TEMPERATE RHODODENDRONS

Julian Taylor-Whall

- Volume Eight -
Directed Pollination (Part Two)

Temperate Rhododendrons:

- the species and hybrids established outdoors in the leading woodland gardens of England, Scotland and Wales;

- the species curated in accordance with scientific advances and field study evidence published in the three decades since the 1996 Edinburgh revision of the classification;

- the hybrids selected and assessed with the benefit of hindsight rather than hype, disposition and floral beauty the key determinants for inclusion, not their commercial availability.

The texts are illustrated with over 3000 photographs taken by the author.

Volume One reviews and amends the classification of Genus *Rhododendron* to conform with the molecular phylogeny studies of 2005 and 2010, as well as taking account of recent work on polyploidy. A visual guide to help identify the various species follows this updating, along with a glossary of the scientific terminology and a listing of the various seed collecting expeditions.

Volume Two considers Subgenus *Therorhodion* and the species placed within Subgenus *Azaleastrum*.

Volumes Three and Four document the taxa assigned to Subgenus *Hymenanthes*.

Volume Five examines the rhododendrons within the three sections of Subgenus *Lepidorrhodium*.

Volume Six evaluates the Natural Hybrids, plants that have arisen in the wild from undirected pollination and established stabilised populations, as well as the host of seed pan rogues germinated in cultivation.

Volumes Seven and Eight survey the Azaleodendrons, Deciduous and Evergreen Azaleas, Lepidote and Elepidote Hybrids created through directed pollination.

TEMPERATE RHODODENDRONS

Julian Taylor-Whall

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Elepidote Hybrids A-C

R. ‘Aladdin’

griersonianum x *auriculatum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 June-July 4m x 4m

Pollen from *R. auriculatum* was placed on a *R. griersonianum* stigma at Embley Park in Hampshire during the early summer of 1930. Joseph John Crosfield was the hybridiser and the result of his endeavours, R. ‘Aladdin’, won an Award of Merit from the RHS when it was introduced just five years later.

For when they first open, the flowers are simply ravishing.

Up to fourteen large, trumpet-shaped, bright vermilion corollas fill each loosely held truss and a mature shrub will easily sport a hundred or more of these globes across its superstructure. Encounter such a shrub when those blooms are just out and it will stop you in your tracks, but unfortunately the pigmentation quickly fades, to a soft rose-pink, and in strong sunlight, pales almost to white. Each corolla’s throat is coloured deeper vermilion inside, with lines and flares of the same hue extending out to the edges of the lobes along the ribs, while the outer surface is graced with an initial orange flush.

The leaf blades are narrow spears with a sharp point, thinly tomentose below and superior to those of R. ‘Azor’, a similar late-flowering hybrid, this the directed result of a Roza Stevenson *griersonianum* x *discolor* pairing.

‘Aladdin’ is usually very fast growing at first, often hitting 1.8m high and 2m wide in little more than six or seven years, but the deportment at this stage is open and rangy, exacerbated by foliage that despite its visual appeal, is only held for one year. If left unchecked, such growth will result in a large, straggly and leggy plant, so regular pruning to attain a better shape is essential. Very few rhododendrons require such repeated attention, but this is one of them, and a far nicer, dome-shaped individual, will ultimately emerge post such surgical manipulations with the secateurs. Note too that the new growth extends at the same time as the flowers open, so it may sometimes partially obscure the display.

To prolong the deeper flower colour, ‘Aladdin’ is best suited to a woodland glade in dappled shade. Located in such, the pest resistant qualities of its leaves will also be vividly demonstrated, with the cross proving to be both heat tolerant and fully hardy.



R. ‘Aladdin’



R. ‘Aladdin’

R. ‘Aladdin’

R. ‘Albatross’

The ‘Albatross’ Pride

‘Loderi’ x *discolor*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 June 9m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Akbar	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1933	1933
Albatross	Lionel de Rothschild	around 1930	1934
Albatross Townhill Pink	Lionel de Rothschild	around 1930	before 1988
Albatross Townhill White	Lionel de Rothschild	around 1930	before 1988
Townhill Albatross	Lord Swaythling (gardener, Mr. F. J. Rose)	before 1945	1945

C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber, authors of *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* describe R. ‘Albatross’ as ‘one of the glories of Exbury and one of the world’s most beautiful rhododendrons’. Written in 1967, their words still hold true today, for Lionel de Rothschild’s cross of pre-1930 vintage - LR 171 in the stud book - is one of the finest woodland plants able to be grown in British gardens. Of course, describing R. ‘Albatross’ as a plant, even as a shrub, is misleading, for it conjures up visions of neat little suburban-sized bushes, prim and well groomed, when for all intents and purposes, a tree is to hand. And a very tall and wide-spreading one at that, the cultivar often adopting an umbrella-shape when a single trunk is dominant, a massive dome otherwise.

The ‘Albatross’ blooms are deliciously scented, the broadly-funnel-shaped corollas carried in a huge truss of 12, these very similar to those borne on R. ‘Loderi’, but with more distinct mahogany rays in the throat. To say the cross was free-flowering would be doing it a disservice, as most years there is an overabundance of bloom and a mature specimen will literally take your breath away. If there is one failing, however, it is that the leaves are only held for one year, which can result in a sparse appearance when the corollas fall. The H5 rating indicates the cross is reliably hardy to -15°C, though it will tolerate -18°C in mid-winter, so can be grown in most UK gardens, but not at the coldest locations or on exposed sites, where the foliage will also suffer damage from high winds.

Five cultivars have been widely distributed, with three of them gifted an Award of Merit by the RHS - ‘Albatross’ in 1934; ‘Townhill Albatross’ in 1945; and ‘Akbar’ in 1952. Propagation is by graft or layering, so although one or two of the few specialist nurseries still trading might have a youngster available, specimens will be absent from the racks at your local garden centre or DIY store.

The ‘Albatross Townhill’ clones - ‘Pink’ and ‘White’ - are L de R gifted seedlings of the cross that were raised by Louis Montagu, the second Baron Swaythling, whose garden was a stone’s throw from Exbury on the other side of Southampton. However, ‘Akbar’ and ‘Townhill Albatross’ resulted from two separate directed pollinations of ‘Loderi King George’ by *R. discolor,* one by L de R, made sometime before 1933, the other by Fred Rose, the head gardener at Townhill, pre 1945. Genetically however, the seed parents of both those selected clones are the same, as each arose from a *fortunei* x *griffithianum* cross. Phillips and Barber list ‘Townhill Albatross’ within their ‘Albatross’ entry, but maintain ‘Akbar’ separately, while parentage details for ‘Albatross Townhill Pink’ and ‘Albatross Townhill White’ are absent from the *IRRC*. However, the FCC-winning cultivar, R. ‘Exbury Albatross’, is the result of a separate mating that reversed the parentage, L de R using R. ‘Loderi’ to provide the pollen and *R. discolor* to mature the seed (*The International Rhododendron Register And Checklist,* 2005, Volume 1, page 428). Genetically, this does make a difference, as the organelles - the chloroplasts and the mitochondria, for instance - are solely provided by the female parent. So even though outwardly the offspring resulting from either a ‘Loderi’ x *discolor* cross, or the reverse *discolor* x ‘Loderi’ pairing, may look morphologically similar, within their individual cells, scientific evidence has shown that this will not be the case. In consequence, cultivars that had previously been associated within the same hybrid ‘group’, have herein, been split apart into two ‘prides’.

A full and detailed explanation of these changes is provided within the ‘Tribulations’ essay at the beginning of Volume 7.

Introduced in 1933, a year before Lionel de Rothschild’s more famous cross made its first appearance, R. ‘Akbar’ has far deeper rose-pink pigmented flowers, though these too have crimson rays in the throat, are carried in a truss of twelve corollas and are sweetly scented. The chosen epithet is an honorific for the 3rd Mughal Emperor of India, Akbar the Great, yet despite its obvious appeal, the plant has not been widely distributed.



R. ‘Akbar’


R. ‘Akbar’


R. ‘Albatross’

R. ‘Albatross’



R. ‘Albatross Townhill Pink’



R. ‘Albatross Townhill White’



R. ‘Albatross Townhill Pink’

R. ‘Alice’

R. ‘Alice’

R. griffithianum hybrid

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5-6	May	6m x 3m

The mottled-pink flowers of R. ‘Alice’ can still be seen lighting up the woodland in any number of UK rhododendron gardens in the first few weeks of May, as the cross, made by John Waterer at the family’s Bagshot nursery, remains one of the most beautiful members of the genus. Well-grown mature specimens will be covered head to foot in large, conical trusses, each holding between 14 and 18 unspotted corollas, these broadly funnel-shaped, which gradually fade from deep pink through pale rose to near white, the colour procession swifter when plants are grown on an open sunny site, especially in southern gardens.

Cultivation is straightforward and usually without problem, the shrubs fully hardy and vigorous, with an upright habit, bushy in full sun, more open in shade. Youngsters take a few years to begin budding-up reliably, but then the annual display just keeps getting better and better.

As with many of the early rhododendron hybrids, the parentage details are ‘hazy’ at best. *R. griffithianum* is certainly in there somewhere, but what else went in remains a complete mystery, or will do until the geneticists get to work. The shrub’s demonstrated hardiness however, almost certainly rules out a first generation F1 cross.

‘Alice’ was introduced by Gomer Waterer in 1910 and is named for his wife.



R. ‘Alice’



R. ‘Alice’

R. ‘Ammerlandense’

The ‘Ammerlandense’ Pride

‘Britannia’ x *williamsianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 May 1.2 to 1.5m x 2.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Alexander Steffen	Dietrich Hobbie	1938	before 1958
Ammerlandense	Dietrich Hobbie	1938	1946
Ardy	Research Station for Arboreus Crops, Boskoop	before 1966	1969
Britannia’s Bells	Ben Lancaster	1958	1965
Erich Beeken	Dietrich Hobbie	1938	1983
Karin	Research Station for Arboreus Crops, Boskoop	before 1966	1968
Linda	Research Station for Arboreus Crops, Boskoop	before 1966	1968
Willbrit	Dietrich Hobbie	1938	1960

In 1938, Dietrich Hobbie flowered a specimen of R. ‘Britannia’ inside his greenhouse at Linswege, in the district of Ammerland, part of the northwestern German state of Lower Saxony. The first bloom to open received pollen from a plant of *R. forrestii* Repens Group, the second, from *R. williamsianum*. Two years on from that mating, with the Second World War in full swing, he was able to determine that his seedlings were all hybrids, showing features from both parents, and once the guns had fallen silent, three selections from each cross were introduced, all having survived outdoors under the nursery’s pine wood canopy, protected from the extreme cold (although - reportedly - they still had to endure winter temperatures as low as -30°C).

The Repens Group pollination produced the hybrids ‘Camillo Schneider’, ‘Linswege’ and ‘Linswegeanum’, while the *R. williamsianum* match resulted in the little-known cultivar ‘Alexander Steffen’, the now widely distributed ‘Willbrit’, and the first selection to be introduced, ‘Ammerlandense’.

This has flowers that are coral-rose trumpets rather than the deep-pink bell-shaped corollas of its more popular sibling, though they are still held in loose trusses of 5 to 8. The leaves on the two are also similar, broadly elliptic with an often cordate base, mirroring the shape of an egg. Mature specimens form upright domes around twice as wide as they are tall, and cover themselves in bloom from mid-May onwards. Backlit against a darker screen of conifers, they are simply stunning.

Of course, that winning combination was soon repeated: first, by Ben Lancaster of Camas, Washington State, in 1958, with his ‘Britannia’s Bells’ offered to the public during 1965; and then, trailing in third place, by the Dutch Experimental Research Station for Arboreus Crops, based in Boskoop, South Holland. Three registrations were logged-in by the latter between 1968 and 1969, these respectively, ‘Karin’ and ‘Linda’, and then ‘Ardy’. The 1969 selection, whether deliberately through its chosen epithet or not, highlights the trio’s -26ºC hardiness rating, with the first and second clones being the far more widely distributed plants. ‘Karin’ has one or two additional corollas in the flower truss and blooms a week or so earlier, at the start of May, but is otherwise identical to ‘Linda’.

Which has a dense and compact habit, with ascending branches that will eventually form a domed specimen just over 1m high, but with a much wider spread. The leaves are rounded through broadly ovate, each between 5 and 8cm long, mid green and matt, with a somewhat cordate base, held on red-flushed petioles. Juvenile foliage is bronzy. The flower truss is open to upright; holds seven or eight widely campanulate corollas with slightly wavy lobe margins; each bowl is up to 7cm across and rose-red in the bud and when first expanded, but paling to rose-pink soon after that. Stamens and style are flushed white.

A more dependable *williamsianum* hybrid - ‘Karin’ excepted - would be hard to find, especially as Dietrich Hobbie’s ‘Willbrit’ is known to have been ‘severely damaged at -26ºC in Virginia’ on the east coast of the USA (*The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* Peter and Kenneth Cox, 1988), and thus only given a clean bill of health down to -23ºC. So when that H7 rating is added to the fact that the hybrid buds up young, takes a full sun placement even in the UK’s southern gardens, and begins extending its new growth well after any chance of a late spring frost has passed, you can see why it would meet FKW’s approval. Oh, and its damn pretty too.



R. ‘Ammerlandense’

R. ‘Ammerlandense’

R. ‘Willbrit’

R. ‘Linda’

R. ‘Linda’



R. ‘Anah Kruschke’

R. ‘Anah Kruschke’

R. ponticum hybrid

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H7	Late May	2m x 2.5m

The parentage of this cross has unhelpfully been registered as simply ‘a *R. ponticum* seedling’, with no detail provided on the pollen parent. However, a number of authors have suggested that the equation is likely to be *R. ponticum* x ‘Purple Splendour’ (or the reverse), with a few opting for a somewhat more complicated pedigree, namely *ponticum* x (*catawbiense* x ‘Purple Splendour’). Either derivation would certainly tally with those dark, reddish-purple flowers and their even darker concentration of spots and speckles on the upper lobe, which cover the shrub during May and are held in tight, ball-shaped trusses of around a dozen corollas. The stamen anthers by contrast are creamy-white, while the habit is densely bushy, the leaves glossy and mid- to deep-green in hue.

‘Anah Kruschke’ is both sun and heat-tolerant and has proved to be a lot tougher than most other *ponticum* hybrids, which gives credence to the notion of some *R. catawbiense* blood being present in the mix. It also means the shrub can be planted-out in full exposure in gardens across the whole of the UK wherever the soil is right for rhododendrons, more especially, because the late May bloom time avoids any lingering spring frosts, which should be well past before the buds begin to swell.

Franz Kruschke, of Clackamas, Oregon, made the cross in 1948, naming the plant for his wife, but it was only introduced and registered five years after his death in 1967, by the Portland-based Van Veen Nursery.



