GLADIOLUS × BRENCHLEYENSIS REDISCOVERED

Michael Tooley

The authentic restoration of gardens of historic interest requires that the correct species, variety, cultivar or hybrid be planted. During the past 150 years, the loss of cultivated plants has been considerable and this was noted by Gertrude Jekyll who drew attention in 1929 to the garden plants grown 100 years ago, but now lost. By the late 20th century the loss became even greater as Brickell and Sharman (1986) demonstrated in their book on lost plants. Miss Jekyll attributed the losses to fashion and novelty, and in collecting and cultivating garden plants at Munstead and Munstead Wood (Jekyll, 1900, 1928, 1929; Tooley, 1994, 1995) and sending specimens to her friends and to Kew, she anticipated the foundation of The National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens in 1982.

Miss Jekyll designed about 400 gardens between 1868 and 1932 and in many she used drift plantings of Gladiolus × brenchleyensis Hort. ex Baker. It was first used in the hardy flower border at Munstead (House) in 1883 (Jekyll, 1882, 1883; Tooley, 1984a,b) where it was associated with plantings of Kniphofia, Lobelia cardinalis L. and Lychnis. In a similar flower border at Munstead Wood some years later, she used the same association with Kniphofia, together with scarlet Salvia, Geranium, Gypsophila and Phlox. This association is shown in a Country Life autochrome (Wood in Tooley & Arnander, 1995; Tankard & Wood, 1996) dating from about 1911. The first occasion on which it is known to have been used in a design commission was in the long border at Brackenbrough (Tooley & Tooley, 1982; Bishgrove, 1992) in 1904, and it is found again in borders designed by her at Upton Grey in 1908 (Wallinger, 2000), Presaddfed on Angelsey in 1909 (Tooley, 2001; Bishgrove, 1992), Lindisfarne in 1911 (Tooley & Tooley, 1982), Little Aston Hall in 1914, Little Cumbrae Island in the Firth of Clyde in 1916 (Gunn, 1991; Bishgrove, 1992), Hascombe Court in 1922 (Bishgrove, 1992), Gledstone in 1926 (Tooley & Tooley, 1982), and Blagdon in 1929 (Tooley & Tooley, 1982; Brown, 1982) where 72 corms were used in drift plantings. Other garden artists also used it in their designs; Margaret Waterfield (1908) planted
it with white roses. This association had been described earlier in *The Garden*: ‘by planting large beds with Dwarf Roses, intermixed with such bright kinds of Gladioli as *G. brenchleyensis* a magnificent effect may be produced, as they blend well with the Roses, and the two make a grand show.’ (S. 1891). The distinguished Scottish horticulturist Mr. Samuel Arnott wrote in 1909, ‘*Gladiolus brenchleyensis* is the finest scarlet one for bedding, and should be largely used, either alone or in combination with white flowers, such as *Galtonia candidans* or *Anemone japonica alba*.’ (Arnott and Brotherston 1909, p.118)

The restoration of Lindisfarne Castle garden for the National Trust in the 1970s (Tooley, 1975) afforded the opportunity to search for several ‘lost’ plants such as the Rose ‘Killarney,’ sweet pea cultivars such as ‘Etta Dyke,’ ‘Gladys Norman’ and ‘Countess Spencer’ and *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis*.

