**(meadow:-** <http://goo.gl/maps/Mh6LU>

[Link to map for Car Park for Iffley Meadow Nature reserve](#)



## *Fritillaria meleagris*, The Snake's-Head Fritillary

By Andrew Smith

(This article has been reprinted from the Magdalen College Record, 2007, by kind permission of the Editor. It was sourced by Laurence Hill.)

Few of Magdalen's treasures are as well known to the outside world as the fritillary. Every April, the chequered, purple flowers of this unusual plant adorn the Meadow in their tens of thousands. Paradoxically, the timing of this annual spectacle means that many of our own undergraduates never witness this plant in its prime. But for countless visitors to our grounds in springtime, this is one of the College's major attractions. So popular is the plant that it was recently voted the county flower of Oxfordshire in a poll organized by Plantlife International. However, as a result of the gradual disappearance of many damp, grassy meadows that are its favoured habitat, the plant has become a national rarity, and the Meadow one of its most important remaining sites.

The origins of this iconic plant are hidden in mystery. For centuries, botanists have debated whether this species is truly native to the British Isles, or merely a garden escape. We know from Lyte and Gerard that the fritillary had been introduced from France into English gardens by the latter part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But the first accepted record of the plant in the wild is not until 1736, when it was noted in a meadow in Middlesex (though locals maintained it had already been established there for about 40 years).

What is particularly curious—if of somewhat more parochial interest—is that the plant's origins in the College's own grounds should be so uncertain. The first printed record of the fritillary at Magdalen is to be found in *Flora oxoniensis* (1794) by John Sibthorp, the third Sherardian Professor of Botany. Evidently the botanist and clergyman John Lightfoot had seen the plant in the Meadow some years previously, for he noted this occurrence in a marginal (but undated) handwritten entry in a copy of the third edition of John Ray's *Synopsis methodica Stirpium Britannicarum* (1724). (This new edition of the most important work of the time on the British flora had been prepared by Dillenius, who went on to become the first Sherardian Professor in 1734.) Yet, as G Claridge Druce remarked in the first edition of his *Flora of Oxfordshire* (1886) when summarizing these records, 'It is not a little singular that the Fritillary, so conspicuous a plant of the Oxford meadows, should have for so long remained unnoticed by the various botanists who had resided in or visited Oxfordshire.'

Richard Mabey devotes one of the largest single entries in *Flora Britannica* (1996) to the fritillary. Picking up Druce's train of thought, he notes that the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century at Magdalen coincided with the incumbency (from 1747 to 1783) of the second Sherardian Professor, Humphrey Sibthorp. This is said to have been one of the less active periods in the College's intellectual history. Indeed, Humphrey Sibthorp's tenure of the professorship does not seem to have resulted in any academic publications, and he is reputed only to have delivered a single lecture to undergraduates (not one lecture a year apparently, but a genuinely unique, one-off event). Mabey wryly notes that the 'men of books and laboratories were not always the most energetic and sharpest of eye in the field.'

Is it conceivable that this annual display could have been missed by the botanists of the time, the purple sheen over the Meadow visible even from within the confines of many College rooms? Although, as expressed in J E Smith's notorious quip, Magdalen may have 'slept' scientifically during part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – or at least took a rather extended nap – the same cannot be said of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, described by Linnaeus as the golden age of botany in England. The botanists Walter Stonehouse the Divine, William Hooper and William Browne were all Fellows of the College. John Goodyer, the great botanist of Petersfield, whose nephew Edmund Yalden was a Demy and later Fellow at Magdalen, was a regular visitor. The Botanic Garden (then known as the Physic Garden) was founded on Magdalen land in 1621, initially building up its stock, and then flourishing under the Bobarts, who were superintendents for a period of nearly 80 years. Robert Morison was appointed the first Professor of Botany in the University in 1669, establishing the subject as a serious scientific discipline. And during this time, the first comprehensive accounts of the country's native flora were being produced, relying heavily on the field observations of these eminent botanists, who had scoured the land for new records.

As the garden historian Geoffrey Grigson wrote in 1955, it 'seems not only singular, but impossible' to believe that the fritillary could have been overlooked by these earlier botanists. So what is the answer to the fritillary's origins at Magdalen? Perhaps we are looking at this problem through the wrong end of the telescope. What if the fritillaries were so common and so well known in the Meadow by this time that they were not thought worthy of note? In compiling their accounts of the native flora, these botanists were keen to exclude species from their lists that were known to be introductions or garden escapes. The archeologist and historian John Steane has shown that planted gardens were well established in Magdalen by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, on the north-west of the present



New Building, as indicated by the Agas map of 1578, and supported by the results of a resistivity survey in 1996. In 1996, Grigson suggests that potential sites of 'wild' fritillaries are always worth scrutinizing for evidence of nearby gardens at some time in the past. By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the fritillary was well established in knot gardens and parterres, in keeping with the great interest in bulbs, and was prized for its exotic flowers, which Gerard (1597) described as 'surpassing...the curiest painting that Art can set down.'

