One Man–One Wood

DAVID SAMPSON

Gerry Mundey 1926-1989.

In paying tribute to Gerry Mundey I realise that many members will not be familiar with his name or his woodland home, Tinney's Firs, but like so many before him there are specific plants that will always have an association with an individual, whether it is an individual genus or borne on a person's reputation as a plantsman able to cultivate a broad range of plants. For Gerry it will surely be his work with the petiolarid primulas, in particular to the hybrids he raised and named which were prefixed with "Tinney's". However, this was just one facet of his horticultural talent, and not the only hybridising programme he was engaged in. Orchids, especially the dactylorhizas and pleiones, and Gesneriaceae were two other subjects undergoing similar treatment. These needed laboratory conditions and a scientific approach, both of which were facilities he had. The study of the hardy Gesneriaceae must have made him one of the few authorities on the family and he must surely be credited with securing *X Jankaeamonda vandedemii* in cultivation, a plant he offered in his plant list of 1989.

Gerry was also an accomplished naturalist and when he acquired Tinney's Firs he was able to satisfy both passions. He purchased Tinney's in the late seventies, a small woodland so he told me of 25ha on the edge of the New Forest, and although rather neglected it was just the property he had in mind. As one might imagine many diverse habitats could be found within the wood, creating a range of communities within a very short distance. Such were the extremes that the dry sandy banks, home for the badgers, and large wet areas of sphagnum moss bog were only a matter of a few yards apart. Largely these would be left undisturbed but on occasions some intervention was necessary, such as when a colony of purple emperor butterfly caterpillars were found feeding on a scruffy stand of willows. The following winter was spent improving the trees and enlarging the plantation hoping to establish a permanent breeding site. Very little of the wood was used for the establishment of plants, perhaps 1ha, most of which was confined within a perimeter of deer proof fencing. The largest area consisted of hybrid and species rhododendrons, magnolias and stuartias, many grown from cuttings or seed. The young plants, having spent several years in nursery beds, would eventually be transplanted into their final positions, and despite the relatively young age

that some of these plants were, a bulldozer was employed to shift them, testifying to his skill and ability as a propagator and cultivator, not to mention the skill in controlling several tonnes of machinery.

Using timber which it was necessary to fell, two raised beds were constructed that were to be home to the many hundreds of smaller plants, such as shortias, epigaeas, erythroniums, and of course primulas. To list all that were present would sound like a nursery catalogue, some catalogue! but to mention just a few and their size will I trust indicate what can be done, especially in the south, with an understanding of a plant's requirements: *Epigaea gaultherioides* at 1.5m diameter, *Cassiope wardii* at 1.2m and *Shortia soldanelloides magna* at 1m. Now you may think that Gerry had the ideal situations for growing such plants, but there is one thing that can be learnt from conditions experienced during the last two years. That is just how tolerant plants are of seemingly hostile seasons. Despite the long hot dry summer of '89 such plants survived, even the shortias seeding about in what appeared to be talcum powder.

The Tinney's primulas

To begin the story of the hybridising programme which led to the Tinney's strain of primulas we must go back to the early 1970s when Gerry and I first met. At the time Gerry was residing temporarily in a caravan and because of the limited space associated with the site it wasn't possible to construct permanent structures such as frames and greenhouses. Home for his plants was anywhere within the boundaries of the caravan, including the underneath. Don't we all grow *P. aureata* under caravans? He did! He had collected primulas, mainly from commerical sources, some years before and these formed the basis for his early work which resulted in many fine selections. Hundreds of seedlings were raised, selected and discarded in the pursuit of creating new varieties or improving on existing species such as *P. aureata* and *P. bhutanica,* the latter being riddled with virus. Later, with the introduction of fresh blood and the importance of authenticated material from wild stock, the breeding programme increased and several new seedlings appeared which were given the Tinney's prefix.

In order for a seedling to carry the "Tinney's" symbol several criteria had to be maintained; nothing short of perfection would be tolerated. First and foremost the quality of the flower, whether the petals were rounded or toothed, to give the flower more substance, colour and the overall shape and size of the truss. Secondly the foliage, particularly where *P. aureata* was used to give the leaves a covering of farina, although this wasn't always the case. With the exception of one, all the crosses were carried out under controlled conditions in a greenhouse which meant the plants had to be grown in pots purely as a means of convenience. The early crosses were quite straightforward, being between two species such as *P. bhutanica* and *P. boothii,*

giving 'Tinney's Icebreaker'. Others which appeared later were so complex that abbreviations had to be used for labelling as in 'Tinney's Poona', raised by crossing a white *P. edgeworthii* with *'P.* Tinney's Blueblood' – a hybrid between two forms of *P. edgeworthii,* one being Ghose's, and a *P. stolonifera* and *P. aureata* hybrid. Try printing that on a standard 15cm label! The label reads "edge alba x bl-bld x stol x aur."