R. ‘Anah Kruschke’

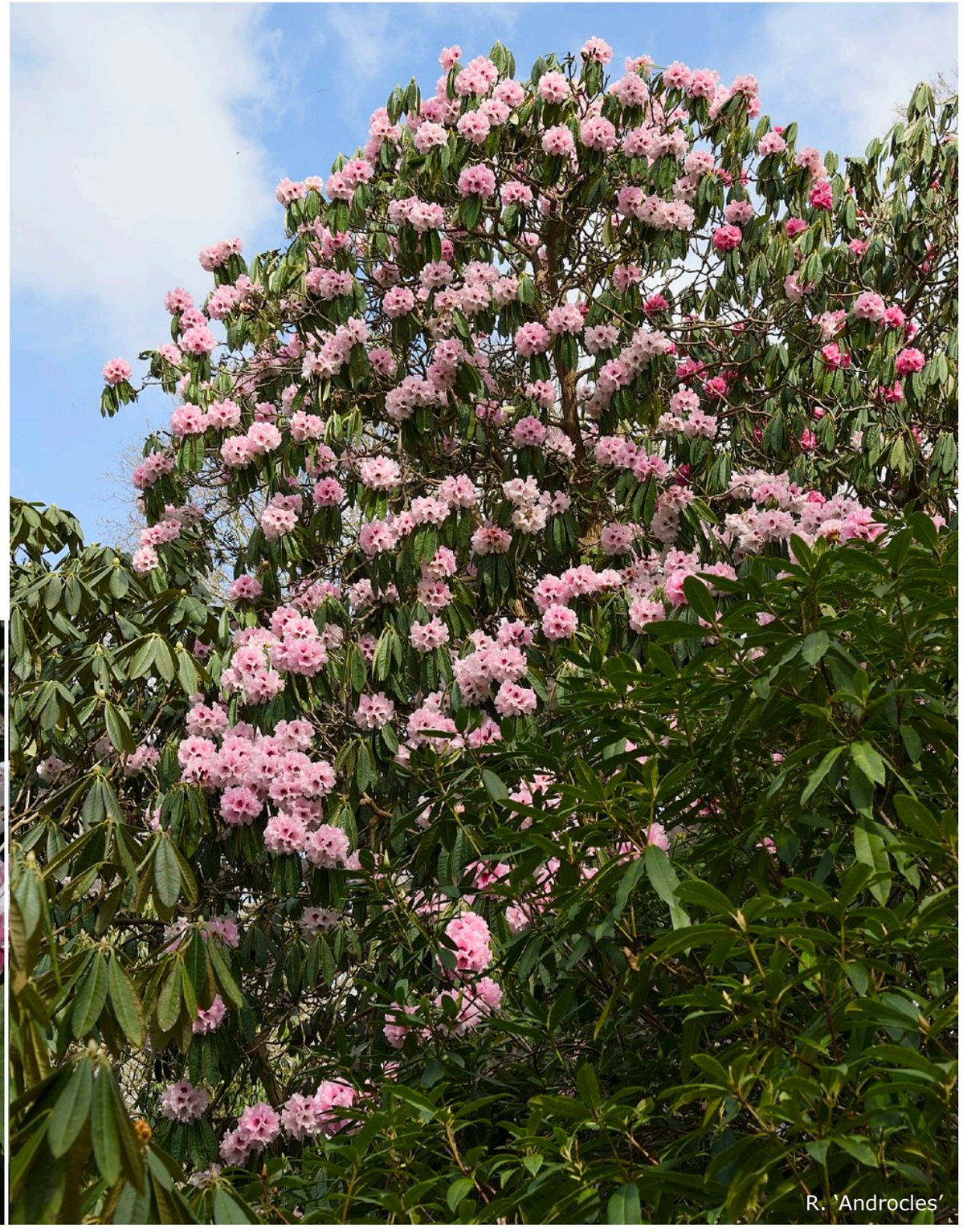
R. ‘Androcles’
arboreum x *calophytum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 March-April 7m x 4m

Lionel de Rothschild’s pairing of *R. arboreum* and *R. calophytum* used superior forms of both species to produce a group of offspring with a tree-like, upright habit, mirroring the seed parent. These plants are all well-filled with long, narrowly-elliptic, dull green leaves, mid-way between the two parents, but their flowers are more reflective of *R. calophytum*. These are borne in trusses of up to thirty campanulate corollas, with those on the award-winning clone - an AM in 1948; an FCC in 1990 - opening rhodamine pink and gifted four lines of darker, purplish-pink spots across their upper lobes that spread out from a deeper coloured blotch in the throat.

Exbury Gardens is home to quite a few now long-established specimens of ‘Androcles’ scattered throughout its 200 acres, but some of these are decidedly inferior and nearer *R. arboreum* florally, hence their ‘Androcles Grex’ labels. The RHS-favoured clone, with a more spreading habit, will be found at the far end of the Winter Garden, though recent storm damage has removed some of the branchwork featured herein.

‘Androcles’ is of course named for the lion-befriending ex-slave of ancient fable. It was introduced in 1933 and although not widely distributed, one or two specialist nurseries might still be able to offer grafted youngsters for a discerning connoisseur, which probably wouldn't be the case had it been tagged with an ‘Arbophytum’ moniker. Prospective purchasers should note however, that freedom of flowering runs in phases, alternating between a good year - when each branch tip boasts a burgeoning truss - and two leaner, successive seasons - when the plant is working up to its next floral overabundance.


R. ‘Androcles’


R. ‘Androcles’

R. ‘Androcles’

R. ‘Androcles Grex’

R. ‘Angelo’

The ‘Angelo’ Pride

griffithianum x *discolor*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late May-June 8m x 5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Angelo	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	1930
Angelo Diadem	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	before 1958
Cornish Loderi	J. C. Williams	before 1933	before 1958
Exbury Angelo	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	1947
Sheffield Park Angelo	A. G. Soames	before 1950	before 1958
Solent Queen	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	1939
Solent Snow	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	before 1942
Solent Swan	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	before 1942

Even though J. C. Williams at Caerhays had won the race to put pollen from stamens of *R. discolor* onto a stigma of *R. griffithianum,* introducing his hybrid ‘Cornish Loderi’ a year or so before R. ‘Angelo’ came onto the scene - despite the official *IRRC*-dated entries in the table above - it is the Lionel de Rothschild pairing of these two species that will be found planted in nearly all the milder UK woodland rhododendron gardens. For it is taller-growing, blooms slightly later and the flowers are superior. Listed as LR 127 in the Exbury stud book, in maturity, the progeny of that pairing are tree-like, often topping the 8m-mark, with an open habit and long, ovate shaped leaves, which despite being dull green are still attractive to the eye after the corollas fall.

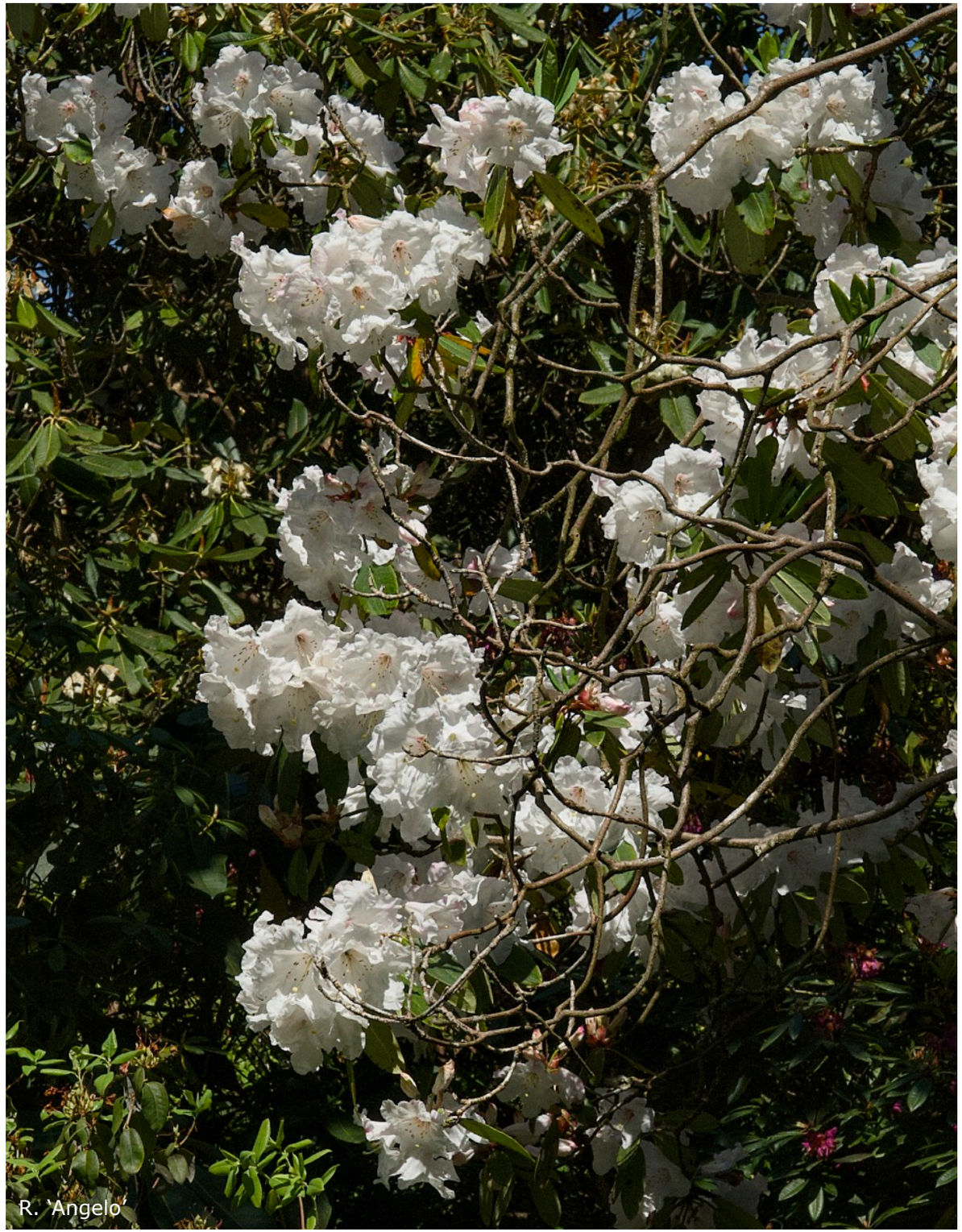
But of course, it is the blooms that maketh the plant:

Sweetly scented and carried in a tall, sumptuous truss of nine, ten or even twelve individual, funnel-shaped, seven-lobed trumpets, each corolla is simply enormous, easily 14cm across at the mouth. Colour varies depending on which clone is to hand and as usual, too many were released and they have become mixed-up in the trade, but: the AM form originating from Exbury is described as being pure white inside and out, from blush pink buds, with a speckling of pale green spots within; while the FCC plant, this registered separately as R. ‘Exbury Angelo’, retains a blush pink flush on its outer surface at first.

The cross made at Sheffield Park by A. G. Soames is also pure white, but has a greenish-yellow blotch in the throat, while Exbury’s third award-winner from the LR 127 mating - given the epithet ‘Solent Queen’ when introduced in 1939 - has blooms that open a very pale rose before fading to white. ‘Solent Snow’ and ‘Solent Swan’ would be fawned over if their sisters did not exist, as would R. ‘Angelo Diadem’, this introduced by Michael Haworth-Booth, but now very rarely found.

The green spotting displayed on all the clones may also be bisected by streaks of reddish-brown on the dorsal lobes. These fan out from a small, darker-coloured blotch deep in the corolla throat, though this is sometimes obscured by the ovary.

A sheltered and shady woodland environment is a prerequisite for anyone setting out on a quest to obtain a young plant, which will have been propagated by grafting or layering, as cuttings rarely root for any but those with the greenest of fingers. Yet such a search will likely prove long and arduous, and rarely result in obtaining the grail, especially if one of the later introductions - including the FCC winner - is your objective.



R. ‘Angelo’



R. ‘Solent Queen’



R. ‘Exbury Angelo’



R. ‘Exbury Angelo’

R. ‘Exbury Angelo’

R. ‘Anita’

campylocarpum x *griersonianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 May 2.5m x 3m

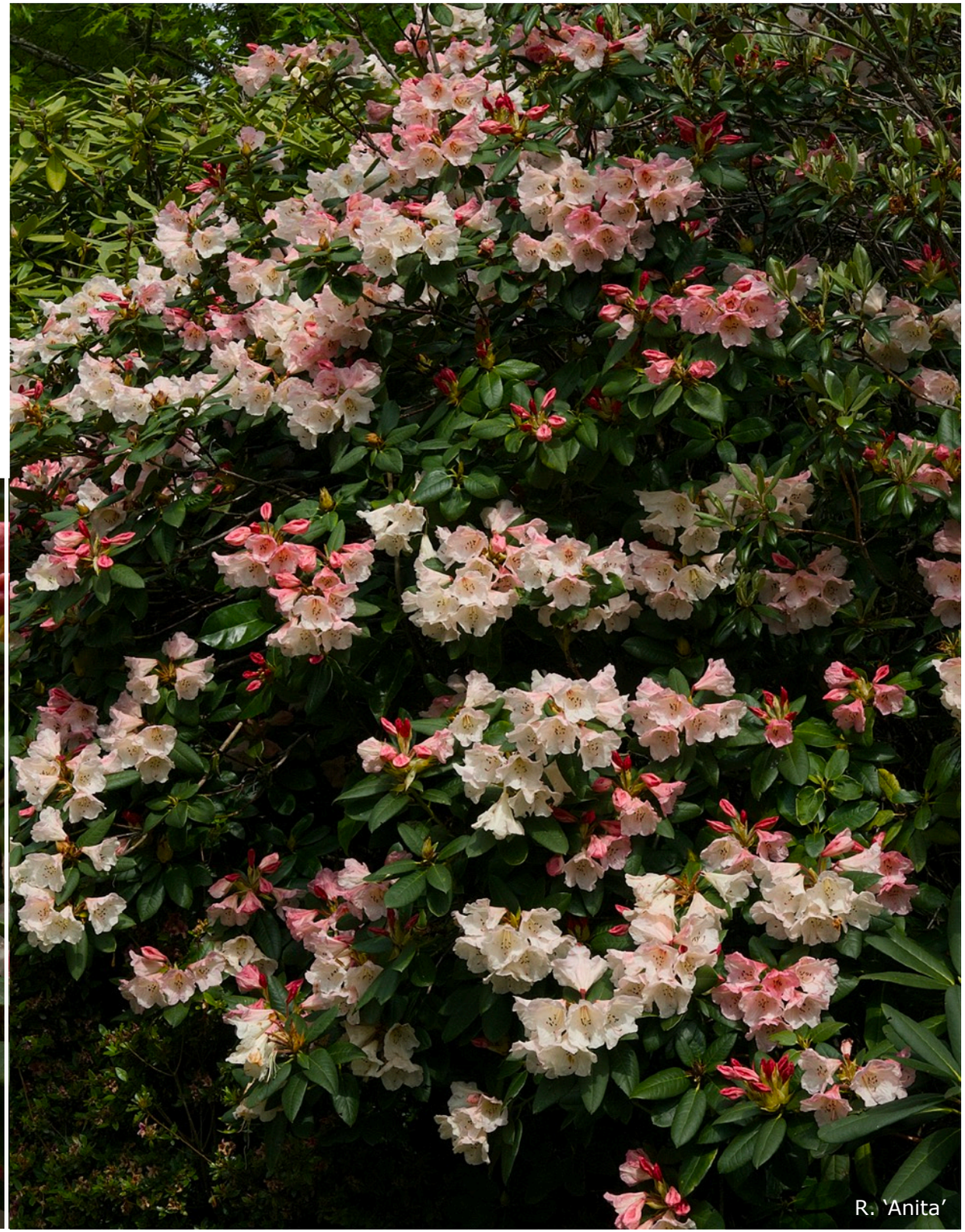
Rather than T. J. Rudolph Seidel’s earlier-introduced *R. catawbiense* ironclad hybrid, the ‘Anita’ cultivar featured herein is Lord Aberconway’s *campylocarpum* x *griersonianum* pairing, whose blooms are eye-catching when they first open. Expanding from buds flushed deep salmon-pink, when fully open, the apricot-pink-through-yellow-flushed-rose broadly campanulate bells are held in a flat-topped loose truss of five through eight corollas, with the dorsal lobe heavily spotted reddish-pink. Regrettably, they all then quickly bleach to a pallid white- or creamy-pink, especially when subjected to too much strong sunlight.