But one famous botanist has not yet been mentioned, who may provide a link between the various strands of this story. John Tradescant the Elder, the most famous gardener in the land, had acquired an Oxford connection. In 1628, he had settled with his family in South Lambeth, establishing a substantial garden and assembling an early natural museum that became known as 'Tradescant's Ark' (and which in due course provided the seed-corn for the founding of the Ashmolean Museum in 1683). In 1630, Tradescant was also chosen by the King Charles I to be 'Keeper of our gardens, Vines and Silke-wormes' at Oatlands Place in Surrey. Then, in 1636, he was approached by Danby to take up post as the first Superintendent of the Physic Garden in Oxford, the earliest still-surviving garden of its sort in the country. Tradescant himself delivered a letter from Danby to President Frewen in November of that year to negotiate a stipend, the letter explaining that 'Mr John Tredeskine is willing to persever in his worke with some assurance of Estate.' Tradescant had already played a major role in providing the new Physic Garden in Oxford with plants in the years following its foundation, and although duly appointed as Superintendent, he died only a year later in April 1638.

There does, however, appear to be specific documentary evidence linking Tradescant's story to the fritillary. As part of a long-standing predilection for fruit trees and bulbs, Tradescant had purchased 40 fritillaries from a nurseryman in Haarlem in 1611. The species is then recorded in his complete plant list of 1634, *Plantarum in Horta Johannem [sic] Tradescanti nascentium Catalogus*, the only surviving copy of which is in the Goodyer Library [q.v.]. Furthermore, the Bobart herbarium of 1648, which formed the first catalogue of the Physic Garden, contains a page of magnificently preserved fritillary plants, including the white colour variant characteristic of the Meadow. There is little doubt, therefore, that the fritillary was well established in the Physic Garden by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, and it is possible that Tradescant himself was directly responsible for its introduction.

Could there have been a connection between the fritillaries in the garden and their occurrence in the Meadow? One of the most characteristic features of these sites was their propensity to flooding. Indeed, cultivation at the garden could not begin in earnest until 1633, when the soil level had been raised ('four thousand loads of mucke and dunge') and the wall completed at considerable expense. Even with these measures, the garden was still often flooded, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century being described as knee-deep in water. Similarly, a 'prodigious flood' was documented in the Meadow in the spring of 1663, extending almost at street level right across to Christ Church meadow, and it was not until the following decades that the water walks around the Meadow were improved. Under these conditions, seeds of fritillary plants established in the garden would surely have been readily dispersed on the flood waters the short distance across to the Meadow to the far side of Magdalen Bridge, there to find a more extensive low-lying site well suited to its further propagation.

Might this explain the origins of Magdalen's fritillaries? Is the plant even native to this country? Maybe the fritillary was already well established and admired in the Meadow in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – but recognized as an introduction, and so not thought worthy of note in the first serious floras of the time. We may never know the definitive answers to these questions, the true origins of this extraordinary plant remaining hidden from us a while longer.



John Gerard (1597), *The Herbal or Generall historie of plantes*



## Jean Morris's *Fritillaria* cross stitch embroideries

By Marion Charman

Many members have no doubt admired Jean Morris's wonderful cross stitch Images at the AGS shows. We are always delighted when she displays some of her *Fritillaria* pictures at the Group's meetings. Jean has been working on her masterpieces since 2001. Her images are taken from photos and worked on 18-count AIDA canvas using mainly 2 strands of embroidery thread. Each one takes about 8 – 10 weeks to complete. Jean told us she used 64 different shades of DMC thread for her *Fritillaria reuteri* and 61 shades for *F. pontica*. The photos for these images were taken by Jon Evans and Bob Charman.

## *Fritillaria davidii*

By Brian Walker



*Fritillaria davidii* Franchet 1887 is a patch-forming plant to 15cm tall and comes from Western Sichuan China where it grows on grassy slopes in *Betula alnoides* forests. It can be found in loose peaty soil with ferns, moist places along streams and crevices of cliffs at 1600 - 2600 metres.

