

# Paul Green

## A notable botanist living in our midst

By Eileen Lacey

**Paul talked and** showed illustrations in New Ross of the many native and non-native flora he had discovered in Co. Wexford, particularly in older churchyards, where the grassland is herb rich. We were surprised to learn from Paul that many churchyards in the county contain rare plants, one of which is the **Green-winged Orchid** which can be found in Saltmills churchyard. So, with appetite suitably whetted, I was eager to join in when the Wexford Naturalists' Field Club (WNFC) organised a New Year Plant Hunt, led by Paul, around the New Ross area in January 2024. Only a few of the more knowledgeable members of the group expected that we would find 50 flowering plants at that time of the year. We soon became aware of Paul's keen, expert eye and astounding knowledge. At the end of the three-hour walk, we realised that we did not need an extensive knowledge in order to become enthusiastic about the fascinating world of wild flowers, while also enjoying the camaraderie and fun. Suddenly it became clear that with a little help, we might just be able to put a name on some of the many wild flowers that we regularly come across in our environments.

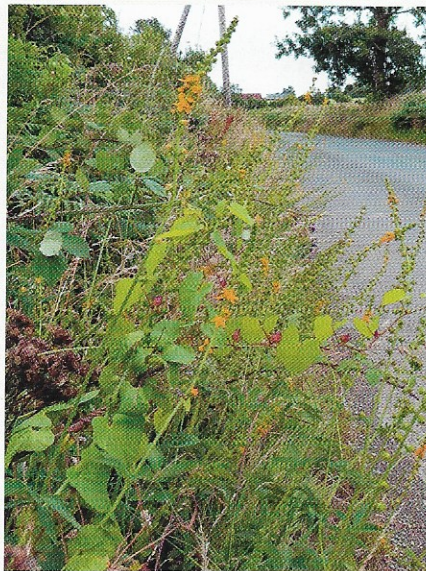


The *Green-winged Orchid*, a rare native perennial herb found in the Churchyard in Saltmills, 2021.

It was only having attended an illustrated talk given by Paul Green in New Ross library on Hallowe'en night 2023, that I realised that here in our locality at Yoletown, Ballycullane, was a botanist with an innate sense of curiosity about plants. His talk was entitled 'The Flora of Co. Wexford's Churchyards and Cemeteries'. I was enthralled.

Born in Guildford, Surrey in 1967, Paul is an identical twin of brother Ian and older brother to Duncan. He seemed destined to follow a career in botany as, during his childhood and teenage years, there always seemed to be rich wildflower habitats in the places where his family lived. While living in Surrey, his Mum often took her 2½ year-old twin boys to a nearby farm to explore the meadows and look at the wild flowers. When the family moved to Somerset, the county that Paul thinks of as home, the three boys had the opportunity to spend their school holidays with their grandparents on a farm on the Sussex Downs in West Sussex. Once again, Paul found that he had great opportunities to explore woodlands that were exceptionally rich in wild flowers. To me, these experiences represent a dreamy wonderland in a part of England that I really want to visit myself. Plants soon became Paul's main interest after his Gran began taking himself and Ian to Natural History meetings and, by April 1984, he had become a keen botanist.

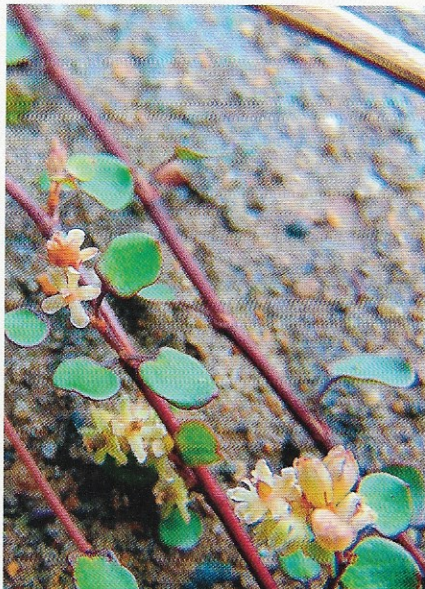
Meanwhile, Paul followed his Dad's advice and completed an apprenticeship in carpentry and joinery. However, the building trade did not appeal to him and, to his father's dismay, he found alternative employment as a milkman. He soon discovered that his working hours admirably suited his botanical interests. In 1987, he registered as a volunteer with the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI), a charitable organisation that promotes the enjoyment, study and conservation of wild plants in Britain and Ireland. He was excited as this involved doing surveys of selected areas in his beloved Somerset to find out all the plant species in these areas. This venture was successful and in 1988, Paul and six of his colleagues were asked if they would like to help out in Ireland. On their first morning in Ireland they stopped at two of



*Fragrant Agrimony*, a native clump forming perennial herb on road verge in Boley, 2022.



*Bulbous buttercup*, a native perennial herb, an uncommon buttercup with reflexed sepals found on the coast in Saltmills Churchyard, 2022.



*Wireplant* a non-native perennial, with wiry climbing stems on a field wall in Mullinderry, 2021.



*Scarlet Pimpernel* with pink flower, a native annual herb at top of shingle beach, St. Kearns, 2021.