Habit is an open dome, wider than it is high, which is usually well-filled with dull green, matt, elliptic-ovate leaves, which are attractive, but no great shakes. Hardiness is also lacking, the H5 tag restricting the shrub longterm to milder woodland gardens in the south and along the west coast, and those locales lower down the east coast.

Henry McLaren made the pairing in 1930 at Bodnant, his North Wales home and garden overlooking the mountains of Snowdonia, near Tal-y-Cafn, Conway, with the plant named and introduced in 1941.



R. ‘Anita’



R. ‘Anita’


R. ‘Anita Dunstan’


R. ‘Anita Dunstan’

R. ‘Anita Dunstan’

‘Crest’ x ‘Hotei’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5-6	Mid May	2m x 2.5m

Crossed and named by Walter Hill, but introduced and registered by the Bruce Briggs Nursery in 1986, R. ‘Anita Dunstan’ resulted from a pairing of two exceptional deep-yellow flowering hybrids - Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Crest’, and Karl Sifferman’s ‘Hotei’, both of which have been gifted RHS floral awards (respectively, an FCC in 1953 and an AM in 1974). Their sole conception to date opens tight, ball-shaped trusses of 16 brilliant yellow corollas, widely funnel-shaped with wavy margins and the lobe tips stained orange-red. The foliage is moderately shiny, olive-green and elliptic in shape, on a bushy, slow growing plant that will take over a decade to top 1m in either height or width.

Light dappled shade will prolong the depth of pigmentation in the flowers, which are often produced in abundance, and a sheltered-spot placement in the garden offer the degree of protection demanded by the hardiness rating, which excludes exposed sites or any really cold inland locales in central or northern areas. Specimens of ‘Anita Dunstan’ are not as finicky to grow as either parent, but in truth, their blooms do not quite match the floral beauty of her forebears.

The Bill Whitney/Anne Sather 1975 cross, R. ‘Beautiful Day’, reverses the parentage, making R. ‘Crest’ the pollen provider.


R. ‘Anita Dunstan’



R. ‘Annegret Hansmann’

R. ‘Annegret Hansmann’
‘Hachmann’s Polaris’ x ‘Wega’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 May 1.2m x 1.5m

‘Annegret Hansmann’ is a cross between R. ‘Hachmann’s Polaris’ and R. ‘Wega’, the latter being a Dietrich Hobbie hybrid of 1947 vintage that is better known and more widely distributed under its synonym, R. ‘Psyche’.

Uwe Genzel made the pairing in 1988, the combination producing a low growing and compact plant, with dazzling saucer-shaped purplish-pink flowers. These open from rosy-red buds, are carried in tight rounded trusses of between 7 and 15 corollas that shade to near white in the throat and have brownish-green markings on the outside. The leaves are ovate through obovate, between 5-10cm long, and dull green; flat, but with a tendency to twist. The cultivar is an F2 *yakushimanum* cross, with the Japanese species providing a quarter of the genetic input via Hans Hachmann’s 1978 introduction.



R. ‘Annegret Hansmann’

The ‘Antonio’ Pride

‘Gill’s Triumph’ x *discolor*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late May-June 8m x 6m

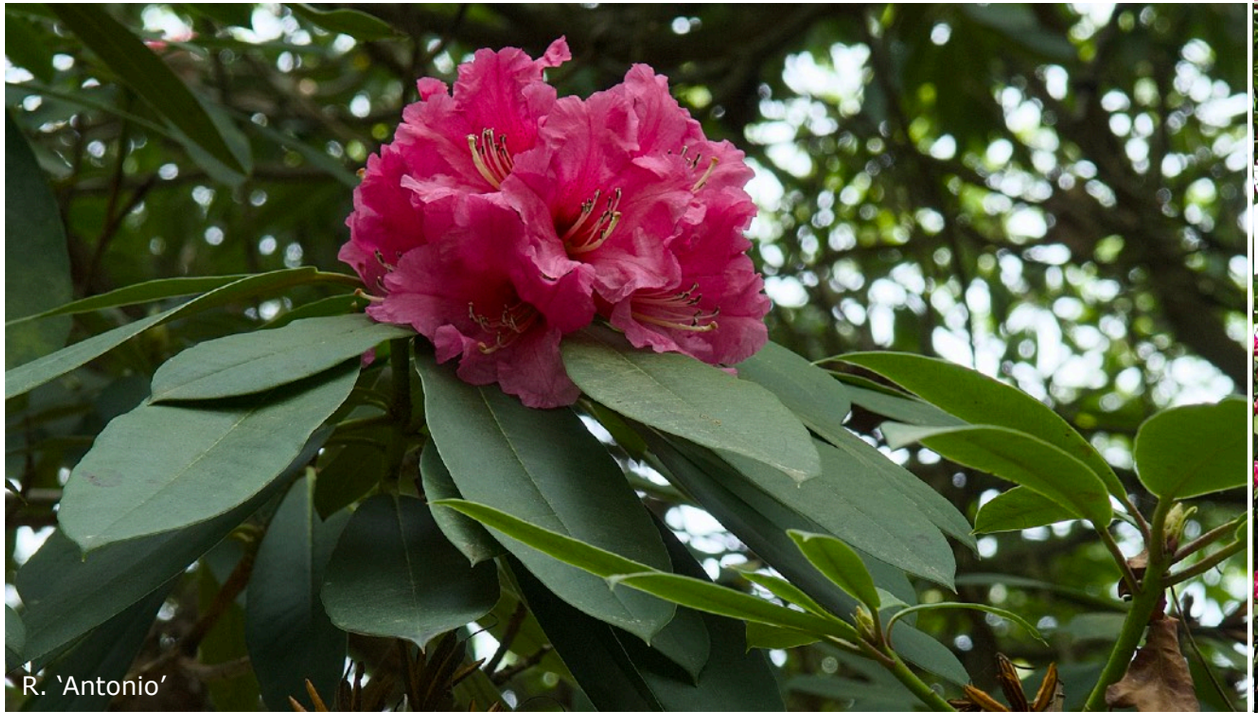
Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Antonio	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1933	1933
Antonio Omega	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1933	1933

Introduced in 1933, ‘Antonio’ is another Exbury stunner bred by Lionel de Rothschild, whose name will top the list of hybridisers whose directed pollinations occupy this volume. Tree-like and wide spreading, umbrella-shaped if confined to a single trunk, the flowers are deep rose pink, sweetly scented and borne in abundance. A dark crimson blotch that masks five nectar pouches deep in the throat, and spotting on the dorsal lobe, become far more apparent as the frilled corollas pale with age. These are funnel-shaped, 10cm wide at the mouth, and held in trusses of ten.

Hardiness is good, with the plants rated to mid-winter lows of -18°C, but light shade is needed to prolong the depth of flower colour and woodland shelter to protect the long leaves from damaging gusts of wind.

Youngsters dispatched from Exbury shortly after R. ‘Antonio’ won its Award of Merit in 1939 were wrongly described by their recipients as ‘Exbury Antonio’. History was on the beneficiary’s side of course, as following a series of precedents, the clone receiving the RHS accolade was usually different from the one subsequently distributed, but in this case, the two were and are the same. An earlier Standish & Noble hybrid with rosy red flowers shares the ‘Antonio’ epithet, though not the parentage.



R. ‘Antonio’



R. ‘Antonio’

R. ‘Arbsutch’

The ‘Arbsutch’ Pride

arboreum x *sutchuenense*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late March-April 6m x 4m

Doppelgänger

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Arbsutch	E. J. P. Magor	1915	before 1958
Snow Bunting	J. C. Williams	before 1958	before 1958

Names are important.

Regardless of a hybrid’s beauty of foliage or flower, in the vast majority of cases when a new cross is lumbered with a tongue-twisting epithet or some other less than memorable moniker, it will fail to find favour with the gardening public.

Edward John Penberthy Magor (1874-1941), of Lamellen, in St Tudy, Cornwall, was without doubt a master hybridiser, but when the time came to christen nearly all of the ravishing cultivars he selected from those directed pollinations, his practice of truncating, then butting together the parental appellations in formulaic contrivances that were the brainchild of Edinburgh’s Botanic’s eminence grise, Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour, his judgement was seriously flawed. For the wholesale adoption of these vitiations has meant that just a handful of his creations are known by anyone who is not an out-and-out avid rhodophile and these - think ‘Blue Tit’ or ‘Damaris’ - are the ones where he abandoned that custom.

So simply on account of its denomination, R. ‘Arbsutch’ falls into the passed-over category, which is criminal, because the plant itself is nothing less than stunning when in bloom and displays and surpasses the best features of both its parents.

The leaves are long; dark green daggers, elliptic-lanceolate in silhouette, fairly stiff and often gifted a V-shaped profile, they remain on the shrub for 2 to 3 years, filling the gaps between the branches. In form, mature specimens will have adopted a tree-like stance and typical umbrella-shaped silhouette if given room enough to develop freely, and they are robust growers.

The flowers appear early in the season, March into the first week of April, so like the foliage need the protection offered by a woodland placement, but seen at their best, en masse, those reddish-pink football-sized blooms are quite literally, breathtaking. Tubular-campanulate corollas, held in large trusses of 10 to 20, are heavily spotted purplish-red on all the lobes, with a still darker blotch in the throat, and although the overall pigmentation fades to a purplish-pink, the resulting tone is still strong, not washed-out. Moreover, the floral display is often prolific, although as with either parent, famine usually follows feast, especially if a plant’s energy is then wasted producing seed.

Regrettably, outwith the fabulous specimen established in the grounds of Muncaster Castle in West Cumbria - where many more Magor crosses will be found lighting up the woodland - mature plants are absent from most of the great collections open to the public. At least, any still graced with a label.

‘Snow Bunting’ is the only other registered cross to duplicate the parentage, but its details are somewhat obscure, for it may have been bred and raised at Exbury rather than at Caerhays, though J. C. Williams does get the credit for its introduction in the *IRRC* entry, even if the date of such is somewhat imprecisely defined.



R. ‘Arbsutch’

R. ‘Arbsutch’

R. ‘Arbsutch’

R. ‘Avalanche’

The ‘Avalanche’ Pride

‘Loderi’ x *calophytum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late March-April 8m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Alpine Glow	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1934	1938
Alpine Rose	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1934	1938
Avalanche	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1934	1934

A more appropriate appellation for this AM and FCC-awarded cross would be hard to conceive, especially when the flowering is prodigious and the weather has stayed mild, for R. ‘Avalanche’ does then indeed resemble a snowslide hurtling down a mountain, as the RHS acknowledged in 1934, and then again, in 1938. Because from head to foot, Lionel de Rothschild’s showpiece creation is covered in football-sized, pure white globes.

These are each made up of twelve to fourteen funnel-shaped corollas, individually 10cm wide at the mouth, which have a small magenta blotch deep in the throat that extends upwards in three lines of colour. And if any rhododendron’s floral display can stop you in your tracks, it will be the unbroken sheet of white borne by this paragon.

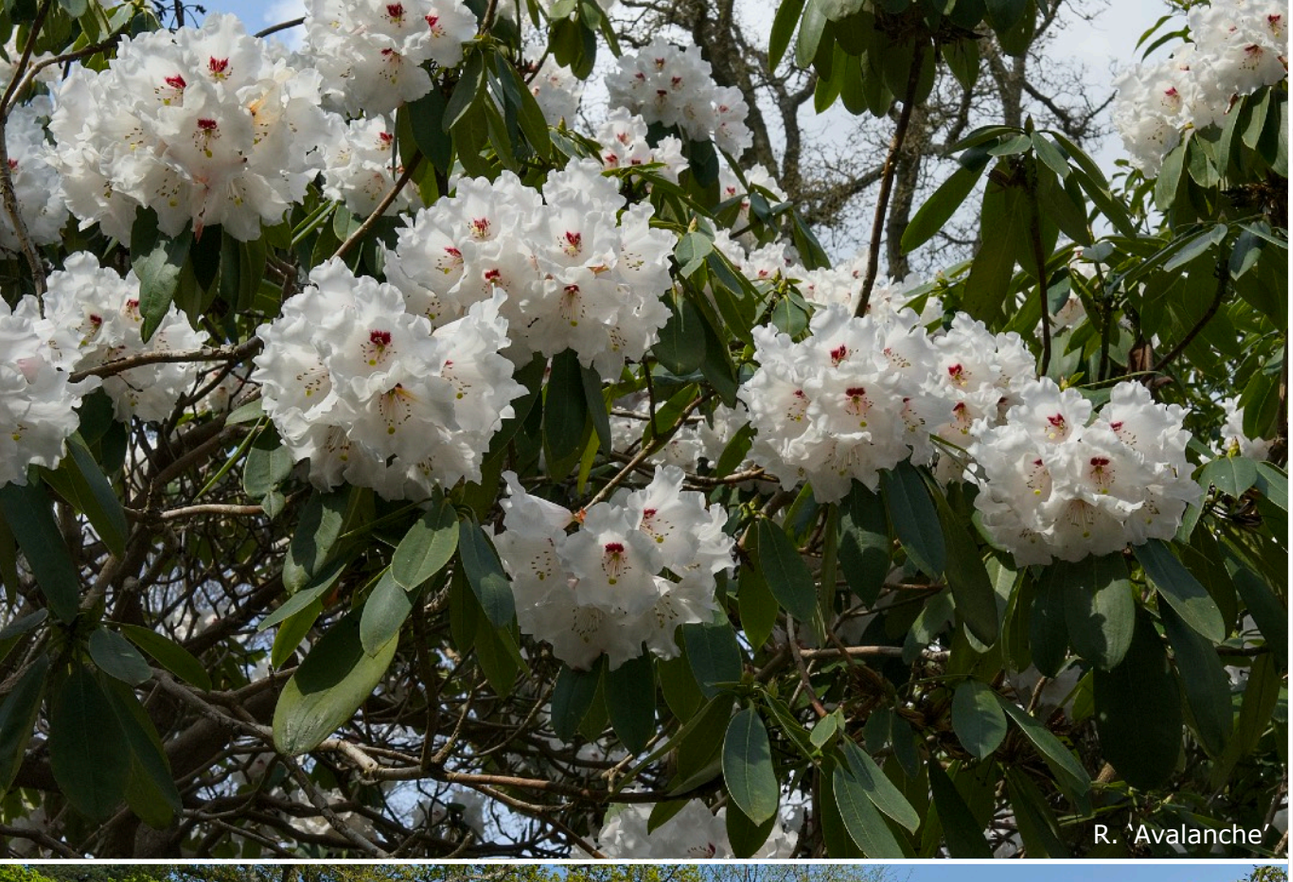
Again, ‘plant’ is a totally inadequate descriptor for this giant, which will easily reach and likely top the 8m-mark, and spread out almost as wide. It bears long, elliptic-oblong leaves, which although only held for one year, are large enough to avoid a leggy look, at least, on a well-grown mature specimen. The new growth follows the *R. calophytum* pollen parent in having rose-red bracts, while up close, the pedicels within each inflorescence will also be found to be flushed with a similar tint.