The first step was to identify the parents of the hybrid. It was first mentioned in the *Proceedings of the Horticultural Society* in 1847 when it received a Certificate of Merit, ‘to Mr Stephen Hooker, of Brenchley, FHS, for a most beautiful Gladiolus, named Brenchleyensis. It was stated to be a hybrid between Psittacinus and Floribundus; but exhibited a striking improvement on both parents, the flowers being large and of a brilliant scarlet’ (pp. lxii–lxiii). It was mentioned again in the *Proceedings* in 1860 in relation to *Gladiolus* ‘Rev. Joshua Dix’, which was described as ‘a very handsome new variety, brighter in colour than *Brenchleyensis* and *Couranti*’ (p. 291). Darwin (1861) enquired of the parentage of *Gladiolus × gandavensis* and ‘whether the six following varieties—Eldorado, Canasi, Ophir, Linné, Brenchleyensis, and Vulcain, are the progeny of *G. × gandavensis* by itself, or of *G. × gandavensis* crossed by some other species’. Dombrain (1873) noted that ‘*Gandavensis* was a seedling from *psittacinus*, and originated in Ghent, in the same way that that very handsome border flower Brenchleyensis was originated some 28 years ago at Brenchley in Kent by Mr. Hooker, whose son I had the pleasure of meeting at the Crystal Palace lately. I asked him if he could tell me when it was raised, but he could not. I remember, however, very distinctly obtaining a bulb of it in 1847 at Canterbury’. At the inaugural meeting of the American Gladiolus Society at Boston on May 27, 1910 a paper was given by Mr. H. Youell, son of the founder of
Youell and Co., on ‘The Gladiolus as we knew and grew it Fifty years ago.’ Mr Youell’s father was credited with the introduction of G. × brenchleyensis some sixty years previously, and one of his foremen, Mr. W. Casey, with discovering it in a cottage garden in Brenchley, ‘to which locality it had apparently been brought from Africa by a sailor son of the owner’ (Anon. 1910). This elicited a furious response from Mr. George Bunyard (1910) of the Royal Nurseries, Maidstone, who confirmed that it originated from Mr. Hooker of Brenchley, ‘who raised it from Gandavensis.’ He added further that Mr. Youell’s father had obtained corms of G. × brenchleyensis from him, ‘which in his sandy soil soon enabled him to flood the country with it’ (Bunyard 1910).

It was widely available from nurserymen. In August 1859, Youell & Co (1859), The Royal Nurseries, Yarmouth sent off a box to the offices of The Gardeners’ Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette and noted that ‘the bulbs [which] were planted in March on our black sandy soils were not larger than swan shot’. Lindley (1859), the editor of the horticultural part of the journal, described them at the time; ‘The flower stalks sent measured on average 20 in. in length, and were each ornamented with 8–12 blooms of most brilliant orange-scarlet. This must certainly be regarded as one of the most showy and beautiful of the class to which it belongs’. In 1851 it had been assigned to the ‘Gandavensis and Floribundus Tribe’ (JE, 1851). Armsfull of flowers were sent by Youells in 1860, 1863 and 1864, during which years 300,000 corms were sold annually (Anon. 1910). In 1867 they referred to ‘good old Brenchleyensis’ and went on to compare it with G. ‘Bowiensis’: ‘We grow them both very extensively and have above 3 acres annually in bloom, and we have proved Brenchleyensis to be far superior to any other sort for either early or late planting, for the latter produces a magnificent fully expanded spike of bloom at one time while the former [G. ‘Bowiensis’] very rarely produces more than four expanded blooms at once, and before it has finished blooming becomes unsightly. With respect to colour there is a great difference, Brenchleyensis being a bright vermilion scarlet and ‘Bowiensis’ a rosy carmine with dark throat. . . . . . we annually cut spikes of Brenchleyensis from the middle of June till the latter end of December [and] we annually obtain magnificent flowers from bulbs of Brenchleyensis not larger than a Pea.’ On
average during the season Youells’ supply of blooms was 4–5000 per week.

In 1873 Dombrain (*op. cit.*, p. 8) noted that, ‘the largest English raiser is Mr. Kelway of Langport in Somerset’. In 1915, Mr. Lionel P. Perkin of Berrylands Road, Surbiton, Surrey described it as ‘the favourite scarlet’ and was selling it at 1s 4d per dozen and 9s per hundred. By 1926, both William Power & Co. of Waterford, Ireland, and Barr and Sons were selling it at 14 and 25s per hundred respectively. In 1930, Barr and Sons offered ‘the large-flowered vermillion-scarlet Gladiolus \( G. \times brenchleyensis \),’ and described it as ‘this well-known handsome Gladiolus [which] blooms first before Gladiolus Gandavensis varieties, and is one of the most valuable for bedding’ (Barr & Sons, 1930: 16).

However a little later Kelways were no longer offering it and the last occasion it was offered for sale by Barr & Sons was in 1934. Thereafter, although listed in 1935, 1936 and 1937, it is described thus: ‘Brenchleyensis, now superseded and practically out of cultivation; in its place we recommend Brilliant, Gladness, Red Emperor, or Vesuvius...’ (Barr & Sons, 1936: 105).