The one exception to this controlled hybridising was a seedling that appeared amongst some pots growing outside in the frames. He was foxed by this, having no idea whatsoever as to its parentage so he named it 'Tinney's Bees Knees!' In his notes Gerry comments "I like this one very much and congratulate the bee or whatever on its good taste."

Many first class seedlings were named between 1981-83 representing the first to be offered on a commercial basis, and it is extremely difficult to make a choice between the varieties, as they all merit cultivation. However, for the purposes of this article, I will describe a selection, giving the date of introduction and parentage, which will highlight the range of species used. Details used are from Gerry's own notes.

'Tinney's Icebreaker' (1981) *P. boothii x bhutanica.*
"Flowered outdoors in the last normal winter from January to May, with apparently frost proof blooms, in long succession and thus outstanding for garden display. Rich green leaves without farina. Flowers larger and a little paler than bhutanica, with a yellow eye, broad white zone and wide blue edge."

'Tinney's Tigger' (1982) *P. boothii x aureata.*
"Large trusses of toothed-edge flowers are of the palest cream with a sharply contrasting orange eye."

'Tinney's Dairymaid', sister seedling to 'Tinney's Tigger'.
"Slightly reddish-backed narrow leaves with a mere sprinkling of farina. The large domed trusses of circular flowers are of pale creamy yellow, with a rich orange eye and regularly dentate outer petal edges. This plant flowers after the first flush of the earliest varieties."

Also using the same parentage as the previous two, particular mention must be given to:

'Tinney's Appleblossom' (Fig. 54, p203).
"Long strap-shaped finely toothed leaves with very many flowered domed central masses of large white flowers with a yellow eye. Finely frilled petals have fresh pink edges."

An outstanding variety which received the recognition of an Award of Merit, and for the distinction of being considered the best cultivated hybrid in 1989, the Reginald Cory Cup.

'Tinney's Gamble' (date not known) *P. bhutanica x aureata.*
"Were it to be discovered in the wild this would be acclaimed the find of the century. Rosettes of long toothed leaves, densely covered with thick farina, are highly attractive through the winter. They give rise to trusses of flowers of primrose yellow underlaid with blue, which comes through to give a blue shaded outer edge to the petals."

Of the later varieties, raised between 1985 and 1988, several stand out for their unique colour and size of the individual flower.

'Tinney's Poona'. *P. edgeworthii alba* x 'Blueblood' x *stolonifera* x *aureata.*
"A shiny leaved selection with a trace of farina at the base of the leaves. Flowers in large central clusters. 37mm dia. overlapping petals with a broad outer zone of rich lime violet, an inner zone of pale cream and a deep orange eye."

'Tinney's Boggle', *P. edgeworthii tricolor* x 'Tinney's Roundel' (which is *P. irregularis* E.N.380 x Blueblood – two forms of *P. edgeworthii).*
"Dark olive green leaves with slightly reddish backs with a little farina when young. Large flowers 37-38mm dia. A light cobalt violet, with overlapping petals which are deeply cut at the tips, as in *P. bhutanica.* A large orange eye inside a narrow white zone."

'Tinney's Innocence', *P. boothii* x *aureata* Langtang form.
"This cross has given me hell! About 125 seedlings flowered with hardly a dud amongst them. This is a very farinose seedling: the leaves are in fact grey and contrast very well with the fresh rosy lilac flowers which are deeply cut at the tips. A broad white zone and sharply contrasting orange eye give a wonderful look of freshness, hence the name."

These later additions were never released, as far as I know, but along with many others the early varieties were. Gerry hoped that these would be perpetuated by growers and distributed amongst enthusiasts so that he could concentrate on developing other creations.

What a great pity his life was shortened: he lived for his plants and his woodland, and for those of us who knew him, Gerry will always be synonymous with Tinney's. He will, I am certain, be recognised for the significant contribution he made to horticulture. Gerry died shortly before Christmas last year and was, as he wished, buried in his beloved woodland, Tinney's Firs.