Placement and cultivation within a woodland environment is a must, both to protect the leaves from wind and the flowers from frost, though a sunny site is also needed to produce the most shapely specimen and maximise flower bud set. For too much shade will result in bare trunks at ground level and far fewer flowers, with these held way up in the shrub’s canopy. Equally, like many large-leaved species and hybrids, the quantity of bloom alternates on a two- or three-year cycle, especially when deadheading - removing the yet-to-swell seed pods once the corollas have fallen - is no longer a practical option.

Lionel de Rothschild selected, named and introduced two other clones from his ‘Loderi’ x *calophytum* pairing: R. ‘Alpine Glow’, which received its own Award of Merit in 1938 and boasts ‘delicate’ pink flowers that swiftly loose their flushing; and R. ‘Alpine Rose’, the blooms of which are suffused with a deeper hue of pink.



R. ‘Avalanche’



R. ‘Avalanche’



R. ‘Avalanche’



R. ‘Avalanche’

R. ‘Alpine Glow’

The ‘Azor’ Pride

griersonianum x *discolor*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 June 5m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Azor	Roza Stevenson	1927	1933
Azor Sister	Roza Stevenson	1927	1960
C. F. Wood	Preston	before 1947	1947
Lily Dache	Hybridiser Unknown	before 1958	before 1958
Mrs John Crawford	Sir James Horlick	before 1962	1962

Several gardens have made the match between *R. griersonianum* and *R. discolor,* with Roza Stevenson of Tower Court, Ascot - despite the *IRRC* entry designating the credit for such to her husband - getting in first and transferring pollen in 1927. The Stevensons introduced and named the hybrid in 1933, crossword fanatics instantly noting that ‘Azor’ is Roza’s name spelt backwards. Yet although Mrs Stevenson was a true gem and is today acknowledged as the respected hybridiser she surely was, her reverse namesake has drawn mixed reviews despite picking up an Award of Merit from the RHS on its debut. Because ‘Azor’, though of upright habit, is an often structurally untidy plant, as well as being quite open. The latter is down to a decidedly sparse mantle of foliage, for the long, oblanceolate through lanceolate-shaped matt green leaves are discarded after just a single year of life. And worse, even while they are still held in place, those blades can often be chlorotic and edged with yellow.

Regrettably, the flowers too can be second-rate, opening a decidedly poor bluish-pink on some of the distributed clones that are marketed under the same epithet. Yet on the plus side, the best specimens have very fine salmon-pink corollas with brownish-red markings in the throat, although these will need to be searched out from amongst the morass, as the usual commercial mix-up of distributed forms - the award winner and at least one lesser clone - has occurred.

So step up, R. ‘Azor Sister’ - recipient of a First Class Certificate in 1960.

Which may or may not be a clone from the original cross - expert opinion is well and truly divided on the issue - or alternatively, a second pairing of the two species by the Stevensons, or thirdly, even the reverse cross, as the parentage has not been registered. It does however bear flowers that are a much superior rhodamine-pink, stained turkey-red at the petal base and speckled currant-red on the dorsal lobes. But again, as is frequently the case for any number of rhododendron hybrids after their departure from the propagating bench, don’t expect the attached label to differentiate between the two.


R. ‘Azor’


R. ‘Azor’

R. ‘Azor’

R. ‘Baden-Baden’

The ‘Baden-Baden’ Pride

‘Essex Scarlet’ x *forrestii* Repens Group

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Early May 0.6 to 2m x 2.5 to 4m

Doppelgängers

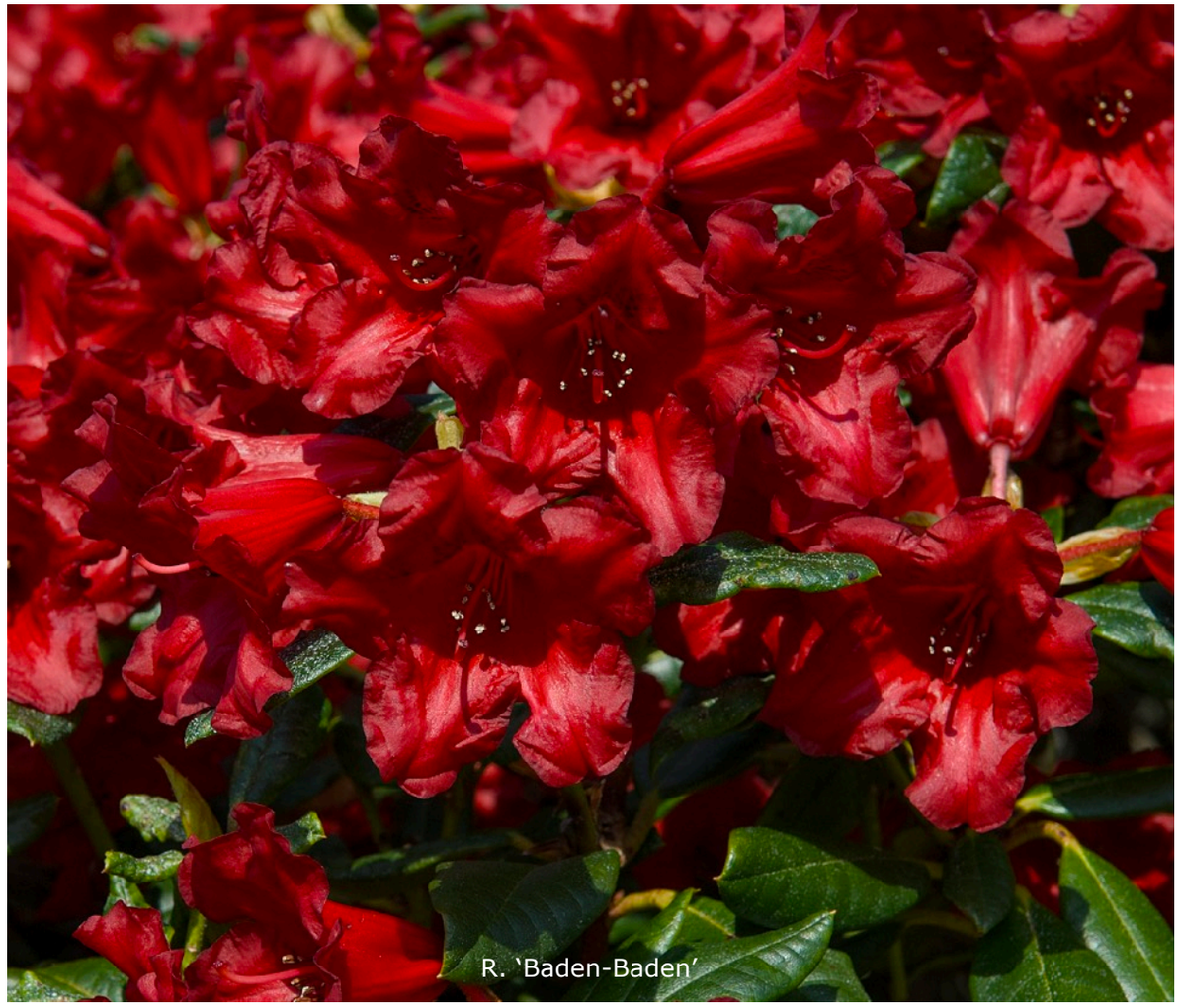
Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Abendglut	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1967
Abdenrot	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	around 1965
Aksel Olsen	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1964
Antje	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1965
Bad Eilsen	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1965
Baden-Baden	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1956
Bengal	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1960
Burning Love	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1973
Elisabeth Hobbie	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	before 1958
Friedrich Deus	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1960
Frühlingsanfang	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1971
Frühlingstag	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1963
Frülingstraum	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1963
Frühlingszauber	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1962
Hobbie Salute	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1994
Juwel	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1960
Mannheim	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	before 1975
Moerheim’s Jubilee	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1968
Salute	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1961
Scarlet Wonder	Dietrich Hobbie	1942	1960

‘Baden-Baden’ is not the most well-known of the twenty clones named and introduced from Dietrich Hobbie’s ‘Essex Scarlet’ x *forrestii* Repens pairing, as ‘Scarlet Wonder’ or ‘Elisabeth Hobbie’ vie for that credit, but it was the first to be offered commercially. The cross was made at his Linswege nursery in 1942 and this clone, named for the famous spa town in southern Germany, introduced in 1956. The *IRRC* entry for ‘Elisabeth Hobbie’ would have you believe that it was conceived in 1937 and available on the market in 1945, the minor fracas of the Second World War notwithstanding, but the hybridiser himself refuted such testimony pre its publication in an article for the American Rhododendron Society’s *Journal* - Volume 11, Number 2, April 1957 - *Rhododendron Breeding at Linswege.*

All twenty named selections are remarkably hardy, for despite the protection offered by a canopy of Scots pine in the nursery woodland - located just a few miles inland from the North Sea at Westerstede, in Oldenburg Province, Lower Saxony - the seedlings still had to face often-snowless winters and bone-chilling temperatures that reportedly fell to as low as -30°C. So they will succeed and prosper in the somewhat balmier maritime climate of the UK in full exposure, though the high summer temperatures of the southern counties are not appreciated and here a planting position offering dappled shade and succour from the sun’s fiercest midday and afternoon rays will prove beneficial. Most specimens also shrugged off the effects of those exceptionally cold winter spasms the UK has been subjected to recently without regard, though a few did loose some flower buds.

Yet ‘Baden-Baden’, despite it fabulous flowers, is not to everyone’s taste because of the twisted foliage, as possibly evidenced by a lack of any formal floral award in spite of being highly commended in RHS trials carried out at Wisley during the early 1970s. The plant is slightly taller growing than its sisters, attaining around 2m in height in time and spreading wider. It is also the most floriferous clone of the bunch, with the waxy corollas also having a deeper pigmentation - cherry- rather than cardinal-red - these carried in flat-topped trusses of six. As to those other clones:

‘Bad Eilsen’ - the name, of course, borrowed from the municipality in Schaumburg, Lower Saxony - is a lower-growing selection to around 1.5m in height, which is liberally covered each spring in strong red flowers, gathered together in lax trusses of 4 or 5. But note that not every shoot bears a flower bud, even on fairly bushy mature specimens, with the ratio being around 50:50. Out of flower, the matt-green foliage is not especially eye-catching despite contrasting red buds set later in the season.



R. ‘Baden-Baden’



R. ‘Bad Eilsen’





R. ‘Bengal’

R. ‘Elisabeth Hobbie’

R. ‘Elisabeth Hobbie’

'Elisabeth Hobbie' is regarded by most aficionados as the best selection from the twenty registered, that ranking mostly down to the foliage: elliptic through obovate and rounded at the apex; dark glossy green, with impressed veins, the leaves not yellowing with age; each between 6.5 and 9cm long, by half that in width. The habit too is better, with the bush remaining compact and densely cloaked for many years, except when planted in too much shade, where it will become leggy and open.

However, reports that 'Elisabeth Hobbie' is a semi-dwarf to low shrub are in error, for the plant is decidedly vigorous and will soon top the 1m-mark, with a spread at least 50% greater. Mature specimens can easily hit 2m in height in the open and more if shade from an encroaching canopy becomes too dense.

The flowers on this clone are described as being 'Turkey Red', and they are also faintly spotted a darker red on the dorsal lobe. Held aloft by glandular pedicels in a lax truss of 5 to 10 funnel-shaped corollas, each is 4.5cm long and 5.5cm across, with slightly wavy margins. Young plants take a little longer to begin blooming than their sister selections, but the delay of a year or two is rewarded in a much better bush structure overall. And one that is no less free-flowering and reliable from then on.

'Frühlingszauber' is much more widely known in the UK and elsewhere as 'Spring Magic', with this *IRRC*-listed synonym regarded as pride member 21 by some authors - who describe a wide-spreading plant with currant-red corollas. This could certainly explain the anomaly of those UK-grown plants differing from their German counterparts - which are low growing, being under 0.6m in height for many years, though the habit eventually reverts to mound building and is soon thereafter fringing the 1m-mark; have leaves that are broadly ovate, hitting maxima of 9cm long by 4cm wide, these somewhat shiny and dark green in colour, their impressed adaxial veins and midrib distinctive; and bear scarlet-red corollas, black spotted at the base of the dorsal lobe, carried in loose trusses of 5 to 7, with each bell 4.5cm by 5.5cm, and these campanulate in shape. Except that when a space is placed between the 's' and the 'z' in the epithet's gobbledegook, 'Spring Magic' appears in the translation box of the online German to English Google dictionary. Try it!

And so finally, to 'Scarlet Wonder' - 'the most grown Repens hybrid worldwide, and a commercial standard in all but the severest growing areas' to quote from the entry Peter and Kenneth Cox penned for their 1988 *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids*. Named and introduced not by Hobbie, but by the Le Feber & Co. Nursery, of Boskoop, in the Netherlands, during 1960, it has between 4 and 7 broadly funnel-shaped corollas in each loose truss, these cardinal red in colour with some faint, though virtually invisible, brownish spotting in the throat, plus wavy-edged lobe margins. The flowers are set against dark green and glossy, ribbed, broadly elliptic-obovate leaves around 5cm long by 2.5cm wide that provide a fine cloak across the framework of supporting branches, though reports indicate an inclination to yellowing. The habit remains compact into maturity, the shrub spreading wider than it grows high, but again, reports that it is a 'dwarf' or 'semi-dwarf' plant are really only valid for youngsters, for although it will take several decades to get there, 'Scarlet Wonder' will eventually broach the 1m-height mark and extend-out to at least twice that figure.

