

HOW WE BECAME INVOLVED WITH IRISES

As members of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Alice and I regularly visited Wisley and lunched there on occasion. The path leading to the restaurant was bordered with a variety of plants each with a label giving the name and supplier. There were several strappy leaved evergreen plants that were labelled 'Banbury', such as 'Banbury Melody', 'Banbury Pageant' and 'Banbury Gem', supplied by Marjorie Brummitt. But, whenever we had visited Wisley they were never in flower. The reason why they were not in bloom was due to the fact that May was a difficult time for us to visit Wisley. However, in May 1983 we decided to look around Wisley and have lunch there. Lo and behold, by the path leading to the restaurant the border was a blaze of colour. We stopped in our tracks and marvelled at the beauty of these glorious irises. We visited the information desk at Wisley to find out more but little information was forthcoming, save the supplier was Marjorie Brummitt from Banbury. The name Banbury struck a chord with us as Cliff, our eldest son, had researched the genealogy of our surname and revealed the Baughen name was an ancestral source.

On the following Tuesday we visited the RHS Flower Show at Victoria, London and met Peter Maynard, Secretary of the British Iris Society. We learned that the irises were Pacific Coast Irises (PCIs) and that Marjorie was the leading hybridist. We were interested in buying some of these irises, Peter asked us what was our garden soil and when we replied alkaline he advised us not to proceed as these irises grow on neutral or acid soils. We went away rather disappointed, but then I thought 'I grow rhododendrons on alkaline conditions, I must be able to grow PCIs'. It was Mr Reuthe, of the famous rhododendron nursery at Ightham in Kent, who had advised me how to grow ericaceous plants in our alkaline soil. We had a garden with a varying depth of loam from 6-9 inches overlaying the chalk. The secret was to plant and mulch the plants with pine needles and this had proved to be very successful. Pine needles are very acid and mixed with alkaline conditions help to neutralise that alkalinity. So we set about purchasing some PCIs and that really set us up in growing irises. They thrived and we enjoyed wonderful displays of colour.

We joined the British Iris Society and explored the wide range of irises and became hooked and began to grow Bearded irises, Siberian irises, Spuria irises, Reticulata irises, Oncocyclus irises and Juno irises. My interest in irises developed rapidly and as a result I enjoyed displaying them at the national and Kent Group shows winning many prizes. I have ventured into hybridising Bearded irises and my most successful introduction is 'Cliff Baughen' which is currently on trial at the RHS Garden at Wisley. At the end of the three-year trial it will be judged and possibly win the Award of Garden Merit (AGM). Also 'Philippa Baughen', a yellow Spuria iris I named after my granddaughter and introduced received good reviews and was awarded the RHS AGM.

I became editor of the *Iris Year Book*, published by the British Iris Society, for nine years and have served as President of the British Iris Society from 2004-2006 and am now a lifetime Vice President.