Its value as a garden plant was highlighted in *The Garden* in 1874; ‘The singularly beautiful gladiolus Brenchleyensis, by far the most effective in the tall-growing section, is now beautifully in flower in the cottage gardens all along the Suffolk coast. In Belle Vue Park, Lowestoft, there is a magnificent bed of it. The light sandy soil, both here and in Yarmouth, seems to suit both this and other Gladioli perfectly’. (Anon., 1874: 168)

There are few illustrations of \( G. \times brenchleyensis \) and so far no herbarium specimens have been found. Robinson (1883) included an illustration (Fig. 1) and noted that, ‘G. gandavensis and brenchleyensis are the principal kinds from which the beautiful race of hybrids has come.’ He planted up part of the main terrace at Gravetye Manor with \( G. \times brenchleyensis \) as displayed in a painting by Beatrice Parsons (Bisgrove 2008, p.128). The *Country Life* autochrome of the border at Munstead Wood, taken in or just before 1911 and showing a drift of the plant (reproduced in Wood, 1995: 102, and

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**Fig. 1.** One of the very few illustrations of *Gladiolus \( G. \times brenchleyensis \)*; plate 123 from William Robinson’s *The English Flower Garden* (1883)

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in Tankard & Wood, 1996) is the only known image. There is a painting by Miss M. Walters Anson in Tinley et al. (1924, Plate 1 fig. 4; p. 199) showing 14 flowers, but neither leaves nor scale are given, and it is described as ‘4–5 ft a handsome bulbous plant, with stout stems and large vermilion-scarlet flowers. Garden hybrid. July to September’.

Unfortunately, there is neither drawing nor painting by Cecily Grey in Hardy Bulbs and Grey (1937: 104) merely gives the parentage as a cross between *G. psittacinus* Hook. f. and *G. cardinalis* Curtis. However, J.B. Garrity, past president of the British Gladiolus Society, expressed the opinion (correspondence June 15, 1975) that the cross was between *G. carneus* D. Delaroche and *G. natalensis* Hook. f.

![Fig. 2. *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis* in cultivation. Photograph: Anthony Hamilton.](image_url)
(Tooley & Tooley, 1982: 51, note 23). This parentage was reiterated by Hamilton (1976). Corms of these putative parents were obtained from Kirstenbosch in South Africa in the mid-1970s, and brought back to Durham by Mr Frank Bell. Attempts were made by the late Dr Jack Crosby and Mr David Sayers at the University of Durham Botanic Garden to make the cross and bring on corms for the garden at Lindisfarne. Mr A. Back, however, quoting Professor T.T. Barnard (1972) (correspondence July 24, 1972), agreed with him that the parentage was G. natalensis and G. oppositiflorus Herb. and the latter was also obtained from Kirstenbosch.

A recent account of Gladiolus in tropical Africa, (Goldblatt, 1996), unites G. natalensis and G. psittacinus under the earlier name G. dalenii van Geel. This very variable species is found throughout the summer rainfall areas of Africa and southern Arabia, and a form of it from Natal was one of the main parents of cultivated, summer-flowering Gladiolus.

The attempts to produce viable seed from G. carneus and G. natalensis at Durham, however, did not succeed, and, rather unsatisfactorily, Schizostylis coccinea Backh. & Harv. was substituted in the Jekyll plan for Lindisfarne Castle Garden.

There the situation rested until 2003, when I was invited by Kathleen Morrey to lecture to the Manx Plant and Garden Conservation Society on the ‘Restoration of Gardens of Historic Interest’. Part of the lecture was devoted to the loss of plants and the obsession with fashion and the consequential problems of authentic garden restoration. Examples were given of Viola ‘Jackanapes,’ which Brickell & Sharman (1986: 12, 227–228) had treated, of Rose ‘Killarney’ and of Gladiolus × brenchleyensis. At the end of the lecture, during questions, Mr. Ed Huyton told me that he had what appeared to be, from the illustrations I had shown, Gladiolus × brenchleyensis growing in his garden in Andreas. They had been growing there for some time, they were never lifted and had formed clumps although were now rather overgrown. I visited his garden in August 2003 with the details and photographs of the five specimens he had sent me earlier and shown in the table overleaf.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specimen</th>
<th>Leaves</th>
<th>Height (mm)</th>
<th>No. of flowers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1066</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition each specimen had two small spathes cladding the stem and specimen 3 had two lateral spikes with seven and five flowers respectively.