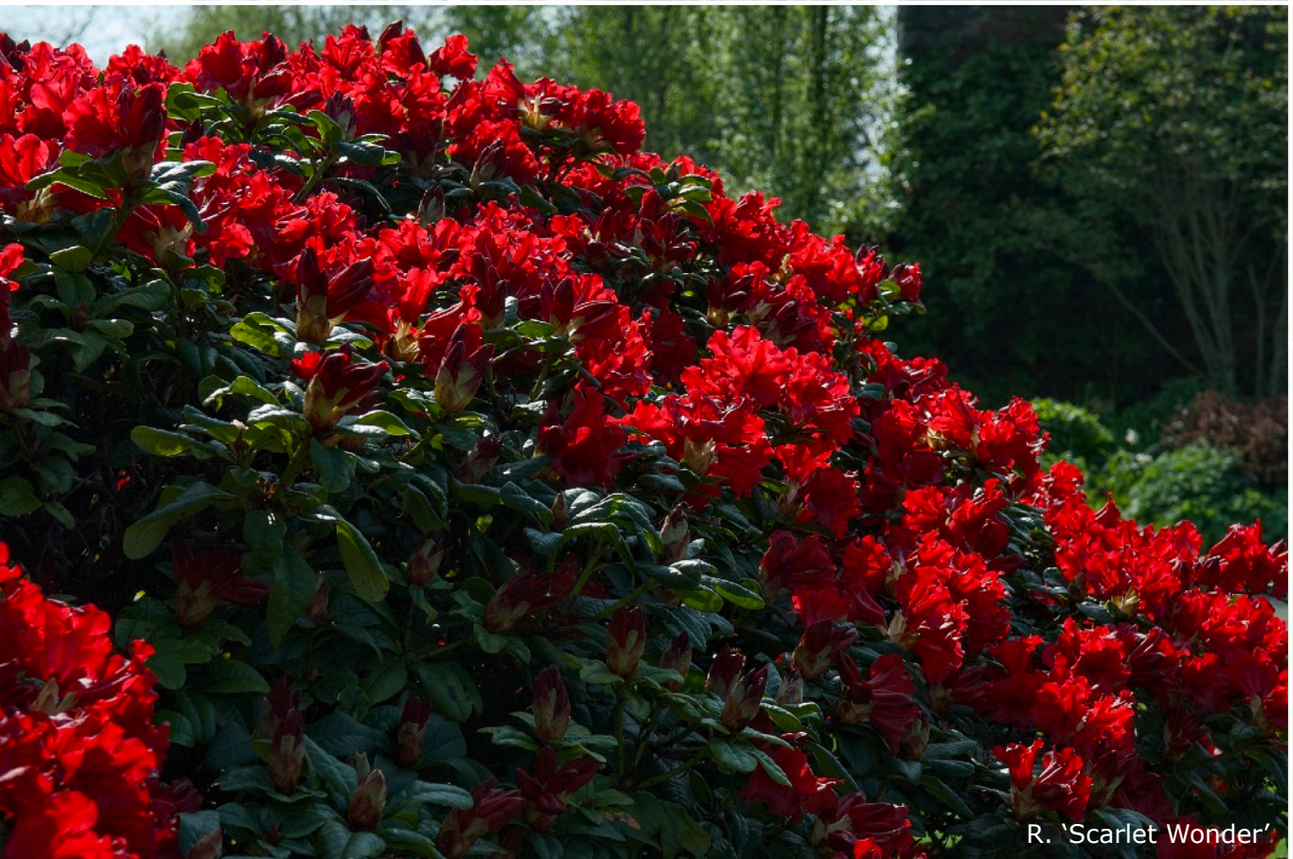
Hardy to at least -23ºC, easy to grow and free-flowering from a two-year-old rooted cutting onwards, Dietrich Hobbie's pièce de résistance can be acquired from garden centres, DIY warehouses and even a few supermarkets, when the annual spring-stock plant displays are wheeled out. The hybrid is also a front garden staple - there are upwards of a half-dozen long-established individuals populating the small west Cumbrian village where this text was typed - for the building mound of foliage is attractive all year-round and an absolute knockout when topped by a sheet of flame for almost the entire month of May.


R. 'Frühlingszauber'


R. 'Frühlingszauber'


R. ‘Scarlet Wonder’

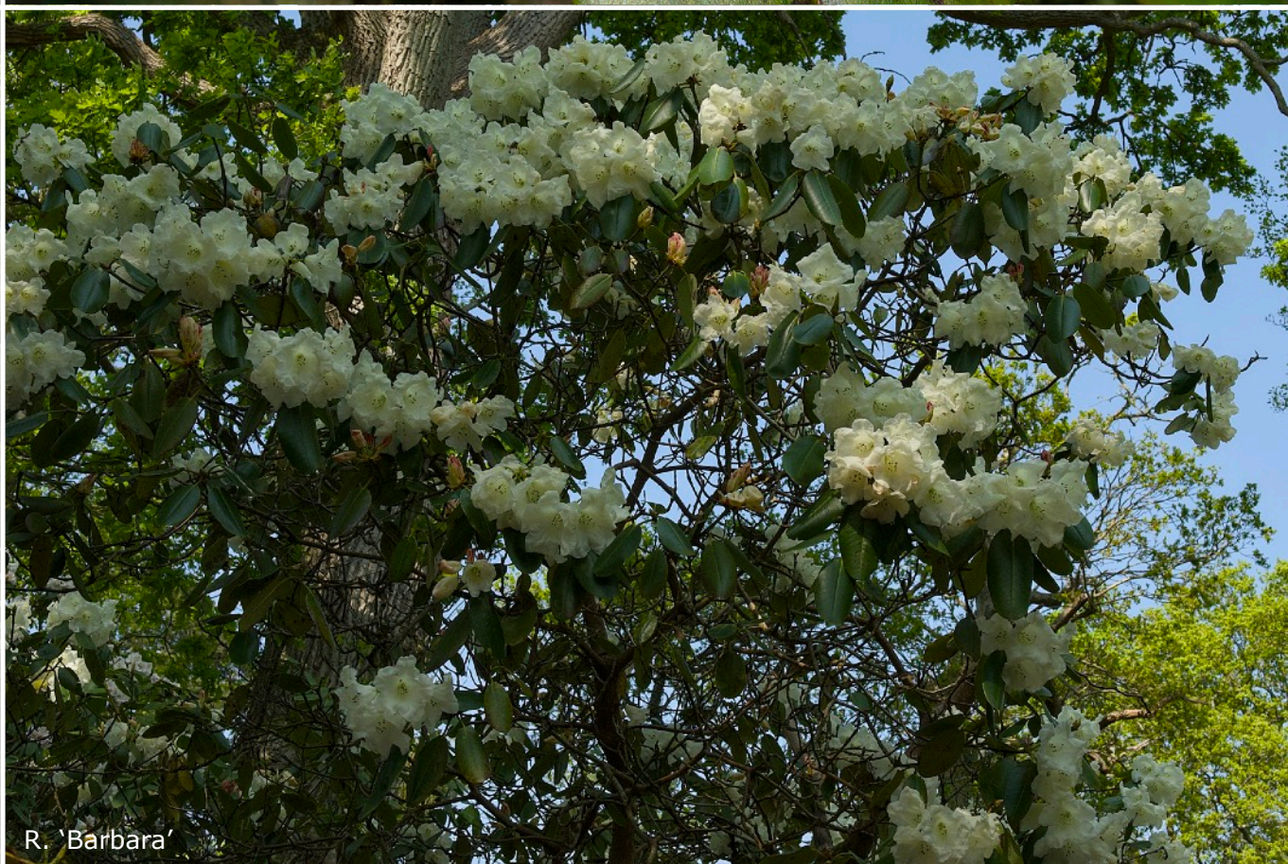

R. ‘Scarlet Wonder’


R. ‘Scarlet Wonder’


R. ‘Scarlet Wonder’


R. ‘Barbara’


R. ‘Barbara’


R. ‘Barbara’

The ‘Barbara’ Pride

campylocarpum x ‘Loderi’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April-May 4m x 3m

Doppelgänger

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Barbara	Lionel de Rothschild	1934	1948
Lady Horlick	Sir James Horlick	1931	1961
Phryne	Henry McLaren	1925	1933
Pinafore	Lionel de Rothschild	1934	1948

The taller-growing form of *R. campylocarpum* - now horticulturally posited as Elatum Group - was the chosen seed parent for R. ‘Barbara’, while R. ‘Loderi’ was gifted the role of pollen provider, the match made in 1934 by Lionel de Rothschild, who later described the flowers of his directed pollination’s progeny as being of ‘many shades of colour’ with ‘a good truss’ (*The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* 1967).

Those borne by ‘Barbara’ are in fact cream, with a soft pink flush at first, and that latter trait, inherited from *R. campylocarpum,* is most pronounced in the ‘Pinafore’ clone, where the staining at the lobe margins and along the veins is delightful, the tone deepest at the tip of each corolla just before it opens. Some sources detail a dark blotch in the throat, but this was not evidenced on the original plants at Exbury, nor detailed by C. E. Lucas Philips and Peter N. Barber in their aforementioned register of the garden’s hybrids.

Both clones, introduced by Lionel’s eldest son, Edmund, in 1948, require a semi-shaded woodland placement to be at their best, with the flowers and foliage protected from too much sun and any winter extremes, so ‘Barbara’ and ‘Pinafore’ are perfect for southern and western gardens, but not for the UK’s coldest sites. This also holds true for the other two cultivars listed above, Henry McLaren’s ‘Phryne’, which although the first to employ the given parental equation in 1925, is virtually unknown today, and ‘Lady Horlick’, crossed in 1931 and named in 1961 by its hybridiser, Sir James Horlick, for his second wife Joan Isabel MacGill, whom he had married after his first consort, Flora Macdonald Martin, passed away in 1955. However, instead of opting for deep cream or white flushed pink corollas, Sir James selected a pure white clone from his group of seedlings once they had begun to flower.

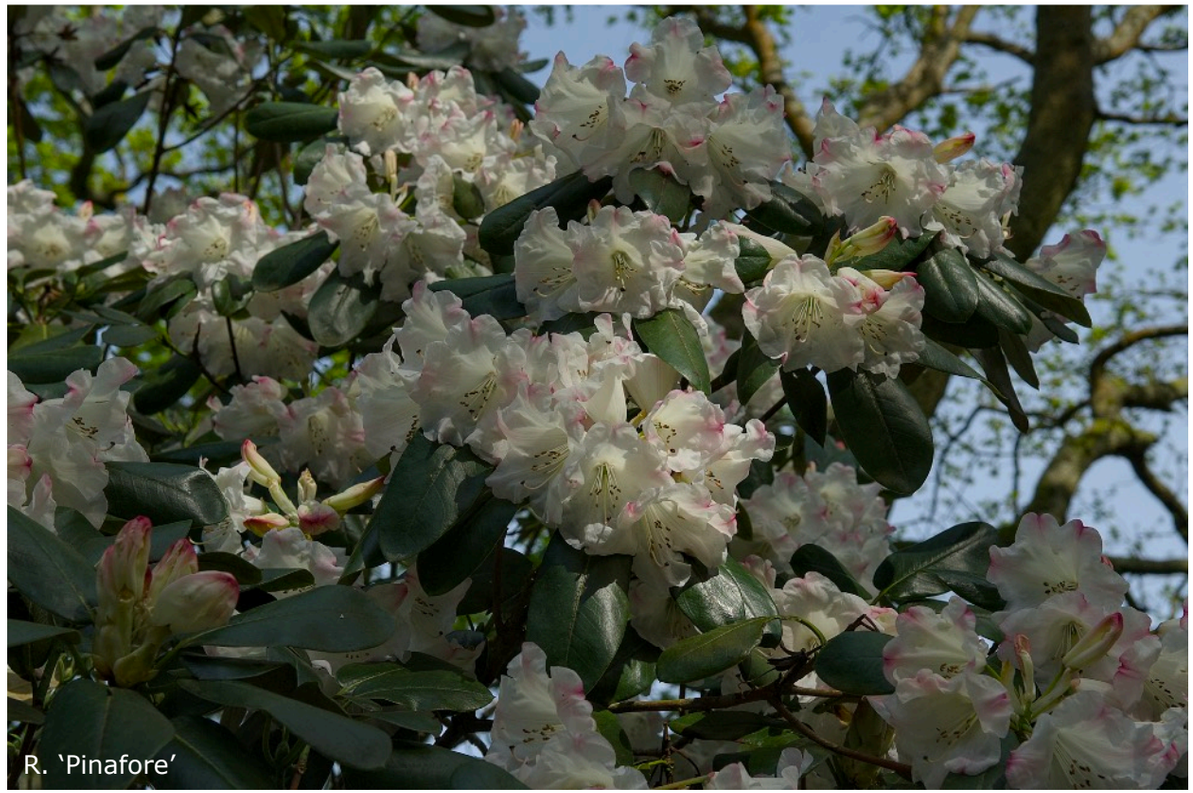
Yet like so many of the Horlick introductions, this sublime hybrid is virtually unknown outwith a few Scottish west coast gardens - Brodick and Inverewe, for instance - and resident in these only because Sir James left his collection of plants at Achamore House, on the Isle of Gigha, to the care of the National Trust for Scotland, when he himself died on the last day of December, in 1972.

‘Lady Horlick’ is similar in habit to ‘Loderi’, though not as tall-growing, with the foliage often more rounded than oblong. The funnel-shaped corollas are carried in a loose and open truss of up to seven blooms, each near 15cm across at the mouth when fully expanded, and slightly scented. In the bud they are a milky-cream colour, with just the faintest hint of pink at their apex, this brushstroke blemish on an otherwise pristine snowfield, quickly lost as the lobes unfurl.

A browse down the pages of the *IRRC* will show that a Hardy Hybrid listed by James Veitch & Son in 1867 shares the ‘Barbara’ epithet, but is unlikely to be confused with the Rothschild plant as its corollas are purple with a white centre.



