

# Robin and Joan Grout

There is a plaque in memory of Robin and Joan Grout in the Botanic Garden at Wollaton and members of longstanding remember them as true plantspeople. We are very proud to count them among the founder members of the Hardy Plant Society Nottingham Group.



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## Extract from "Wollaton's Secret Garden"

*the story of the Nottingham Group of the Hardy Plant Society's Botanic Garden at Wollaton Park by Derek Martin et al, 2000*

JOAN AND ROBIN GROUT - Both Joan and Robin passed away within seven months of each other in 1999. They had the distinction of being founder members of both the National Society and the Nottingham Group. Joan served for many years as the Group's representative on the National Conservation Sub-Committee, and Robin was the Group's first elected Chairman. He also became the National Vice-Chairman until he was forced to stand down through ill-health. Both were made Vice-Presidents of the Group in recognition of their valuable service.

Joan and Robin always had a good eye for the unusual or 'garden-worthy' plant and were responsible for the introduction of several new varieties such as *Linaria purpurea* 'Thurgarton Beauty', *Linaria purpurea* 'Radcliffe Innocence', *Pulmonaria* hybrid 'Joan's Red', *Pulmonaria mollis* 'St Annes', *Pulmonaria* hybrid 'Patrick Bates' and *Galanthus* hybrid 'Lady Buchanan'<sup>1</sup>.

They will be remembered for their infectious enthusiasm and for their immensely amusing and informative 'double-act' talks which they gave up and down the country. They will be sorely missed. . . .

## A Variegated Garden

By John and Audrey Widdison, *The Bulletin of the Hardy Plant Society* - 1978 Vol. 5, No. 4

**Introduction** When Joan and Robin Grout came to the East Midlands nine years ago from Bedfordshire, they settled on a hilltop in the pleasantly undulating countryside between Nottingham and Newark, only a mile or two from Southwell Minster. Their new home stood in the middle of a half acre field, its only feature a cluster of trees on one boundary. This was the bare bones which, with Robin's muscle and planning and Joan's fervent plant collecting, became the Variegated Garden. Like most successful projects, it started simply, with long borders on the boundaries, each year seeing new developments in island beds, a rock garden and pool, a dry bed for "silvers" etc.

Beds and borders are now crammed full. The number of varieties tops the two thousand mark, and the scope of the ever increasing collection is wide, comprising shrubs, alpines, bulbs and plants for house and greenhouse, but at the heart is an unusually large selection of hardy plants. The quest for unusual forms led to an emphasis on 'variegateds' which became a consuming passion and resulted in the formation five years ago of a Nursery devoted to this phenomenon of plant life.

**Theme and Variegations** A visitor will approach from the main road along a short tree lined lane. At the garden gate, a little semi-circular bed presents a microcosm of things to come, with variegated forms of such familiar plants as bugle, balm, mint, sedum arabis and London Pride. One's impression from the gate is of a pretty house 'planted in' a modern conception of a cottage garden with flowing beds and harmonious plant associations.

The visitor's reflections may well be interrupted by the attentions of a friendly Jack Russell terrier. Her name is Becky and she needs to have plenty of character to hold her own with the seven or eight and sometimes more cats in the household, most of whom are, of course, variegated. Becky's warm welcome will be echoed by the Grouts----their enthusiasm is infectious----and during the garden tour, every unusual plant will be given its correct name and provenance, though no common plant is ever despised or overlooked.

The gravel drive is flanked by a deep border which provides winter cheer in the form of variegated shrubs, notably *Euonymus japonicus Macrophyllus Argenteo variegatus* which Joan says 'Shines out in Winter' as does its gold form nearby. Infilling are hardy plants, *Penstemon* 'White Bedder' and *P.* 'Alice Hindley', pale lilac, dainty *Aster tradescantia*<sup>3</sup> from Miss Allen's collection at Wraxall and on the edge *Stachys byzantinus*, similar to *S. lanata* but with larger flower spikes and even more beautiful leaves, 'A fine sight when in full fig'.

Across the drive, a bed of sun lovers in silver and purple features *Cnicus diacantha*<sup>1</sup>, yet to flower but with striking rosettes of narrow spiny leaves strongly veined with white, various *Artemisias*, *Sedums*<sup>2</sup> 'Ruby Glow' and 'Vera Jameson' and purple irises. In the heavy rains last May this 'dry' bed was under several inches of water when the pond overflowed

and fish were found wandering on the lawn, yet ironically the margins of the pond are not damp enough for the variegated figwort *Scrophularia nodosa* 'Variegata' to give of its best, though 'Inshriach Hybrid' primulas<sup>4</sup> give a good account of themselves here.

The long border near the lane is another dry area where two special *Linarias* thrive; the pink form of *L. triornithophora* which though not very hardy comes true from seed and covers itself with appealingly 'potbellied' snapdragons and *L.* 'Thurgarton Beauty' with deep rose spires of much tinier snapdragons, which appeared in the garden, and is probably a cross between *L. purpurea* and *L. dalmatica*.