The plants grew in two stands and had not been lifted. Frosts are infrequent and Mr Huyton’s garden lies at an altitude of about 24m above sea level, south of the Bride Hills moraine and about three miles west of the coast. One stand yielded twenty mature corms and many bulbils. One spike was the subject of a watercolour by Mr Huyton in his book *Flowers from an Island Garden* (Huyton, 2004).

The corms grown by Mr Huyton came from Ballamanagh, Sulby, Isle of Man by way of Colonel and Mrs Scott’s gardener, Mr John Devonshire. The Scotts had bought Ballamanagh in 1962 after Lady Collet had died. Lady Collet was the second wife of Sir Mark Edlemann Collet. Sir Mark and Lady Collet had moved to the island from Kent in about 1938, although the house and garden were under construction in 1936 (Garrad, 1985: 145 and Note 1). Sir Mark was a Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society and exhibited plants from Ballamanagh at Vincent Square in London, of which one example was *Beschorneria*, a member of the Agavaceae from Mexico, on August 8, 1939. It was Lady Collet’s gardener who gave the *Gladiolus* corms to the Scott’s gardener, from a group at the base of a stone retaining wall at Ballamanagh and by then regarded as rather special. Garrad (1985) gave a detailed description of the garden in the late 1970s, before the property was acquired by Dr Daniel MacDonald in 1985.

Mr Huyton gave me a collection of corms and bulbils in 2003, which were planted in the open and lifted each autumn and then grown in a polytunnel at Downfield, Fife. They prospered to such an extent that there were sufficient to distribute to friends who had, or worked on, gardens designed by Gertrude Jekyll, which originally included plantings of *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis*. Corms and
bulbils were sent in 2004 to Andrew Robinson at Munstead Wood, Rosamund Wallinger at The Manor House, Upton Grey, David Usher at Hestercombe and to Philippa Hodkinson at Lindisfarne. David Usher’s corms found their way to Knightshayes where Mr Chris Trimmer is bulking them up and safeguarding them for the future as part of the National Trust’s Plant Conservation Programme. Mr Huyton also sent corms and bulbils to Mr John Pilbeam of Hooe, Battle, East Sussex in 2005 where they have been bulked up to 150: Mr Pilbeam has given the bulk of his stock to Mr Trimmer at Knightshayes. Corms and cormlets were sent to Mr Bruce Elwell in New York City who has also supplied New York Botanical Garden for the Darwin garden there.

In the meantime a stock of corms and bulbils was being built up at Downfield which lies at 204 m (670 ft) in Fife (NO 3413 0750).

On October 12, 2007, four flowering specimens were measured, as listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specimen</th>
<th>Leaves</th>
<th>Height (mm)</th>
<th>No. of flowers</th>
<th>Length of flower spike (mm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1625</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>533</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1397</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1536</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>558</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Specimens 1–3 were grown outside and each one had a single lateral spike with 5, 7 and 7 florets respectively. Specimen 4 was grown in a polytunnel and had one side shoot with nine flowers. At least four flowers were open together. They are large and one sided and the colour is Scarlet 19, fading to 19/1 (The British Colour Council, 1938): the outer three tepals have narrow flashes of Rose Madder 23/1 to Tyrian Rose 24/1 extending from close to the tip of the tepal to near the end of the funnel-shaped perianth. The length of the dorsal tepal ranges from 71 to 76 mm. At Downfield, flowering is much later than on the Isle of Man and in the south of England, though similarly late in the year to that noted by Youells in Lowestoft in the 19th century. Flowering begins around the middle of
September and continues until the first frosts and well after *Kniphofia caulescens* has finished.

The rediscovery of *Gladiolus × brenchleyensis*, that had been available to the trade from 1847 until about 1937, not only adds a lost hybrid that had been very popular during the Victorian and Edwardian period, but also allows gardens of historic interest, in which this gladiolus has been used, to be restored authentically.

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**Notes**


**References**


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