R. ‘Pinafore’

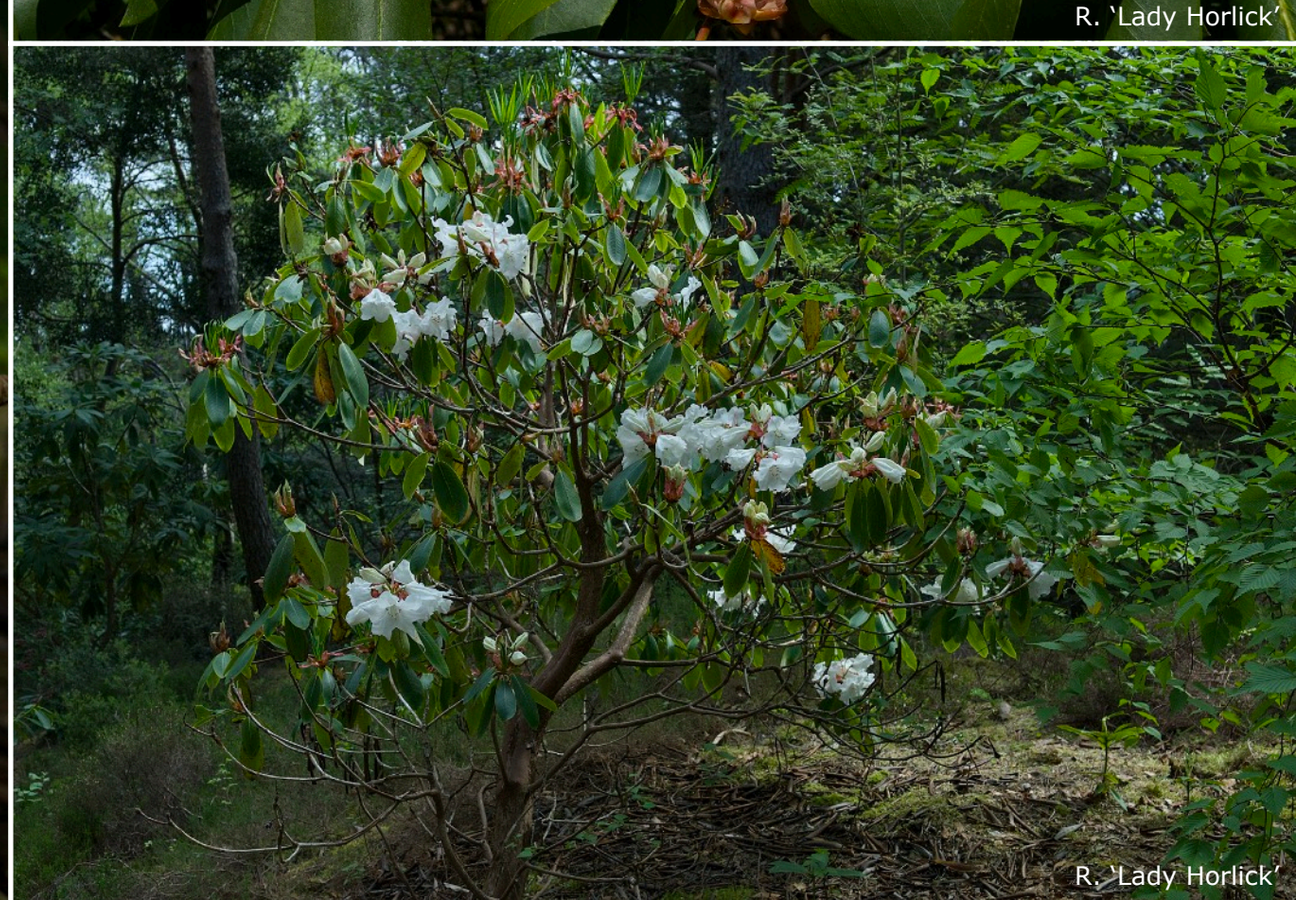


R. ‘Pinafore’

R. ‘Lady Horlick’


R. ‘Lady Horlick’


R. ‘Lady Horlick’


R. ‘Lady Horlick’

R. ‘Beau Brummell’

R. ‘Beau Brummell’

‘Essex Scarlet’ x *facetum*

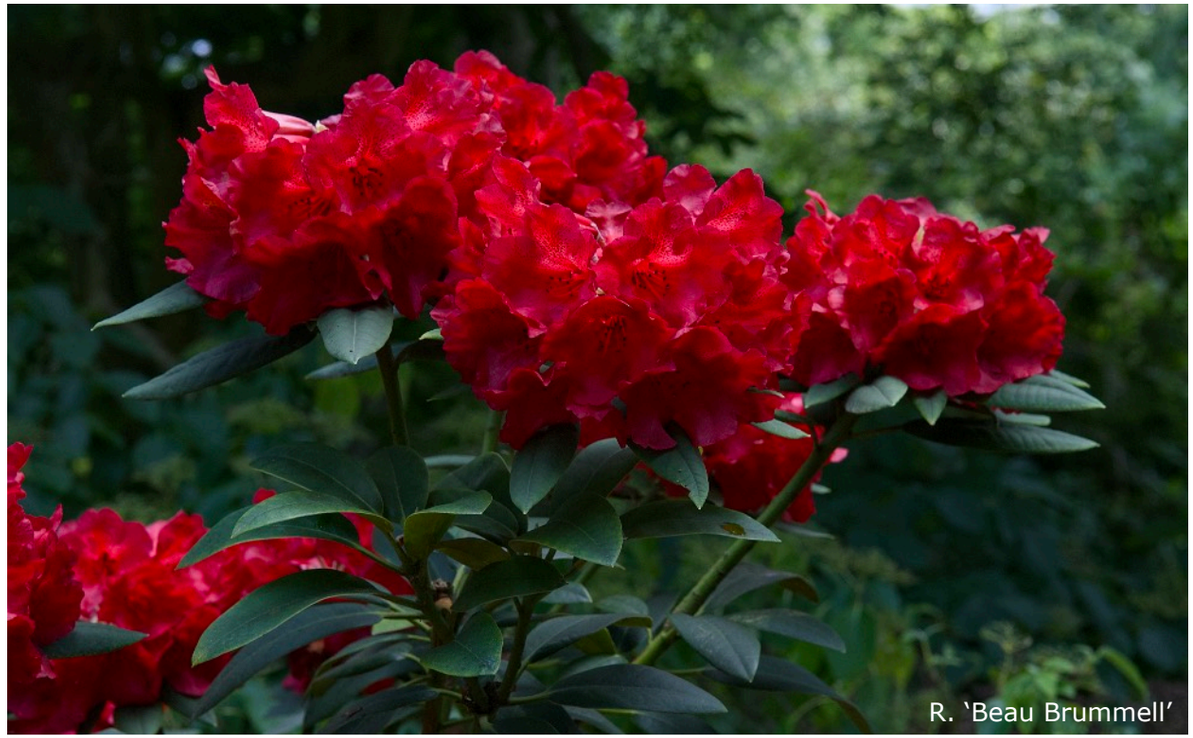
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 June 3m x 3m

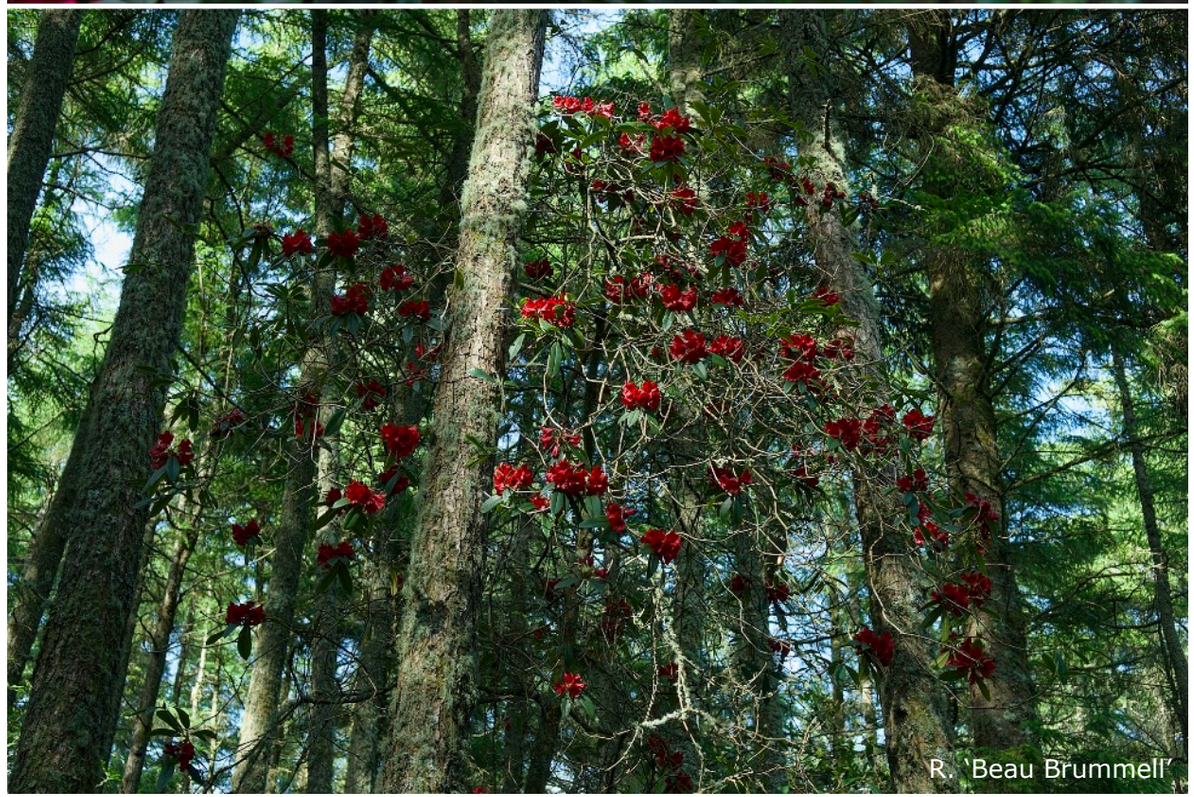
With around thirty waxy and glowing, scarlet-red tubular-funnel-shaped corollas held in each individual domed truss, a mature plant of Lionel de Rothschild’s 1934 cross ‘Beau Brummell’ is a splendid sight to behold in a woodland garden during the first week of June. Within the throat, all the lobes are spotted darker, but the effect is muted below, strongest above, with the speckles most distinct on the central dorsal petal. In contrast, the stamen anthers are coloured black and so catch the eye. The foliage colour foil is greyish-green, the pointed leaves narrowly ovate-oblong in silhouette, of medium length, with a thin, pale brown indumentum below.

The H6 hardiness rating means the shrub is tough enough to be planted outdoors in all but the coldest of British gardens, ‘Beau Brummell’ inheriting its vim from George Paul’s ‘Essex Scarlet’, with the pollen parent barely influencing the winter low resilience, instead, seemingly responsible only for enhancing the beauty of the flowers. The plant’s usual habit is to form an open dome structure 2 to 3m high, this spreading out wider unless too much shade draws the new growth skyward, producing a gawky, straggly specimen (as the photo opposite-below clearly illustrates). Consequently, unlike the other Exbury deep reds, R. ‘Beau Brummell’ can be grown in a far more open and exposed spot than would suit the likes of ‘Jutland’, ‘Kiev’ or ‘Kilimanjaro’, all three being much more cold intolerant due to their tender seed parent, this regardless of the fact that *R. elliottii* ssp. *elliottii* replaced *R. elliottii* ssp. *facetum* in the various directed pollinations. For as experienced rhodophiles will know, both of the subspecies are only really suitable for west or south coast gardens due to their H3-4 hardiness rating, and will suffer bud and limb damage, or even death, when temperatures fall below -10ºC. And the hybridising fraternity know as well that as seed parents, they will pass on that vulnerability to the progeny matured in their capsules. But in this instance, given that ‘Essex Scarlet’ uplift, a dappling of light shade to keep too much sun from prematurely paling those spellbinding flowers, and a bare modicum of wind protection to safeguard the leaves, will allow L de R’s ‘Beau Brummell’ to thrive.

The choice of epithet too is perfect - the Regency dandy of impeccable dress, echoed in the flamboyant yet perfectly set blooms.



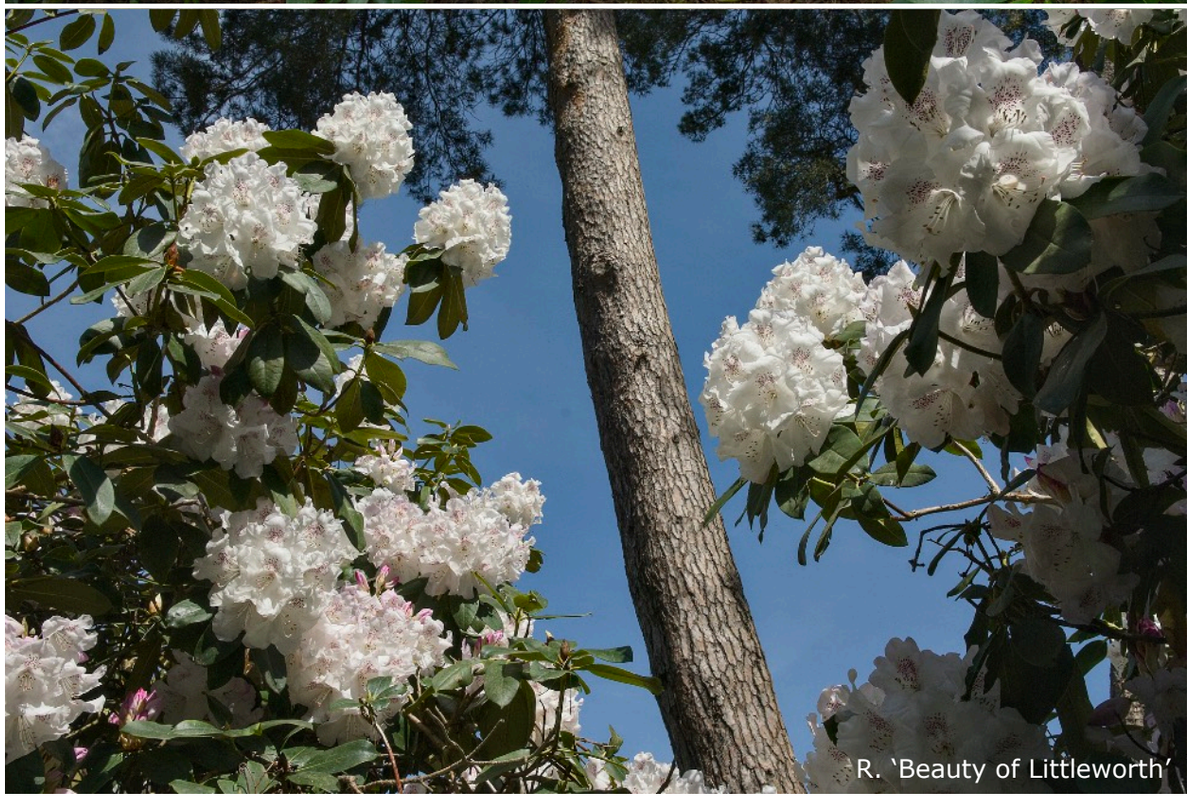
R. ‘Beau Brummell’



R. ‘Beau Brummell’

R. ‘Beauty of Littleworth’


R. ‘Beauty of Littleworth’


R. ‘Beauty of Littleworth’

R. ‘Beauty of Littleworth’

R. griffithianum hybrid

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 Late April-May 4m x 6m

If ever an epithet could inadvertently suggest the total opposite of its intent, this one takes the biscuit: as instead of iron pyrite, James Mangles’ ‘Beauty of Littleworth’ is literally worth its weight in gold.

For much of the second half of the 19th Century, James Henry Mangles (1832-1884), was regarded as the ‘High Priest of the Rhododendron cult’ - at least, by John Guille Millais, who was responsible for dreaming up the accolade. He has some 63 rhododendron hybrids and 2 azaleodendrons registered against his name in the current edition of the *IRRC,* shrubs moreover, that still hold their own against many of today’s floral concoctions - on a showbench, or in many a woodland garden. For plants such as ‘Dawn’s Delight’, ‘George Hardy’, ‘Loder’s White’ and ‘Mrs Kingsmill’ - to single out but four - were, like ‘Beauty of Littleworth’, the result of pairings made with the newly-discovered *R. griffithianum*.

Even though the species had only been introduced from Sikkim in 1850, Mangles instinctively knew that it would gift his hybrids a beauty that would set them apart from the plethora of *ponticum-catawbiense-maximum-arboreum* fabrications that had dominated the first half of the century and that in the main, are today, good only for the bonfire. His writings in *The Gardeners’ Chronicle* confirm such, though despite repeated references in otherwise erudite texts, the *Floral Calendar* - of 1839 vintage - was penned by his father - another James Mangles (1786-1867) - who was an ex-Royal Navy officer, traveller and amateur botanist. His son knew that the tougher constitutions of those ‘near-ironclads’, along with other hardier species would, when bred with Hooker’s ‘Aucklandii’, produce offspring to marvel at. Plants that in addition, could be grown outdoors across a far wider spread of horticultural locales. And history has shown he was right.

