

Masdevallia hybridisation:

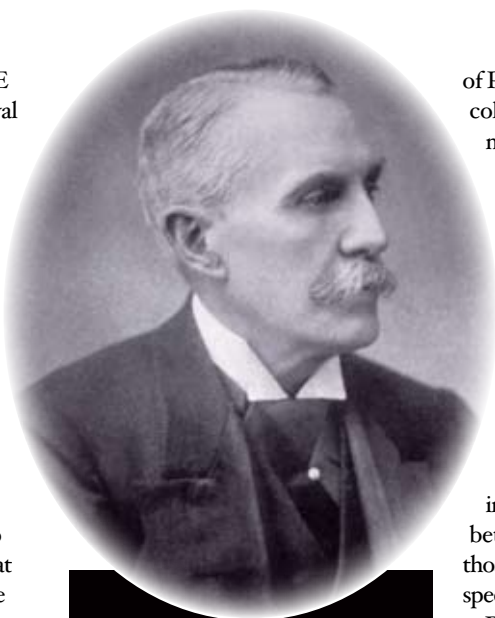
20th century hybrids

PART THREE

STEVE MANNING concludes his account of early *Masdevallia* hybrids and those who made them, by examining the work of Sir Trevor Lawrence, Robert Ballentine, Leroy Kuhn and J&L Orchids

SIR TREVOR LAWRENCE was the President of the Royal Horticultural Society at the time of its first Orchid Conference in 1885, where Harry Veitch presented the paper referred to in part one of this series. Sir Trevor was the pre-eminent personality of the Victorian orchid world. He had gained his love of orchids from his mother, Lady Louisa, at whose home in Eaton Park, London, was one of the earliest large collections of orchids, contemporaneous with that of Bateman. It is hard to imagine now a private home in that part of London with a garden large enough to accommodate a huge, 'Orchidaceous house and Stove Aquarium', 50 feet broad, with three spans and heated by hot water. This had been constructed in 1839.⁽³⁰⁾ In 1846 Lindley reported that at the annual July Horticultural exhibition, 'the possessors of large collections of stove and greenhouse plants were driven off by the hopelessness of competing with Mrs Lawrence.'⁽³¹⁾

Her continued success over the years was apparently at the cost of some of her employees as she had a



Sir Trevor Lawrence, pictured in volume one of *The Orchid World*, October 1910

succession of 14 orchid gardeners over a period of 20 years.⁽³²⁾

Sir Trevor's orchid collection

Sir Trevor had studied medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital where he trained as a surgeon, before a period of service in the Indian Medical Service. He inherited his baronetcy from his father and served as a Member

of Parliament for a while. His orchid collection was at his country house near Dorking, Surrey. The orchid scribe James Anderson of Meadowbank wrote an article on the Lawrence collection in the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, and needed a full page plus a column to describe just the first three greenhouses. He started, 'Among all the collections of Orchids that have been recently formed in this country there is none more extensive, none more interesting, none, without exception, better cultivated throughout than those located in the ten or dozen houses specially built for their particular wants at Burford Lodge. I have been a grower for about thirty years, and have had charge of one of the most wonderful collections of its time, and have also seen nearly everything that is good between '50 and '80, so that I am not writing at all haphazard... the first house we note is one of the north-exposure houses for *Masdevallias*... The front stage occupied with about four rows of really well cultivated plants, comprising *igneas*, *Veitchiana*, *Harryana* in its several forms... fine plants of *Lindenii*, *Trochilus*, a most



Left *Masdevallia veitchiana*
Right *Masdevallia falcata*
Steve Manning



Above *Masdevallia Shuttryana* 'Chamberlain' received an RHS Award of Merit on 18 April 1899

Right *Masdevallia Falcata*

Below *Masdevallia Igneo-Estradae*, painted by Nellie Roberts after receiving an RHS Award of Merit on 3 April 1906



remarkable macrura, which seems to revel in the cold, as its leaves were not unlike a fair-sized Cos Lettuce.' The second house was 50 feet long by 10 feet wide, and the third house was twice as wide as the second. ⁽³³⁾

Sir Trevor's successes

In 1893, *The Orchid Review* carried a six-page report on the Burford Lodge collection, and in 1910 Sir Trevor was the first person to have a volume of this publication dedicated to him.