*Montbretia*<sup>5</sup> 'Honey Angels' is a charming form with rather wide light green leaves and soft yellow flowers and *Valeriana pyrenaica* has big heart shaped leaves and domed heads of pink flowers at 2ft. Very many forms of *Pulmonaria* grace the garden, a favourite genus indeed, especially *P. argentea* with silver washed leaves, *P. longifolia* which has brilliant clear blue flowers, and *P. linifolia* with arching narrow spotted leaves.

Their extensive library of garden literature has had its influence on the Grouts, and their favourite authors are revealed as the garden tour proceeds, as in 'Margery Fish liked . . . ' or 'Mr Bowles said . . . ' and never more noticeably than when discussing the dozens of different hardy geraniums flourishing at Thurgarton. To name but three of the rarer ones, first a dark form of *G. nodosum*, then a rather nice bush hybrid probably between 'Claridge Druce' and *phaeum*, and lastly one bought as *G. maculatum* 'Variegatum' but now thought to be *G. phaeum* 'Variegatum' with lovely 'tide marks' of cream and two shades of green.

With so much to take in, the dedicated Hardy Planter will eschew the delights of the Rock Garden lest darkness fall ere he end his tour, but he must not miss the narrow beds at the foot of the house wall where a 'pampered few' are given some shelter from the icy blasts. In late Summer, he may see the most hardy of the Dahlias *D. merckii* from Mexico which Graham Stuart Thomas describes tellingly as 'a typical yet slender and refined species with single, small pure lilac blooms.....in complete and striking contrast the central cone is maroon with yellow stamens. Also from Mexico, a small pink flowered *Oenothera (mexicana)* recently acquired has delighted the owners, though one of the authors unkindly dismissed it as 'too like a willowherb'. Sharing the same plot, but from the other side of the world, is *Eucomis comosa (punctata)* an alluring plant with a rosette of dusky leaves ribbed palest green and a close set cylinder of pink beige stars violet centred.

Returning to the open borders, herbaceous plants clamour for attention; two variegated comfrees in *Symphytum uplandicum* 'Variegatum' and *S. grandiflorum* 'Variegatum' and three variegated Brunneras----- *B.* 'Langtrees' in which the leaf's centre is speckled with silvery grey, from Dr Rogerson's garden in Devon. *B.* 'Hadspen Cream' with strong lime yellow zones, raised by Eric Smith in Somerset, and the already popular *B. macrophylla* 'Variegata' with creamy white shadings on heart shaped leaves from Douglas Dawson.

In their search for the uncommon, the conservation of old and rare cultivars such as the hen and chickens' daisy *Bellis perennis* 'Prolifera' has become dear to Joan and Robin and when lecturing they invite students to keep an eye open for the double sweet rocket or the old double scarlet lychnis.

In July a bed of silvers, pinks and mauves charms the eye with its centrepiece of salsify (*Tragopogon porrifolius*) all soft purple with brown and purple involucre like little crowns at two and a half feet. Here too is *Erigeron philadelphicus*, described by G.S.T. as a

'meek plant' but none the worse for it, we would add, barely one and a half feet, dumpy little daisy flowers with yellow centres and short swirly pink petals.

Beyond a small vegetable patch, a greenhouse protects the more tender 'variegateds' and others and aids propagation of the tricky ones, and beyond again, the inherited clump of trees, sycamore, birch, copper beech and turkey oak, has become a little wood, carpeted with periwinkles, lamiums, hellebores including *H. foetidus* 'Variegatus' underplanted with bulbs; Joan recalls that it was the sight of snowdrops and daffodils coming through what had been a wilderness of nettles that persuaded them it was possible to stay and make a garden.

Their decision was our good fortune; not only have they made an enchanting garden, a plantsman's garden but the Nottingham Group has benefited from their wide knowledge, willingly shared, and the leading part they have taken in its development.

The modifying influence of green flowered plants is used to good effect here; not only the various alchemillas and euphorbias but also *Bupleurum*; *B. angulosum* 18in. high with little green 'cauliflowers' sitting in green cups an inch or so across, and *B. falcatum* as tall again with slender stems and greeny tufts of flower, a rare British native. Playing a similar role are the many grasses and Robin's botanical know-how will sort these out for the visitor. As one turns back towards the house some cool lemons delight the eye in *Potentilla detommasii* with faintly hairy leaves, *P. recta pallida*, *Oenothera stricta sulphurea* which never fails to captivate with creamy cups ageing to apricot, *Urospermum dalechampii* with lemon and buff daisy flowers so elegant in bud and the subtle grey green foliage of *Phlomis chrysophylla*.

Old roses and their special favourites the trouble free Rugosas are used as space and colouring benefit. These and all the other plants seem so at home, owing so much to thoughtful placing as in the peat walls for calcifuges and troughs for little treasures. By a small area devoted to winter interest containing variegated hebes, ivies used as ground cover and a variegated tulip tree, the visitor will end his tour.

But the hunt goes on! with frequent sorties and excursions to bring back new treasures, eagle eyes ever alert for the rare, the unusual, the variegated! Sometimes, a find on their own doorstep, a variegated bindweed from a nearby field, carefully potted, looking a trifle sickly or, perhaps, a little overawed by its elevation to the greenhouse bench....