The parentage of ‘Beauty of Littleworth’, like many of the crosses James Mangles made, was either not recorded or the details have been lost, but it is clearly a pairing of *R. griffithianum* pollen placed on the stigma of either *R. campanulatum* or one of the hybrids of such then in circulation, though of course, only the former is credited in the *IRRC’s* official ‘*griffithianum*-hybrid’ tag. Regardless, the conical trusses of up to 18 white flowers spotted purplish-red on the upper lobes and opening from pink buds, could result from a match with nothing else.

They open in the last week of April and persist through much of May, but in quantity and substance, often prove too heavy for the branches to support, so end up inverted or side-on. This has a permanent effect on the habit, turning an already leggy demeanour into a bent and straggly mess. Yet vigour comes to the rescue, with the sheer size of a mature specimen making the sprawl of its construction immaterial.

Mangles gardened at Valewood, near Haslemere, which is now a nursing home, but following his untimely death at the age of 52, much of his rhododendron collection was moved to Littleworth Cross, then the home of his younger brother Henry Albert Mangles (1833-1908). ‘Beauty of Littleworth’ however, was spotted and raised by his even younger sister, Clara (1846-1931), who shared the estate with Henry and named the hybrid for its new abode, winning a First Class Certificate floral award from the RHS when the blooms were exhibited at a flower show in 1904.

Today, huge specimen plants of ‘Beauty of Littleworth’ - or ‘Littleworth Beauty’, as many garden labels alternatively proclaim - will be found in woodland abodes up and down the whole country, with possibly the largest example of such in the UK, to be found at Corsock House, Dumfries & Galloway, in southwest Scotland.



R. ‘Bellerophon’



R. ‘Bellerophon’

R. ‘Bellerophon’

‘Norman Shaw’ x *facetum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late June-July 4m x 3m

‘Bellerophon’ is one of Lionel de Rothschild’s lesser-known hybrids, overlooked by the cognoscenti until they stumble upon a mature specimen in late June through mid July:

In full flower.

Lighting up a woodland glade.

When virtually every other rhododendron has long since dropped its corollas.

Unless, of course, the blood of *R. auriculatum* flows through its veins. Which is not the case here. But even then, those blooms are nowhere near as attention grabbing as the trusses displayed on this cross.

At which point, cameras are quickly retrieved from their pouches and the search for a label begins. For in globular-shaped, tight-knit balls of ten large florets or more, this tall and elegant shrub covers itself in glowing spheres of bright crimson.

That devastatingly exceptional pigmentation - for the time of season - is well retained in dappled shade, the poise and compactness of the inflorescences too, all set against attractive, long, and glossy, lanceolate-shaped leaves. If there is one fault, it is that the foliage is only retained for one year, the blades discarded soon after the new growth expands. Yet mature specimens do not appear straggly or gaunt, so well-clothed is the whole. Hardiness too is high, especially for a late-flowering red hybrid, a strength inherited from the seed parent, and it allows the shrub to be planted throughout the UK wherever rhododendrons thrive. Yet nonsensically, it remains so rare a find - absent from almost all the publicly-open woodland gardens and omitted from most rhododendron texts - that its exclusion borders on the criminal. As does the lack of an AM or FCC award.

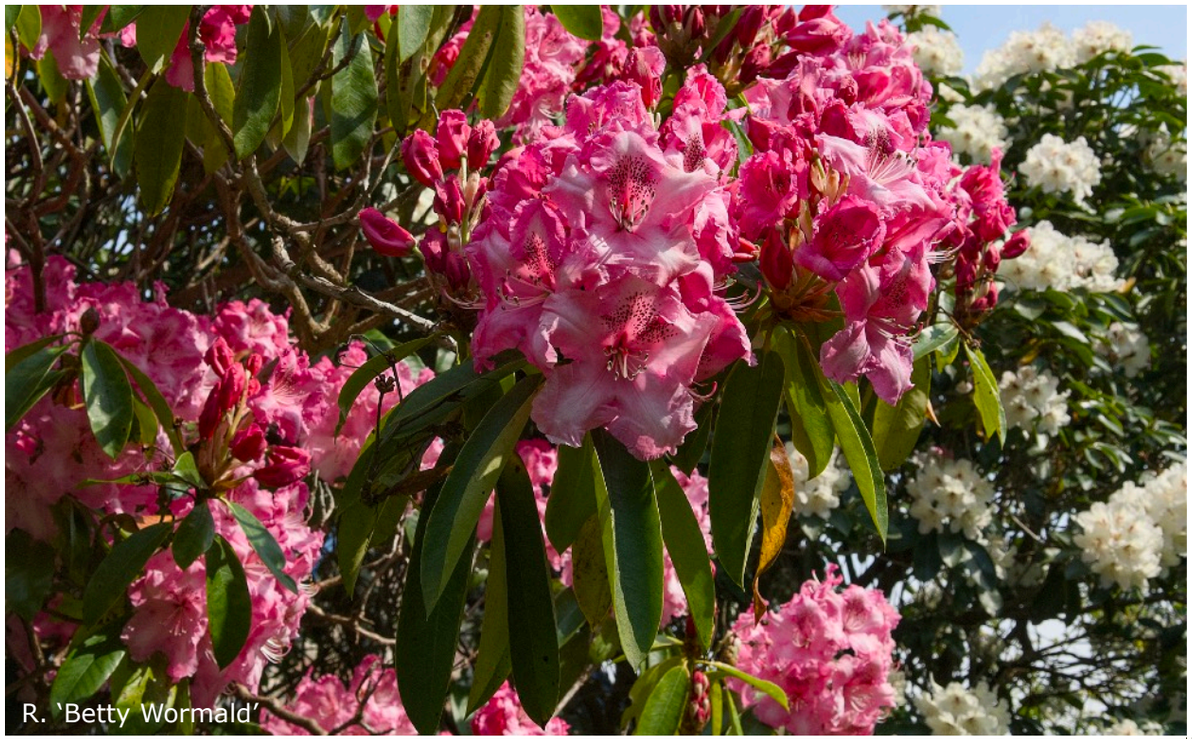
Nonetheless - and once again - Lionel de Rothschild’s choice of epithet is inspired: Bellerophon, the Greek mythologic hero, who speared and slaughtered the Chimera from his winged horse Pegasus.

An act perfectly represented by this stunning rhododendron.

Except that the honorific could also have a more mundane origin, an association with the now closed Royal Navy shore base located close to Exbury in nearby Portsmouth; or even perhaps, the class of dreadnought battleship.

R. 'Bellerophon'

R. ‘Betty Wormald’


R. ‘Betty Wormald’

R. ‘Betty Wormald’

‘George Hardy’ x Un-named Red Hybrid

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6-7	May	4m x 3m

R. ‘Betty Wormald’ is a cross between the James Mangles *griffithianum* x *catawbiense* hybrid ‘George Hardy’ and an un-named red-flowering shrub growing in the Koster nursery at Boskoop in the Netherlands. It is comparable with and in many aspects superior to R. ‘Pink Pearl’, the far better known and much more widely planted pink-flowering introduction from the Waterers at Bagshot.

Both rhododendrons are hardy down to -21°C, have long, obovate-oblong leaves, and present their blooms in tall conical trusses, but whereas ‘Pink Pearl’ has pale foliage, a leggy habit unless grown in full sun, and corollas that will quickly fade out to near white, ‘Betty Wormald’ exhibits dark, glossy green leaves, has a much less vigorous habit even in shade, and retains the depth of its corolla pigmentation for much longer. Moreover, the bluish tint that is present in the blooms of ‘Pink Pearl’, is absent from those borne on ‘Betty Wormald’. However, one characteristic above all others distinguishes the latter from the former: simply stated, the flower-bearing branches of the Dutch cross do not suffer from what can only be described, as “Brewer’s Droop”.

M. Koster & Sons put pollen to stigma sometime between 1907 and 1910, naming and introducing the cross around 1922. Nurserymen like it because it buds up young and is easy to root, yet despite that, only a few specialist establishments in the UK propagate and stock ‘Betty Wormald’, whereas ‘Pink Pearl’ will be found in the plant racks of most garden centres and DIY warehouses come April or May. Clearly there is no justice in the world.


R. ‘Betty Wormald’


R. ‘Betty Wormald’

R. 'Blewbury'
roxieanum x *anwheiense*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6-7 Early May 4m x 3m

Alongside 'Seven Stars' and 'Wishmoor', 'Blewbury' is probably Thomas Hope Findlay's most well-known and widely planted rhododendron hybrid.

Named for a small village in Oxfordshire, R. 'Blewbury' is a straightforward F1 cross between *R. roxieanum* and *R. anwheiense* that opens tightly packed trusses of eighteen to twenty, 5-lobed, open-campanulate corollas. These are pink in the bud, but emerge white with just a flush of pink, and then fade out to a yellowish-white, with the upper lobe of each corolla fairly heavily spotted purplish-red in the throat and this blotch sometimes split into two distinct flares. The blooms are set against dark green and somewhat shiny, narrowly-elliptic leaves, each about 9cm long, thin and pointed, which are graced with recurved margins and on the underside, a loose, pale brown, woolly indumentum. A minor negative to note, is that the foliage can sometimes look a touch chlorotic, a trait inherited from the pollen parent. Habit is upright and bushy, and a mature shrub will be awash with bloom each season, with the first flower buds set when a plant is just 5 or 6 years old.

Hope Findlay was born into a gardening family, for on the day of his birth in April 1910, his father was in charge of the Logan estate, near Stranraer, later retiring as the curator of Wisley at the end of the Second World War. His son began work at Pyrford Court, Woking, the home of Lord Iveagh, rising swiftly through the ranks and moving between estates to become head gardener to Sir James Horlick at Little Paddocks, Titness Park, from where he was poached by Sir Eric Savill for Windsor Great Park, the Savill Garden, and the then nascent Valley Gardens. So from the start of 1943 until Sir Eric retired in 1970, these two men created what today, are probably the finest woodland gardens in the whole of the UK, if not the world.

Findlay had begun hybridising rhododendrons under Sir James Horlick's guidance while still employed at Titness Park, but it was at Windsor that he came into his own. There is no detailed record of his breeding programme as such, even though it began within a year of his arrival and ran through until 1968, just one line entries in the Windsor Great Park Stud Book. But Mark Flanagan, one of Hope's successors as curator of the two gardens - as well as the author of the article from which these two paragraphs have been compiled (published in *Rhododendrons with Camellias and Magnolias 2006*) - has discovered that 288 crosses were made in total, and of these, 56 hybrids named and registered. Yet a check of the official *IRRC* database will show Hope Findlay's name assigned to very few of them, including the plant that bears his name. For the tradition at Windsor, then and now, required all new hybrids to be introduced and registered under the banner of the Crown Estate Commissioners. It is a convention not followed herein, where credit for a cross is rightly assigned to the person who made the match.

Thomas Hope Findlay died in Bracknell in 1994, at the age of 84.



Thomas Hope Findlay & Sir Eric Savill



R. ‘Blewbury’



R. ‘Blewbury’



R. ‘Blewbury’

R. ‘Boddaertianum’

R. ‘Boddaertianum’
campanulatum x *arboreum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 April-May 5m x 5m

Massive specimens of this old Belgian hybrid will be found in any number of British gardens, with some plants approaching, if not past, their 160th birthday, for the cross was made sometime before 1860 by Louis van Houtte, at his nursery in Gentbrugge, near Ghent. The accepted parentage denotes that pollen from *R. arboreum* was placed on the style of *R. campanulatum,* but others, who believe that *R. ponticum* received the largesse, challenge this equation. J. G. Millais walks a contrary path, believing the origin to be seed collected in Sikkim, thus making R. ‘Boddaertianum’ a natural hybrid.

Just over a century ago, he wrote that:

> ‘The exact origin of this magnificent Rhododendron is not known, and it may have originated in the Sikkim forests as a natural hybrid. There is little doubt that it has been in existence for over 70 years in the gardens of South Wales and Cornwall, and the nurserymen have at last got hold of it and appreciated its excellence, for it is a plant that should be in every garden in England where Rhododendrons can be grown. What R. Loder’s White is to May, R. Bodartianum is to April. There is no other early white to compare with it’.
> *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* 1917.

Putting aside its ancestry - or spelling - as Millais states, a tree in full flower is indeed one impressive rhododendron.

The flowers initially open pink from the bud but swiftly fade to a clear off-white, the broadly-funnel-shaped blooms adorned with a spray of crimson-purple spots. The corollas are long-lasting and carried in conical trusses of 18-24, each around 5cm long and up to 7cm wide at the mouth when fully expanded, with small but distinct crimson nectaries at the very base of the throat. The leaves are long, to 17cm in length or more, oblanceolate through narrowly elliptic in shape, matt green in hue, often concave in profile, and with an impressed midrib. When they first extend, the thin coating of indumentum on the leaf underside is rusty-brown, but this pales as the foliage matures. The shrub’s habit is upright and tree-like, but it spreads as wide as it grows tall, yet remains well-clothed, even in old-age. And its constitution is remarkably formidable, unlike many other *R. arboreum* hybrids, eschewing bark spilt from late spring frosts, breezing through the UK’s recent spate of desperately cold winters and relishing a position in full sun.

There is one quandary however, the epithet.

For despite its clear honorific duties with regard to Monsieur Boddaert (the foreman of Louis van Houtte’s horticultural emporium), R. ‘Boddaertianum’ was apparently originally named R. ‘Gloire d’Anvers’ - ‘Glory of Antwerp’ - but then re-christened, and strangely, the registration authorities have played ball with this nomenclatural and historical faux pas, and rolled over.


R. ‘Boddaertianum’


R. ‘Boddaertianum’

R. ‘Bonito’

R. ‘Bonito’

discolor x ‘Luscombei’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 June 5m x 3.5m

R. ‘Bonito’ was introduced in 1934, won Lionel de Rothschild an Award of Merit in 1937 and each year, specimens will provide an abundance of bloom to carry the flowering season over into June. Moreover, the cross is fully hardy, grows without problem, and its blooms are even sweetly scented.

The habit is tree-like, upright and open, the growth vigorous. Foliage is grey-green, not too long, elliptically-shaped, but only held for one year, which can result in mature individuals proffering a sparse appearance when devoid of bloom. But come early June, when those flowers open, no-one will care: for the individual corollas are large, over 12cm across when fully expanded, and they are carried in rounded trusses of 15. Of which there are lots and lots and lots. Pure white; delicately flushed with pink; each bloom bearing a rose-brown blotch of spots and speckles on the upper lobe.

A second clone is also in commerce, travelling under the same epithet, and identical bar the blotch, which is green and yellow rather than chocolate.

A planting site in dappled shade, just to prolong the flowers, will prove ideal for southern gardeners, but as the choice of plot at Benmore Botanic Garden in Argyll shows, coping with all the various distractions the Scottish west coast weather can drum up on a hillside halfway up a mountain, seems not to have had any detrimental effect whatsoever.