He was not reticent about spending money on special plants as it is recorded he paid 72 guineas for an *Odontoglossum vexillarium*, £147 for a *Cypripedium* and 255 guineas for an *Aerides*. This plant was subsequently named *Aerides lawrenceae*. ⁽³⁴⁾ His RHS awards for masdevallias as well as other orchids are so numerous that a list would be tedious.

Reichenbach described a visit to Burford Lodge as a visit to an orchidic Eldorado, and at one time, Kränzlin named a plant "*Masdevallia lawrencei*" but this proved to be *M. guttulata*. Lehmann named the genus *Trevoria* in Sir Trevor's honour. His fame was so well known that, 'Many years ago a box addressed to Sir Trevor Lawrence was found floating in the Mersey. It ultimately reached its destination and on being opened was found to contain a fine mass of orchids, which on flowering proved to be *Angraecum pellucidum*. The knowledge of Sir Trevor's love of orchids had been borne in mind on the West Coast of Africa, where a near relative had despatched this plant to him - not by throwing it into the sea, but by placing it on a ship which, on arrival at the River Mersey, had the misfortune to jettison some of her cargo.' ⁽³⁵⁾

Three *Masdevallia* hybrids

In July 1906, still President of the RHS, Sir Trevor chaired the International Conference on Hybridisation and

Cross-Breeding, held in London.

Sir Trevor had at least two growers, a Mr White, followed by the more famous JC Speyers. Three *Masdevallia* hybrids were created at Burford Lodge – *Masdevallia* Falcata, a free-flowering and dependable cross between *M. coccinea* and *M. veitchiana* in 1899, then in 1902, *Masdevallia* Igneo-Estradae, which is no longer seen in collections. However, the first was the apparently strangely-named *M. Shuttryana*. Lawrence had invented a portmanteau word from the names of the two parent plants, which at that time were better known by their synonyms: *Masdevallia caudata* was *M. SHUTTleworthii* and *M. coccinea* was *M. harRYANA*. I recounted

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the full story of this taxon and its vicissitudes in the September/October 2001 issue of *The Orchid Review*.

Sir Trevor had used this naming method in some of his earlier hybrids, presumably as a reminder of the parents of the cross, for instance *Laeliocattleya* Trimyra (*C. trianae* x *Lc. Myra*).

The late 20th century

From 1880, when *M. Chelsonii* first appeared, until 1904, when *M. Veitchiana*-Fragrans arrived, a total of 47 *Masdevallia* hybrids (plus a few remakes etc) had been made and were recognised. Then until 1967 there was a complete hiatus – no further *Masdevallia* hybrids were registered during this entire period

of 63 years. There appears to be no specific reason for this, but perhaps a number of factors worked together. In the early years of the 20th century several of the main collection owners such as Measures and Lawrence died, and their collections were sold off. Some of the larger nurseries also ceased – again partly through death. The First World War stopped exploration for new species, and it also wiped out the generation of heirs and successors to the remaining large collections. Certainly the big money which had been freely flowing in the orchid auctions of the Victorian age had become much tighter, and the cost of employing a full-time orchid grower could no longer be afforded. Also perhaps, quite predictably, fashions in orchids changed as do most fashions, and masdevallias were no longer popular. Yet the 1967 hybrid did not open the flood gates – it took another two decades for that to take place.

Robert Ballentine

In view of the fact that the modern generation of hybridisers have been predominantly American, it was only proper that the first of the new hybrid masdevallias was also made by an American. In 1967 Robert Ballentine of Baltimore registered a cross he had made between *M. guttulata* and *M. weberbaueri*, naming it *M. Memoria* Albert Ballentine in memory of his father. The other significant feature of this hybrid is that it was made between two masdevallias that prefer intermediate to warm conditions, whereas the original hybrids came from cool-growing parents. This has set a trend. The majority of masdevallias discovered prior to 1900 were cool-growing, so consequently the hybrids made from them were also cool growers, which suited European culture methods. When, during the latter half of the 20th century, warmer growing species ►



Masdevallia Shuttryana

Steve Manning

Masdevallia Angel Frost
'Cordelia'



Marguerite Webb/J&L Orchids

were discovered, these suited the American growers better, and it was found that by crossing some of the original cool growers with those that preferred warmer conditions, heat tolerant crosses could be produced.