1. *Cirsium diacantha*
2. *Hylotelephium*
3. *Symphyotrichum tradescantii*
4. *Primula bulleesiana*
5. *Crocsmia*

## Joan and Robin Grout

by Sue Scarrott

Joan and Robin Grout were arguably the 'pioneers' of the Radcliffe gardening community and I was privileged to help them with their garden during their later lives. Together with their friend, Jean Harris, they regularly opened under the NGS Scheme and welcomed visitors from all over the country into their beautiful 'quart in a pint pot' garden.



I regularly visited the garden on open days and always felt an element of excitement upon each visit. The plant stall always drew me in like a magnet as there was always something special to buy that Joan and Robin had grown themselves. It was on one of these visits that Joan introduced me to Geranium 'Mary Mottram', a brand new plant to cultivation with delicate white flowers. 'Mary Mottram' was discovered by Joan in her very own garden and named after her friend who ran a nursery in Devon. Mary Mottram also had a polemonium and a pulmonaria named after her which are still readily available today.

Along with Geranium 'Mary Mottram', Joan and Robin also discovered Pulmonaria 'Joan's Red' as a chance seedling which forms a compact plant with pink/red flowers.

I enjoyed helping Robin and Joan with their garden and Robin taught me a lot, including information you wouldn't even find in a book. His main interest was hellebores and I can remember that he had a white one which he had hoped to name after Jean Harris but, sadly, I am not aware of this actually happening. Robin had one hellebore plant where the flowers faced slightly upwards and would like to have improved on it further. Joan and Robin did a talk on hellebores at Radcliffe Gardening Club and they were also members.

Despite their extensive knowledge, Joan and Robin did not always agree on certain elements of gardening. One particular spring, I remember Robin cutting back Clematis 'Niobe' to the ground by mistake, much to Joan's horror! However, it went on to flower better than it ever had before.

One of Robin's proudest moments was growing tree peony, *Paeonia rockii* from seed which was a huge achievement. It took centre stage in the garden and I remember seeing it in full bloom. After Robin died I helped Joan scatter his ashes under it. When Joan died, it was taken to the HPS Botanic Garden at Wollaton and I ensured that some of the soil went with it.

One of Joan and Robin's favourite places to visit was Potterton and Martin Nursery which they visited with their friend, Geoff Denman. The trio would often go on trips to garden shows together and, on one occasion, Joan and Geoff purchased some bulbs of Narcissus 'Foundling'. When the bulbs came up the following year, Joan's came true but poor Geoff had some rogue bulbs and they did not remotely resemble what he believed to have purchased the year before. This amused Joan greatly and caused much discussion between the pair. By coincidence, I found some narcissus bulbs poking through the soil in Joan's garden just after she died and took them home. I could see that they were small but was surprised to discover that they were 'Foundling'. I remembered the ongoing joke and promptly gifted them to Geoff.

Joan loved variegated plants and she would walk around her garden with a leaf or a flower to help her decide where to plant something. She was particularly fond of dark leaves which she would often plant with white flowers. I can remember pots full of *Tulbaghia violacea* under the window and *Lobelia tupa* in the front borders. Joan and Robin both loved euphorbias and 'Lambrook Gold' was a particular favourite. They also loved *Corydalis* 'George Baker' and *Sanguinaria canadensis*, the double form which grew at the bottom of the garden.

Robin held a National Collection of species crocus which he kept in his greenhouse. The Grouts also had over a hundred different snowdrops in their garden which were well documented. In their will, they requested that some of the snowdrops be sold and the proceeds donated to Pershore college.

## Colour and foliage harmony

by Joan Grout, *The Bulletin of the Hardy Plant Society* - 1972, Vol. 4, no. 4.

Irene Feeseey's notes in the 1971 Bulletin on plant associations in her garden prompted me to look round my own small patch, high on a hill in Nottinghamshire, for particularly happy groupings.

Some of the most delightful have been obtained with the most ordinary materials. The common, but still beautiful, old *Iris sibirica* with its grassy foliage and hovering purple butterfly flowers provides a lovely background for the fernlike leaves and clear pink daisy flowers of *Pyrethrum* 'E. M. Robinson'. The pyrethrum<sup>1</sup> of course, needs good drainage but the iris is so good tempered it gives a good account of itself anywhere, providing the site is not bone dry.

Here in Nottinghamshire, we have to make as good use as we can of our sunny walls, so *Caryopteris x clandonensis* is given a small amount of precious space under a west window. With my insatiable desire to stuff every bed as full as I possibly can, it shares its home with another clump of *Pyrethrum* 'E. M. Robinson' and *Geranium endressii* 'A.T.Johnson'. In early summer, the rather stiff stems of the pyrethrum are softened by the embracing arms and delicate silvery pink flowers of the geranium, which continues to earn its keep covering the dying stems and then enhances the glorious autumnal blue of the caryopteris by wreathing in and out of its stems.