*Flowering Currant*, a non-native deciduous shrub found in older gardens and in ruins and here, in a road hedge in Yoletown, 2021.



*Rock Sea-spurrey*, a native perennial herb found on top of shingle beaches and coastal walls as in Saltmills, 2020.



*Compact Brome*, a rare grass in Ireland and found on margins of gravel car parks and walls and here, on church wall, Clonmines, 2022.



*Prickly Sedge*, a native Winter green perennial herb found on a road bank in Mullinderry, 2020.



*Pale Flax* a native biennial herb found on waste ground on site of disused station, Ballycullane, 2020.



A late flowering *Sweet-briar*, native deciduous shrub giving off a scent in warm weather found on roadside hedge in Yoletown, 2021.



*Skullcap* is a rare perennial herb in SE Ireland found by the Owenduff River, Rathnageeragh, 2016.



*Hook-lobed dandelion* is a rare perennial found mostly in the east of Ireland, at the verge of a lane in Rathimney, 2014.

the selected areas. And guess what? Their survey took them to none other than Mullinderry where they walked along the Owenduff river. The other selected area was at St. Kearns, where they walked along the roads and the shore of Bannow Bay. It was during this period that Paul realised that he would like to settle in Ireland. By curious chance, Paul now lives with his partner Olivier in Yoletown, which is approximately half-way between these two areas.

In 1998, Paul returned to Cornwall where he changed career again and worked in a care centre for adults with learning difficulties. He says that this work brought him a lot of enjoyment. However, once again Ireland beckoned and he answered the BSBI call for volunteers to map native and non-native plants growing wild in Co. Waterford. This work eventually led him to write a book called *Flora of Co. Waterford*. Paul was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Recorder Award in 2009 for his outstanding contribution to the recording of Ireland's biodiversity. It was during this period that he realised he wanted to fulfill his dream of living in Ireland. In 2008 a request from the Wexford Naturalists' Field Club to write a book to be titled *Flora of Co. Wexford*, left him feeling indecisive but thankfully, for the plant lovers of Co. Wexford and elsewhere, he was soon motivated to achieve another goal. Wexford's recording of flora at this time, like that of many counties, was not very advanced. Paul and his team decided to use the 1 x 1km squares (monads) on the Ordnance Survey of Ireland Discovery Series as the recording units to map the flora of the county. It has 2,566 monads and, realistically, each of these needed three visits covering Spring, Summer and Autumn. During the following 12 years, over a half million plant records were collected by a small team of Wexford botanists. Only 873 of the plants growing wild

in Wexford are native to Ireland. This team managed to record more plants during this period than all the other counties combined and Wexford is now the best recorded county. For Paul, this work is fascinating, but it is also seriously challenging, requiring both patience and perseverance when analysing, interpreting and reporting data. Paul has kindly given us a selection of pictures from his book for you to enjoy. Perhaps looking at these may motivate some of us to do our own plant spotting around our own wild areas. Jim Hurley in his recent nature column in the *New Ross Standard* 'Can you name the wild flower?' recommends an app developed in Germany called 'Flora Incognita', as an aid to help identify unknown flowers. Using this app, which is available in several languages and is free and very user-friendly, you can photograph an unknown plant, find out its name and all its details. I downloaded it recently and find it colourful and easy-to-use.

Paul has suggestions for local areas where we could find some interesting

plants, one of these being the disused railway station at Ballycullane. Here you can find **Bee Orchids**, which as the name implies have a flower that looks like a bee. Other uncommon plants here are **Pale Flax**, which has a pale blue flower with dark blue veins and **Little-Robin**, a geranium with a pink flower. It is a rare plant in Ireland. A little to the east of the old station, the railway line is bordered by bog, where the **Royal Fern** and the **Narrow Buckler-fern** are found, both rare in Co. Wexford. Boley bog, which is extremely wet and difficult to walk in, is the largest bog in the county. It has the largest population of **Greater Tussock-sedge** in Ireland. The tussocks can grow almost two metres in height and one metre in width. Saltmills is by far the best churchyard for flowers as it has over 100 species of different plants growing there, many of which do not occur elsewhere in this part of Wexford. Paul considers it a good example of what the grasslands of Wexford might have looked like prior to agricultural improvements. This churchyard is the only site in the

county where **Green-winged Orchid** can be found. The three other orchids found here are the **Common Spotted-orchid**, the **Early-purple Orchid** and the **Pyramidal Orchid**.

Up to 2004, all Paul's work for the BSBI was in a voluntary capacity. This changed when he began working for Greentours as a botanical leader, which involved trips all over the world. In 2022 he became the BSBI's Ireland officer. For those who might be interested, the All-Ireland branch of the BSBI, the committee and the BSBI Ireland officer run a varied programme of field meetings, workshops and conferences. And of course, there is the Wexford Naturalists' Field Club (WNFC) which provides field trips and lectures about many aspects of the natural history of Co. Wexford.

This club is where anyone interested in nature will feel at home in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. It's where members learn from each other and, of course, where I came across Paul Green, a remarkable botanist who has contributed greatly to efforts to conserve the flora of Co. Wexford. ■