Five new hybrids

In the 1970s just five new hybrids were produced – *M. Perlacea*, with its maker Leroy Kuhn following the tradition of Sir Trevor Lawrence by taking part of the word *coriacea* and joining it to part of *peristeria* – his two parent plants. *M. Andromeda* (*fragrans* × *schroederiana*) and *M. Diana* (*wagneriana* × *caudata*) were made by Don Richardson in 1976 and 1977 respectively. Also in 1976, *M. Dina* (*coriacea* × *infracta*) by A&C Tarlow and the successful *M. Prince Charming* (*angulata* × *veitchiana*) in 1979 by the Rod McLellan Co. ended that decade, which also saw one new *Dracuvallia* registered – *D. Memoria Maria Arcila* (*M. veitchiana* × *Dracula chimaera*).

J&L Orchids

Janet Kuhn was Leroy's wife and together they founded the well known nursery of J&L Orchids at Easton, Connecticut, which was where, in 1977, *Masdevallia uniflora* was rediscovered. Janet Kuhn made several journeys to South America where she, sometimes in company with others, discovered a number of new species, notably *M. pyxis*, *M. empusa*, *M. kubniorum*, *M. fuchsii*, *M. nitens*, *M. theleura*, *M. utriculata*, *Dracula cochliops*, *D. lotax* and *D. janetiae* and also the delightful, pendent yet perpetually-flowering *Pleurothallis janetiae*. In 1979 the business was transferred to three ladies – Cordelia Head, Marguerite Webb and Lucinda Winn. The first pure *Dracula* cross – *D. platycrater* × *D. lotax*, named *D. Jester*, was made by J&L Orchids in 1982, and deserves its place in any collection as I have found it to start flowering in July and continue until the following January.

QUOTATION SOURCES

- 30 *Orchid Review*, April 1902: 108
- 31 *Gardeners' Chronicle*, July 18, 1846: 477
- 32 **Hamilton** in *Orchid History Reference Papers* 26: viii
- 33 *Gardeners' Chronicle*, April 3, 1880: 423–4
- 34 **Boyle, Frederick** (1902) *The Culture of Greenhouse Orchids*. Chapman & Hall, London
- 35 *The Orchid World*, Vol 1, No 1, October 1910: 13

NOTE

Since the publication of Part Two, in which I queried the use of girls' names, more information has come to light. Firstly, *Masdevallia* Henrietta was named after Mrs Frederick L Ames (Christian name Henrietta) of Massachusetts, but there is still no trace of the origin of the name *Masdevallia* Rebecca.

Secondly, and my thanks to Alex and Trish Scott for this information, Mr Norman Cookson was a lead manufacturer and employer. He was married to Phoebe, and named various clones and hybrids in other genera in her honour. They had three sons and one daughter, Doris, so that is the origin of that taxon. However it is a sad story – Doris, unlike the person that name conjured up in my mind, died before she was 16 years old, and could have died as young as aged 9 or 10. I will view *Masdevallia* Doris in a different light from now on.

1980 to the present day

The 1980s saw 48 new hybrid masdevallias, more than had been made in all the previous decades put together. Nearly half – 23 in total – were made by the ladies at J&L Orchids, including their popular Angel series of crosses, with *M. Angel* Frost being the first and foremost. They have continued in this work, and over 60 crosses have been registered by them up to the time of writing.

When *M. yungasensis* became popular it heralded an exciting range of new hybrids incorporating stripes. Now, with more and more hybrids being registered almost every month, what had once been a rare and difficult operation has now become almost an everyday occupation for those seeking to put their names in the record book of hybridisers. ■

STEVE MANNING and his wife Frances are holders of the NCCPG National Plant Collection of *Pleurothallidinae*