In a large sunny border of rather heavy soil, another combination of blue and pink always excites comment; it is based on a large plant of the lovely summer-long flowering *Malva sylvaticum* 'Primley Blue'<sup>2</sup>. Although the late Margery Fish described the colour as rather dull, here the flowers are clear lavender enlivened by the lines of darker blue. Growing close to it (too close, if the truth were known) is another large plant, *Polygonum campanulatum*<sup>3</sup>, whose old name of 'shelly bells' describes it so aptly. With all the easy temper and long flowering habit of its many brethren it is completely free from their invasive tendencies and from a small clump of its fascinatingly veined leaves, it grows into a 3ft. Tall mass of 3 in. heads of dainty soft pink bells which mingle with the flat mallow flowers most charmingly. A planting of the lovely deep pink *Monarda* 'Croftway Pink' emphasises the colour scheme until September, when the theme is taken up at the back of the group by that fine form of *Aster novae-angliae*<sup>4</sup> 'Harrington's Pink'.

Another most satisfying planting in a sunny border was purely fortuitous. Having bought *Penstemon* 'Ophelia'<sup>5</sup>, listed as "pretty-pink and white" and having nowhere else to plant it at the time, I put it next to *Achillea* 'Moonshine', and the result has been sheer delight in the later months of the year. 'Ophelia' does not begin to bloom until late September, by which time the soft gold plates of 'Moonshine' have been cut off, and the large and brilliant salmon-flame bells of the penstemon blaze and glow against the feathery silver foliage at the base of the achillea.

So many noted horticultural writers have heaped such scornful epithets upon magenta flowers that for a long time I was very wary, eschewing them myself until I came upon one of the most effective garden pictures I have ever seen. In the very lovely garden of an artist, just round a corner, one was met by the brilliance of a large group of *Geranium*

*psilostemon* underplanted with *Geranium sanguineum prostratum* poised at the base of the dark green of a tall yew hedge. Since then, I have been bolder in my use of that much maligned shade and have found great fascination in the juxtaposition of identical colouring with different flower shapes. At the edge of a big mixed bed of varying foliage colours is a broad band of magenta-cerise composed of many different small plants.

The stubby flower heads of *Prunella* 'Pink Loveliness'<sup>16</sup> come first and last for most of the summer then, above their flat carpet of dark green leaves the slender tapering spires of *Veronica spicata* 'Barcarolle' contrast with the bushy mass of the aromatic long-lasting *Calamintha grandiflora*. One of the turtle heads, *Chelone obliqua*, comes next, its terminal spikes of deep rose flowers showing up well against the broad dark green leaves. Beyond them the dwarf Michaelmas daisy 'Alice Haslam' carries the magenta-cerise colour in its simple composite shape until late in the season; while further round the corner, *Geranium* 'Russell Prichard' flaunts its beautifully shaped flowers against the silvery sheen of its leaves throughout the season. Linking the whole scheme together are self-sown seedlings of the old fashioned *Salvia horminum*, in just the right shade of brilliant pink.

I find oranges and reds difficult colours to place satisfactorily in mixed borders and my solution, which is to group them in one eye-clashing mass, has proved successful beyond my hopes. And when my husband finds time to whiten the wall against which they grow, they will make a most striking feature. Against a backcloth of the climbing *Eccremocarpus scaber*; *Geum x borisii*, *Potentilla* 'Roxanne', *Papaver rupifragum* and the tiny and attractive *Mimulus* 'Scarlet Bee' riot all summer---to be joined next year by *Lychnis chalcidonica* and as many of my selected kniphofia seedlings as will provide the right impact.

1. *Tanacetum coccineum* 'Eileen May Robinson'
2. *Malva sylvestris* var. *Mauritiana* 'Primley Blue'
3. *Persicaria campanulata*
4. *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*
5. *Penstemon* 'Ophelia' no longer available
6. *Prunella grandiflora* 'Pink Loveliness'

## A Quart into a Pint Pot

by Joan and Robin Grout, *The Hardy Plant Journal* - Autumn 1992 - Vol.14, No. 2

The story that Joan and Robin Grout recalled at the 1992 AGM was their experience of two gardens; moving in Nottinghamshire from half an acre at Thurgarton, to a sixth of an acre at Radcliffe-on-Trent - the 'quart into a pint pot' of the title.

In 1969 when they moved to Thurgarton, the house hadn't been lived in for two years nor the garden touched for longer. When the wind blew, and it did almost constantly (Thurgarton is some 550ft [170m] high with no higher point between it and the Urals) work continued indoors on the first three editions of the *Hardy Plant Directory*; in fact the measure of universal hardiness was practical success in Nottingham.

The first challenge was a bank of forest trees at the end of the garden presumably planted as a shelter belt; under them were planted hellebores, hardy geraniums, primroses, tiarellas and periwinkles as ground cover. Nettles were another early problem but in time they largely succumbed to an over-generous cover of *Lamium galeobdolon* (syn. *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*), yellow archangel.

An initial mystery was the old 'burial barrow', 15yds (14m) long by 5yds (4.5m) wide, along the front of the house. This pile of subsoil covered with bindweed, couch grass and nettles, proved in the first winter to be a barrier between the house and a 'spring line'. Robin spoke feelingly of the three years it took him to dig out the 'barrow', sift the weed infested soil and construct an extensive rockery area. Fortunately Thurgarton had been famed for five hundred years for its Norman priory, that is until Henry VIII demolished all but one tower; the village is littered with massive chunks of stone. Most inhabitants built houses, cottages, barns and walls with the relics: the Grouts built a rockery. In the various pockets different alpinists grew and flourished, each with its chosen soil type in a north-facing cliff.