The plant above was exhibited at the North Midland AGS Show Chesterfield on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013 with 49 flowers. It was awarded the Farrer Memorial Medal and the Chatsworth Trophy for the best pan of bulbous plant. The following week 13<sup>th</sup> April 2013 at the South West AGS Show at Exeter it was awarded Best Plant in the Show. I also put it up to the RHS Joint Rock Garden Committee where it was awarded a First Class Certificate (FCC) and a Cultural Commendation Certificate.

The bulb consists of 3 – 10 globose scales, 1-2 cm in diameter surrounded by many small bulbils. Stem 10 – 33 cm glabrous; basal leaves 1 – 4, petiole 10 – 24 cm, slender, leaf blade elliptic or oval 3 -5.5 x 2 – 2.8 cm apex acute; inflorescence 1 – flowered bracts 3 or 4, crowded suboblong, 2 – 3cm x 5 – 6 mm. Flowers solitary semi-nodding, campanulate, pedicel short. Tepals yellow, tessellated with purple chequering in lower two-thirds, suboblong – elliptic, 3 – 4 x 0.7 – 1.4 cm, papillose – tuberculate adaxially, apex obtuse, nectaries inconspicuous. Stamens 1.5 – 2 cm, filaments glabrous, anthers subdorsifixed. Style 3 –lobed, lobes 5 – 6mm. Flowers March to May in the wild.

I grow this plant in a 31 cm clay half pot in a compost consisting of 2 parts JI No 2, 1 part Multipurpose (Soiless Compost) and 1 part Grit, and the bulbs are planted at a depth of 5 cm. The pot is kept in a sand plunge in semi shade in its own place from where it is never moved (at my assistant's peril) except for exhibition.. This particular *Fritillaria* must be kept moist all the year round. It commences growth in the early Autumn and grows all through the Winter. In the Spring when it comes into full flower the leaves start to show signs of dieback by having yellow / brown edges. I find that it likes to have the bulbs close together and seems to flower better in the second year after repotting.



*Fritillaria reuteri*  
by Jean  
Morris, using  
64 different  
shades of  
DMC  
embroidery  
thread (see  
page 9).

# Kaydale Lodge

By Bob Charman

Lesley Crowden's father and subsequently his wife Kay and their daughters, Lesley and Amarlie, have lived on the 70-hectare farm at Nietta on the NW coast of Tasmania since 1963. As a family they have all been involved in the development of this amazing 2 hectare garden. There was no planting at all around the original cottage so the transformation that has taken place since Robert and Kay built their new home in 1979 is nothing short of miraculous. There are many different aspects to the grounds, and most of the planting has been done on a grand scale.

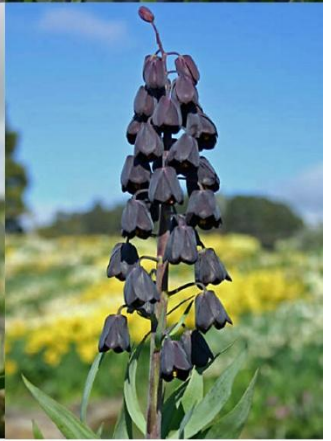
The main rockery contains a large variety of plants such as succulents and saponarias as well as small rare bulbs such as Trilliums and Erythroniums. All these thrive in the sheltered spots between the 160 tonnes of rock brought in from the farm. In 2005 a new bulb rockery was built. Large rocks were raised hip-high for three reasons: drainage, ease of weeding and a great opportunity to get up close to see the flowers. Though she grows lots of other bulbs in it, this was created mainly for Lesley's collection of *Fritillaria*. She has grown 37 different varieties to flowing size from our Group's seed distribution. She enjoys the challenge of growing all rare bulbs from seed but says fritillaries are her favourite genus.

She digs 7mm crushed basalt into the soil then uses it again as a mulch approximately 15mm deep. This keeps the soil temperature up to 4 degrees warmer than straight soil. As you will see from the collage of photos, she is a very successful grower. Lesley also developed a *Fritillaria* meadow which she wrote about in journal no. 19 (autumn 2006).

Lesley very kindly sent us a copy of the book the family had printed to celebrate the 35 anniversary of their garden. Looking at the wonderful photos makes us realize we have no right to complain about the work in our own garden, which is a tiny postage stamp by comparison!

I would recommend visiting their website: [www.kaydalelodge.com.au](http://www.kaydalelodge.com.au), or following them on Facebook or Instagram.