Grass mowing is never a welcome task so an ever-increasing number of island beds were cut out of the lawn. A present of a cut-leaved golden elder gave Joan the idea of creating a golden-foliage bed interplanted with pale primrose and lemon flowers. Early horticultural writers emphasised that plants should be grouped in drifts of five or even seven to maximum impact; which is fine if one has the space of Gertrude Jekyll. The Grout's experience, in contrast, proved that groupings of different plants, matched for colour, provided impact and much more interest than groups of a single species. (Later, on moving to a small garden, the ideas that had succeeded in that first colour planned island bed were used in planning the new garden.)

A pink and silver planned bed never came up to expectations until *Geranium clarkei* 'Kashmir White' with its pink veining was planted beside *Centaurea montana* 'Carnea' (syn. *Centaurea montana rosea*) - the perfect match. Another example of colour matching was *Geranium himalayense* 'Plenum' with *Centaurea montana* 'Violetta'.

A new border, planned to provide a focal point, was found to be full of gravel - an incredible discovery in a garden of Keuper Marl, a sticky red clay common in Nottinghamshire. Obviously both soil and climate dictate what one grows and this presented an opportunity to introduce silver foliage plants. In search of flower colour *Iris sibirica* and *Libertia formosa* were introduced and flourished in the well-drained triangular border.

The pond and spring area still posed a problem in winter so an artificial stream was constructed to carry the excess water to a bog area. This provided a marvellous feature for growing hostas, irises, sedges and a host of variegated plants which had long been an obsession, and initiated Joan's nursery area.

One of the last projects was the construction of an oversized patio to accommodate garden visitors. (A hundred visitors were expected on the first open day in 1977: five hundred arrived!). A low enclosing wall provided an exciting site for many conservation finds including *Lobelia* 'Kathleen Mallard' not hardy of course and to make propagation more difficult, a 'double'! At the turn of the century there were about forty double bedding lobelia but alas with this one exception, they have all vanished. The story goes that an old and expert gardener in Birmingham kept 'Kathleen Mallard' viable by constant overwintering of cuttings. Resembling a tiny blue rose with a slightly paler centre, it is now relatively easy to obtain. (In their next garden more walls were built to allow planting to the very edge of borders and raised beds.)



Following six months of preparing cuttings and divisions the 'move' took place in September 1982. Assisted by family and friends, four van loads of furniture and five of plants, nine cats, countless chimneys, troughs, pots and assorted garden equipment made the ten-mile journey to the new home at Radcliffe-on-Trent. The garden, 60yd (55m) long by 12yd (11m) wide, was a sensible reduction to a so-called semi-retirement home, though seemed small at first. The presence of over 2000 individual plants needing attention spurred the new owners into activity. Though there was an initial plan on paper, like most gardens it has since evolved. Design of a small garden is a critical but delightful occupation, even therapeutic; though a possible cause of marital disharmony.

The first priority was making extra space. The front garden meandered down to the pavement with a vaguely formal layout. Joan has always insisted that hardy plants demand informality for effect and the central narrow strip of grass needed cutting by hand, an excellent reason for changing the layout. The entrance drive was reduced in width for an extra 2yd (1.8m) of planting space and by building a low double wall at least a yard and a half (1.3m) was gained in the length. The extra space allowed the introduction of specialist soils, notably where a 18in (45cm) depth of gravel and grit was covered with an alpine-type compost - a scree bed on a level site for a mass of species crocus and tulips together with difficult alpinists extending interest through the year. A new gravel bed was prepared in which clay pots with special dwarf conifers were buried to the neck where they have survived the recent hot dry summers on a south-facing slope.

A surviving *Rhododendron ponticum* indicated a mildly acid soil (red sandstone marl above a stratum of gypsum) allowing the pleasure of growing dwarf rhododendrons and azaleas, denied in the previous garden. One raised bed beneath the sitting-room windows now houses dwarf rhododendrons, hellebores, dwarf hostas and a host of variegated dwarf shrubs for winter interest. Special dwarf hostas have now become a passion and Joan, rescuing them from snail damage and smothering by other plants, now pots them up and stands them on the low walls.

In a small garden every inch of space must be used; hedges were replaced with fencing to supply shelter and support for climbers. Five old apple trees remained and these now carry their complement of climbing roses and clematis chosen for spring and autumn colour. Joan admits to failure in having only twenty clematis; Gladys Tonge has over fifty in her smaller garden.

An illusion of depth to the garden was successfully achieved by siting dark colours nearer the house and paler ones beyond. A recent addition has been a 'folly'; a diminished wrought-iron gate, backed by a mirror, placed in the hedge at the far end of the garden. Apart from causing consternation to the local wildlife, human visitors invariably make a direct line to it assuming that the garden must be a lot larger than they thought.

A slabbed path beside an ugly garage was lifted to provide a shady triangular bed for hellebores and hostas, and all-season plant combination for a damp shady bed. (The proximity of the river Trent, some 30ft (9m) below, and the growth of maturing trees and shrubs has contributed to create a favourable micro-climate in the garden and less hardy and difficult plants thrive. At Thurgarton hellebores died out after 3-4 years: in the present garden soil and siting being kinder, there is a profusion of them.) An attractive winter backcloth to the bed - obscuring the garage - is provided by a silver variegated hedgehog holly, *Ilex aquifolium* 'Ferox', a cutting from Stephen Taffler, and a variegated *Aucuba japonica* 'Sulphurea Marginata'. There are about ten different hellebores in the bed including

*Helleborus x nigercors* with its beautiful alabaster flowers lasting from January through till late April. It is followed by *Helleborus guttatus* 'Prince Rupert' an old white variety with purple spotting. The leaves are cut-off early to show the flowers, then as the flowers fade to green, seeds are collected and the under planting of hostas reigns supreme. *Hosta fortunei* 'Aureoalba' introduced by Eric Smith of The Plantsmen nursery and now known as 'Spinners' (from Peter Chappell at Lymington) has pride of place among twelve other blue, variegated and dwarf varieties together with *H. undulata* var. *univittata*.

Under the shade of the apple trees another stone-edged raised bed provided an ideal site for a peat garden - with equal measures of sedge peat and garden soil. *Sanguinaria canadensis* 'Plena', *Corydalis solida* 'George P. Baker', *Tricyrtis*, *Helleborus* and dwarf species of *Rhododendron* and *Pieris* compete with underplanted *Galanthus*, *Anemone* and dwarf *Narcissus*. The latest edition to this woodland corner include *Jeffersonia dubia*, *J.d.alba*, and *J.diphylla*, *Anemonopsis macrophylla* and *Iris milesii*. *Cardamine pentaphyllos* (syn. *Dentaria digitata*) though it does go to ground very early is a welcome woodlander. *Dicentra spectabilis* grows and flowers exuberantly, varieties of *Viola cornuta*, dwarf astilbes and the unjustifiably rare fair maids of France. (*Ranunculus acris* 'Flore Pleno'), shows well against the original single form.

On the sunny side of the garden, a home was found for the golden foliage collection using hazels, hypericum, hostas, oreganums, conifers and this time set off by the true blue flowers of *Delphinium* 'Alice Artindale', the only recorded fully double sky-blue delphinium, and a medley of *Clematis heracleifolia*, *Pulmonaria angustifolia*, *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*, polemoniums, eryngiums, blue chicory, and a multitude of spring bulbs. *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* 'Lambrook Gold' and the golden hop from Margery Fish still form the focal point of the border.

There are primrose and apricot island beds, pink and white island beds and purple foliage and white flowers in another. The more unusual whites include *Paeonia suffruticosa* 'Rock's Variety', *Campanula trachelium* 'Alba Flore Pleno', *Campanula persicifolia* 'Alba Coronata' and the most recent permanent introduction *Geranium* 'Mary Mottram'. Mary worked for Margery Fish before starting her own nursery in Devon and is well remembered as an enthusiastic HPS member. *Geranium endressii album* appeared only once on her plant list but Dr Peter Yeo has confirmed that it is a hybrid between *G. sylvaticum* 'Album' and *G. endressii*. It forms a neat clump about 1ft (30cm) tall covered in early summer with pure clear white flowers and, if dead headed, flowers again in the autumn. The name 'Mary Mottram' has been accepted.

With the soil excavated for a pond the obvious answer was to add rocks and create a rockery. Species tulips, *T. linifolia* Batalinii Group (syn. *T. batalinii*), *T. saxatilis* Bakeri Group (syn. *T. bakeri*) are at home here as the dwarf willows, daphnes, colchicums and autumn crocus and a 3ft (90cm) alpine cherry, *Prunus incisa*. Herbert Exton of Grantham had raised seedlings from cherry stones collected by a Japanese pen friend on Mount Fuji. Blooms of Bressingham, twenty-five years later, introduced this wonderful dwarf decorative cherry in 1991, ['Kojo-no-mai'] for the first time in the UK.

If any fellow hardy planters are regretfully coming to the conclusion that their garden is getting beyond them Joan and Robin Grout can assure them that moving can be great fun. One has to maximise the advantages and minimise the disadvantages. The prime advantages for them have been the diversity of planting possible with more shelter, more shade and more workable soil - and questionably 'less work'! They now have more plants

after nine years than they did in the larger garden after fourteen years but whereas most hardy planters plant 3ft (90cm) apart, their spacing has been reduced to 1ft (30cm) since more plants mean more satisfaction and less weeding! Small is beautiful and even in retirement they are having a whale of a time!

**Joan and Robin Grout** *have been long-standing and influential members of the HPS. With two other couples, they were the first to found a regional group and it was their idea to compile a directory of hardy plants, which has since evolved into The Plant Finder. Apart from collecting rare plants and conserving old ones Joan and Robin Grout welcome visitors from home and abroad to their small garden. - Ed.*

## Wandering around the garden with a plant pot in my hand

### *Verse 1 Joan & Robin Jointly*

We all enjoy our gardens....we like to see them.....nice!  
With some folks it's a virtue... with other it's a vice.  
To satisfy our cravings, we all buy plants galore,,  
And even when our garden's full... we go on buying more!