A recent photo of the rockery (above) and the fritillary lawn (below)



## Meritorious Frits

By Rannveig Wallis

The Award of Garden Merit (AGM) is awarded by the Royal Horticultural Society as a practical guide to gardeners to help highlight plants which the Society, or rather its various plant committee members, knows perform well. It is awarded to those that are:

1. Excellent for ordinary use in appropriate conditions
2. Available
3. Of good constitution
4. Essentially stable in form and colour
5. Reasonably resistant to pests and diseases

The assessment may be made in one or more of the following ways: trials, examination of specialist collections, and discussions between committee members and specialist growers. There are presently ten species and forms of *Fritillaria* which hold this prestigious award. But should they? What do you think? Our comments are based on our experience both in wet west Wales (1700 mm rain p.a.) and drier West Sussex (750mm).

*F. meleagris* (AGM 2012) and its var *unicolor* subvar *alba* (AGM 1993). Presumably the latter is *F. meleagris alba* offered by many bulb companies. In our experience this Frit fulfils all the above criteria and is a plant that no garden should be without. As an aside: it seems strange that the white form which is the minority in wild populations received the AGM before the typical species. This grows and flowers extremely well in a wet bit of grass verge in our garden where it was started by planting about fifty 2 year old seedlings which we had raised ourselves maybe 12 year ago. It now numbers several hundred flowering plants and countless seedlings for the future.

*F. pontica* (AGM 2003). We did not try this outside in Sussex but in west Wales, where they have survived in our garden for many years. However they have lately declined possibly because it is too wet where we tried them. We also suspect that slugs may have had something to do with their decline. Maybe we should have moved them into a new place after a few years. We will try again!

*F. pyrenaica* (AGM 1993). In our opinion, this is another one which no garden should be without. It fulfils the criteria with the exception of availability. It is surprising that none of the well-known bulb catalogues list this species so it is best to raise it from seed which is readily available in the Fritillaria Group's seed exchange and from the Alpine Garden Society.

*F. pallidiflora* (AGM 1993). We find this rather difficult in pots both from seed and purchased bulbs but it is readily available in the trade. When we first arrived in West Wales, we planted it out in a rather inappropriate spot and it survived for a few years but then succumbed. Until now we have not had enough to try again but we have now planted some young bulbs in a variety of sites in the garden and will see what it does.

*F. acmopetala* (AGM 1993). As stated in the AGM literature, it certainly needs fertile, well- drained soil and full sun but with us in west Wales, the copious rain kills it. Does anyone succeed with this outside?

*F. amana* 'Cambridge'. (AGM 1997). Only one catalogue lists the incorrectly named *F. hermonis amana*, which is presumably this species, but not the named form 'Cambridge'. In my opinion, this fails in four, if not five, of the above categories. It spawns plenty of bulblets so it is easy to build up in a pot but it does not survive outside in Wales.

*F. persica* 'Adiyaman' (AGM 1996). Although the unnamed species is available in many catalogues, the dark purple brown form 'Adiyaman' is only named in one. However, I suspect that this is the only such coloured one widely in cultivation so they are probably all 'Adiyaman' or very similar to it. While this did survive for a few years in Sussex, it only lasted one winter in Wales. It needs a well-drained sunny or even hot position for it to last from year to year.

*F. imperialis* (AGM 2012) and its form 'Maxima Lutea' (AGM 1993). This appears in many catalogues under a large variety of names. It fulfils the above criteria but with us, none flowers particularly well in Wales. On the other hand, both the unnamed orange and a yellow form were a joy in a hot dry herbaceous border in Sussex if you can stand the foxy smell.

In view of our high rainfall we do not deliberately plant Frits outside as we fear it may be a death sentence. However, we have had *F. affinis* growing and flowering outside for a number of years but this year it failed to come up. Maybe the

winter was too wet. It was an accidental introduction to the garden having been thrown out with old potting compost which is used regularly to top dress our garden. We have a similar success with *F frankiiorum*. This has done well in a slightly raised bed against a south-facing wall and has flowered for the last three years and produced lots of bulblets which will hopefully mature.

We have all tried these and many other fritillaries outside so please can you let us know how they are doing and whether they match up to the above AGM criteria. I do wonder if we are missing some really good garden plants or is this selection too ambitious in your experience? Members may want to consult the article written by Jack Elliott (Quart Bull AGS 66(3): 265 (1998)) for his experiences in drier eastern Kent.

---



Jean Morris's *Fritillaria carica* (see page 9)



£3.50

[www.fritillaria.org.uk](http://www.fritillaria.org.uk)