### *Chorus*

We're wandering round the garden with plant pots in our hands.....  
There's some spot in this garden, where they would look real grand;  
So, if you're a plant collector, we know you'll understand,  
Why we're wandering round the garden with plant pots in our hands!

### *Verse II - Robin Only*

Life is all uncertainties - we have our ups and downs,  
We start the day all happy....but often ends in frowns.  
But when depression strikes me... I don't go to the pub.....  
Just to a Garden Centre, where I buy another shrub!

### *Chorus*

We're wandering round the garden, with a plant pot in my hand....  
There's some spot in this garden, where it would look real grand;  
So, if you're a plant collector, we know you'll understand,  
Why I'm wandering round the garden with a plant pot in my hand!

### *Verse III - Joan Only*

I order lots of catalogues - collect them by the score....  
I order all the plants I need and then..... I order more.

But when, in time, the plants arrive - things never go to order....  
I look around the garden.... I've filled the ruddy border!

### *Chorus*

I'm wandering round the garden with a plant pot in my hand...  
There's some spot in this garden, where it would look real grand;

*Found in some HPS papers from member, Gwenda Watkins. But to what tune was it sung?  
Laughing Policeman?*

## An Affectionate Tribute to Robin Grout

*by Jean Harris, The Hardy Plant Journal - Autumn 1999 - Vol. 21, No.2*

With the death of Robin Grout in May 1999, the Hardy Plant Society has lost one of its longest-serving members and a staunch supporter.

Robin became involved with the Society when he was living and working in Bedfordshire during the early 1960s. Robin and Joan - and one cannot write or speak about one without the other, because they were truly a partnership - visited the Chelsea Flower Show where Barbara White was manning The Hardy Plant Society stand. They thought it sounded interesting and signed up there and then - the start of their involvement.

When Robin moved to Nottingham in 1968 to take up a post with the Boots Company, they lived in a house set in a third of an acre of land which gave them scope to develop a garden and also a small nursery devoted to variegated plants, which were Joan's special interest. They asked Barbara White if she could let them know of any other HPS members in the area and they met up with a few, and then more. They began meeting in each others' homes. When the membership grew to 20, it was agreed to hold proper meetings and they officially became the Nottingham Branch of the Hardy Plant Society, with Robin as their first Chairman. This was the first regional group and Robin led it through those early years when they attended flower shows and anywhere else they could set up a stand to interest people in the Society. They were pioneering days in the hardy plant movement and Robin and his fellow committee members established a group which has grown and flourished ever since.

Robin and Joan continued to support the activities of the Nottingham Group and were made Vice-President some years ago in recognition of their major contribution over many years. They both served on the National Executive Committee and Robin was elected as national Vice-Chairman but had to relinquish the post after a year because of ill health. During this time they were insistent that the Society should not be entirely London-based. They arranged the first national meeting to be held outside London - a two-day meeting in Derby in 1976 - as well as a visit to three Nottingham gardens, including their own, long before Summer Garden Visits became a regular feature in the national programme. They also initiated weekend garden visits in different parts of the country, which have since developed into the very popular Autumn Weekends.

Robin and Joan's other major innovation was to compile, with the help of several local members, an alphabetical directory listing hardy plants and their sources of supply. The Directory appeared in 1975 and was followed by three updated editions. In those pre-computer days it was a very tedious and time-consuming task. Eventually, Robin arranged with Chris Phillip to take over its production. Chris expanded and developed it to become The Plant Finder ...and the rest is history!

Robin and Joan formed a good double-act, giving entertaining and very popular talks about hardy plants to gardening groups in many parts of the country.. Robin was the photographer and slide operator and Joan did the talking - with interjections from Robin from time to time! This side of their activities developed even more when they left Thurgarton and moved to a small garden at Radcliffe-on-Trent. This was beautifully designed to give colour-themed beds and their talk, 'From a Quart to a Pint Pot' [The Hardy Plant, Autumn 1992] must have inspired many gardening folk with similar sized plots.

Their garden was planted with many treasures and has featured several times on television and in magazines. Robin loved working in the garden - even though Joan thought he was lethal with a pair of secateurs! - and he was well-known for his generosity with plants, seeds, and cuttings. One rarely left their garden without clutching a plastic bag containing a piece of something one had admired.

Robin will be remembered as an exceptionally kind, gentle and caring man and he is sadly missed by his many friends in the gardening world. He gave generously of his time and energies to the work of the Society and we have much to thank him for.

**Jean Harris** is a helper at Joan and Robin's Garden Open Days, is a former Chair of the Nottingham Group and formerly national Group Co-ordinator - Ed.

## Joan Grout, 23 April 1921 to 30 December 1999

*by Jean Harris, The Hardy Plant - Spring 2000 Vol. 22, No. 1*

With the death of Joan Grout, only seven months after her husband, Robin, the gardening fraternity has lost two very dear friends [see The Hardy Plant, Autumn 1999]. Theirs was a true partnership and together they made a major contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of hardy plants in particular, although their interests and expertise encompassed trees, shrubs and bulbs, especially Crocus and Galanthus.

They joined the HPS in the early 1960s and, when Robin's work took them to Nottingham in 1968, they helped to form the Nottingham Branch, as it was then called, the first of the society's regional groups. It was at this time that they began producing their Hardy Plant Directories, listing hardy plants and the nurseries where they could be found. They produced three editions of what was later developed by Chris Philip to become The Plant Finder.

In their early days in Nottingham Joan established a nursery devoted to variegated plants - she was a member of the HPS Variegated Plants Group from its beginning - and she was always on the look-out for interesting, unusual and special plants, right up to the last weeks of her life.

Upon Robin's retirement they moved to a much smaller property in Radcliffe on Trent. They became very well known on the speakers' circuit, travelling far and wide to give talks to



gardening groups. One of their most popular talks was called From a Quart to a Pint Pot [see The Hardy Plant, Autumn 1992], about the challenges of moving from a two-acre garden to a small suburban plot. That plot became full of treasures and was featured widely in the gardening press and on television.

Joan served for several years on the HPS Conservation Subcommittee and no doubt it was her commitment to conservation that led her to state in her will that the HPS should have first choice of the plants in her garden - she particularly wanted wider distribution of her large collection of snowdrops.

Joan and Robin had a great gift for friendship and they were much loved by a wide circle of gardening friends. They will be remembered for their enthusiasm, undimmed to the last; their generosity in sharing both their knowledge and their plants; their kindness and their sense of fun. Joan could never understand why people thought so highly of her and of what she and Robin had achieved together but they certainly were 'doers' who set in train much that is part of today's gardening scene - for which they will be remembered with gratitude and affection.

## The Gardener's Guide to Snowdrops

by Freda Cox - 2013

### **'Babraham Dwarf'**

Compact, neat plants. Rounded flowers olive-green ovary. Leaves semi-erect explicative, short at flowering. Inner segments tube-like olive-green 'U' or 'V' at apex, rounded ends. Mid-February. Robin and Joan Grout, Babraham, Cambridgeshire. 1985. *Galanthus nivalis* x *Galanthus plicatus*. Ht. 14cm.

### **'Babraham Scented' (Semi-double)**

Well shaped semi-double flowers. Outer segments broad, bluntly pointed. Inner segment ruff, outer whorl flared at apex, variable roughly heart-shaped mark. Good perfume. Robin and Joan Grout. Babraham Cambridgeshire 1985. Ht 12cm

According to Harvey's Garden Plants who call it *Galanthus plicatus* 'Babraham Dwarf':

The leaves are noticeably short at flowering time of mid February. It was found in 1985 by the late Robin and Joan Grout in a mixed colony of *nivalis* and *plicatus* at Babraham, Cambridgeshire.

## Pulmonarias

by Jennifer Hewitt, The Hardy Plant Society

### **Pulmonaria 'Joan's Red'**

Came from Joan Grout and is a very striking plant with dark green basal leaves and paler stem leaves, all boldly spotted and blotched bright silvery white. The basal leaves are quite large with blades about one and a half times the length of the

petioles and a third as wide as they are long; they widen and narrow gradually. It makes a compact clump. The flower heads are fairly closely clustered, on brown stems up to 22cm (9in) tall, and dark reddish-brown calyces hold bright pink to red flowers with short styles. It is said to be probably a cross between *P. rubra* and *P. saccharata* Argentea Group.

*[In a past HPS Newsletter The HPS Pulmonaria Group announced they had set up a Conservation Project aimed at conserving the worthwhile varieties no longer stocked by Nurseries. 'Joan's Red' was amongst a list of 40 Pulmonaria varieties they were seeking to obtain.]*

#### Pulmonaria 'Patrick Bates'

Given to Joan Grout by the raiser and named for him. It is a longifolia type of plant, making a close clump with long, narrow stem and basal leaves which are fresh green, brightly but moderately spotted and blotched. Some leaves are more heavily marked and between the spots there may be areas lightly dusted with silvery-green. The flower stems are upright at the centre of the clump while outer ones are spreading, up to 30 cm (12in) long; they are branched but each head is fairly closely clustered, with very dark calyces enclosing bright coral-red buds which become red-violet flowers, later mainly violet with red veins and edges. Short styles. A bold and effective plant in flower and leaf.

*[This plant was last listed in the RHS Plant Finder in 2006. It was not one of the varieties that the Pulmonaria Group were seeking.]*

#### Linaria 'Thurgarton Beauty'

Probably a cross between *Linaria purpurea* and *L. dalmatica*, this lovely linaria was found in Robin and Joan's garden and is still commercially available today.

#### Rosa 'Blushing Lucy'

Sue Scarrott writes,

"I recently spoke to John Gregory regarding a pink rose called Blushing Lucy. This was the only plant their son [John] wanted from the garden after they died. Luckily Joan had given me a pot of it only a few months previously, so I was able to give it to him."

*[Rosa 'Blushing Lucy' is a Rambler.]*