R. ‘Bonito’



R. ‘Bonito’



R. ‘Bonito’



R. ‘Bow Bells’

R. ‘Bow Bells’

‘Corona’ x *williamsianum*

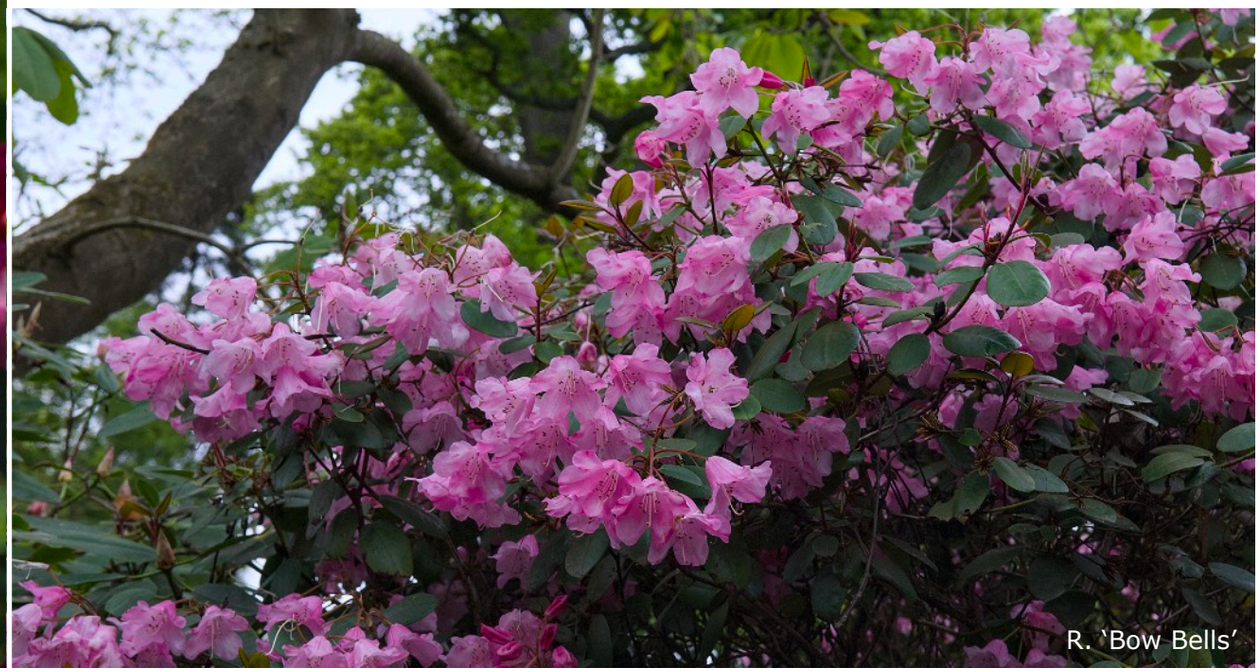
Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5-6	May	2m x 3m

If you take pollen from one of the most distinctive and utterly beautiful rhododendron species so far discovered, and place it onto the style of a hybrid with possibly the most jarring flower colour ever to have been bred, then within the gamut of seedlings that could emerge, one or two are going to be very special. Exceptional even.

Lionel de Rothschild, who made that ‘Corona’ x *williamsianum* pairing, revealed his selection from the resulting aggregate in 1934: one of the finest hybrids ever created. He christened it ‘Bow Bells’ - face it, no other possible epithet could ever have done the plant justice - the RHS gifted it an Award of Merit in 1935, and today, it is one of the most widely grown rhododendron crosses ever introduced.

Like its two parents, R. ‘Bow Bells’ has a medium-sized dome shaped habit, upright and well-filled with foliage, but it is without the brittle branches and stymied vigour of ‘Corona’, nor does it rock on its own roots. Young growth is copper-red, a trait inherited from *R. williamsianum,* while the mature leaves are ovate in shape, somewhat stiff, up to 6.5cm long and dark green in colour. A placement in light dappled shade will prevent them scorching in southern gardens while not inducing any legginess or reducing flower bud formation, which is usually profuse. Those blooms are a deep cerise in tone when they first open, expanding into bright pink, broadly campanulate cups, the pigment paling towards the margins, but deeper on the reverse. Carried on long pedicels in a lax truss of up to seven corollas, each individual member of this septet is 4.5cm long and 6cm wide at the mouth, and bears a few crimson spots on the dorsal lobe.

A number of lesser clones have been distributed and are now thoroughly mixed up in commerce. They differ in ultimate height - all are lower growing than the AM plant - and in the intensity of the pigmentation flushing their flowers.



R. ‘Bow Bells’

R. ‘Bow Bells’

The ‘Britannia’ Pride

‘Queen Wilhelmina’ x ‘Stanley Davies’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-7 Mid April-May 2 to 3m x 2.5 to 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Britannia	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1921
C. B. van Nes	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1938
Doctor W. F. Wery	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1929
Earl of Athlone	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1933
Langley Park	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1922
London	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1922
May Templar	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	before 1958
Trilby	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1930
Unknown Warrior	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1922
Van Nes Glory	C. B. van Nes & Sons	around 1898	1928

The pairing of two hybrids introduced during the 1880s - ‘Stanley Davies’, bred at the Ormskirk nursery of Isaac Davies; and ‘Queen Wilhelmina’, created by Otto Schultz, former head gardener at the Royal Porcelain Factory, Berlin - allowed the Dutch firm of C. B. van Nes & Sons to offer the gardening public probably the most outstanding rhododendron of 1921: ‘Britannia’. Which unlike many of its contemporaries, was not genetically destined to grow into a monster that would shade-out and unduly dominate the more modest suburban gardens that were becoming a nurseryman’s dream marketing niche.

In fact, mature specimens of the van Nes rhododendron rarely ascend to more than 2m in height and their spread is equally subdued. Their habit too is compact, even in a fair amount of shade, with the foliage densely filling in any space between the branches, as the leaves are held for several years. Mid-green in colour, but sometimes yellowish-green if a plant is grown in full sun, these are obovate through oblong-ovate in shape, and in length, up to 14cm long.

Buyers of ‘Britannia’ however, found that it had one fault: young plants were a little reticent to begin flowering, setting some buds from the age of five onwards, but only really coming into their stride during their teen years and beyond. Yet when those blooms opened, they were simply outstanding, and equally, well worth the wait for them then to be produced with a rhododendron’s typical wanton abandon. Each corolla is 5cm long and 7cm across at the mouth when fully expanded, campanulate in shape and a soft rose red in tone, which changes to bright scarlet when sunlit, the bowls paler in the throat, but with dark red nectaries, and a dorsal lobe sparsely spotted dark brown. Moreover, they are gathered together in long-lasting domed trusses of up to 15 individual florets.

For the van Nes nursery, ‘Britannia’ was a success story from the get-go, remaining the standard red rhododendron hybrid for fifty years or more and becoming one of the most in demand crosses ever created, particularly in the UK, for obvious reasons. As a parent it has directly sired or given birth to over a hundred registered cultivars and its genes will be found in an innumerable number of crosses bred-on from those offspring. And that takes no account of the nine other clones selected, registered and marketed from that original 1998 match, doppelgängers that include ‘Earl of Athlone’, ‘Trilby’ and the pièce de résistance, ‘Unknown Warrior’, this the second most popular pick of the ennead.

It has broadly campanulate-shaped blooms that are held in compact trusses of up to eighteen corollas, each one 5.5cm long by as much as 8cm across at the mouth. They are crimson-scarlet in the bud, but open strawberry-red through deep rose-pink, and have two flares of brown dots and dashes on the dorsal lobe. Dark green matt leaves, elliptically-shaped, pointed at the apex, up to 10cm long and often with a shallow V-profile, complete the picture. Habit is upright, growth vigorous, but if placed in too much shade the result will be a decidedly sprawling bush, with the shrub hitting the 3m height mark rather than 2m, and spreading out to 4m rather than a little over half that figure. Full sun helps to restrain such fecundity, but doesn’t fully eliminate the problem, though the leaf blades - on this clone retained for around two years, some a touch longer - usually work wonders at hiding any gaps in the framework.

‘Unknown Warrior’ is always the first of the ten selections to begin flowering, opening its blooms in mid April most years, while ‘Britannia’ holds back until May. It is also the least hardy of the bunch, gifted a H5 rating, as opposed to the latter’s H7.

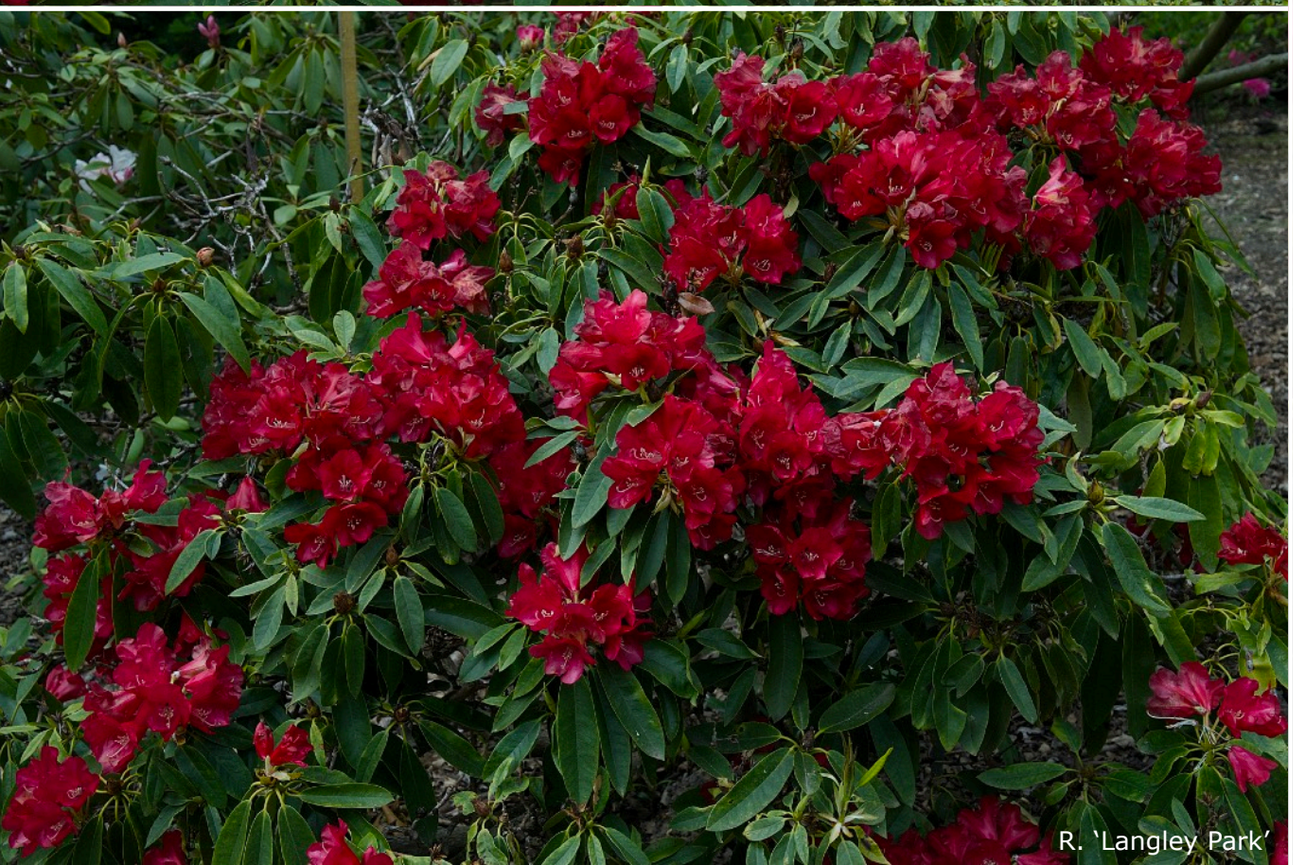


R. ‘Britannia’

R. ‘Britannia’



R. ‘Doctor W. F. Wery’



R. ‘Langley Park’



R. ‘Unknown Warrior’

R. ‘Unknown Warrior’

R. 'Brocade'

'Vervaeniana' x *williamsianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late April-May 3m x 2m

'Brocade' is one of the few Lionel de Rothschild rhododendron crosses where for many years, the parental equation was in a state of flux. Not that the UK's premier hybridiser had any doubts, for it is listed in his stud book as 'Vervaeniana' x *williamsianum.* Yet that specific combination, when the pages of the *IRRC* are consulted, would require an evergreen azalea to have received pollen from an elepidote species. So somewhere along the line - in the seed pan, the cold frame or the nursery bed, or when the capsules were first gathered - the doyens have decreed that a mix up occurred. Because this stunningly beautiful shrub is anything but an azaleodendron. A cross involving *R. williamsianum* most certainly, but absent from any of the morphological characteristics on display, is the faintest hint or trace of an evergreen azalea. Thus the parentage set out in the 2004-published Second Edition of the *IRRC* does not follow the Exbury Stud Book entry, but records the pairing as simply a no frills '*williamsianum* hybrid'.

However, if you progress onward from that R. 'Brocade' entry, traversing some 1,234 pages and switching volumes as you do so, the listings for all those plants incorporating the Vervaene surname into their epithet will be to hand:

Eleven registrations, excluding the synonyms.

All of them evergreen azalea hybrids.

Bar one.

The second of those entries - R. 'Vervaeneanum'.

This plant was first listed by Standish & Noble in their 1850 catalogue and the *IRRC* has it pegged as a rhododendron, although the text is without any parental details. Two synonyms are detailed however, 'Vervaeneanum Flore Pleno' and 'Fastuosum Vervaeneanum', while the 'Vervaeneanum' corollas themselves are described as being 'purplish-lilac, paler in the centre, with yellowish to brownish yellow spots', each between 4.5 and 7cm wide, opening at the end of May, and carried in a compact truss of 11-19. They are also described as being double, which in theory rather puts the kibosh on the proposition being worked up herein, or it would, had not Pam Hayward, the RCMG Archivist and former editor of the group's Year Book, spotted a recurring entry in the 'List of Hybrid Rhododendrons' published in the Year Books of the Rhododendron Association.

Namely, 'Vervaneana'.

That register exclusively populated by lepidote or elepidote hybrid rhododendrons.

A single line entry reports 'Vervaneana' as having mauve flowers, and notes that it is hardy anywhere in the British Isles, especially if provided with a modicum of shade. It was regarded by the authors of said register as 'old fashioned and not up to present-day standard', this comment being added as an addendum to the text in the 1933 edition, and maintained in those volumes published subsequently.

Now, delve a little deeper, and you will stumble upon the fact that the President of the Rhododendron Association, and the chief contributor to those Year Books, was a gentleman whose surname was Rothschild.

Lionel Nathan de Rothschild.

None other than the hybridiser responsible for conceiving 'Brocade'.

And the likely owner of a specimen of 'Vervaneana'.

Which in all probability was actually the Standish & Noble 'Vervaeneanum', especially as 'mauve' and 'purplish-lilac' corollas are one and the same thing. And it also goes without saying that the 200 or so acres of woodland garden at Exbury almost certainly offered just the lightly shaded nook that the cross required.

Moreover, the International Rhododendron Registrar has also agreed with Pam's deductions and changes to the parentage of 'Brocade' were published in the 'Corrections' section at the end of the third supplement to the Second Edition, specifically:

> 'Brocade'/Brocade Group (p.178).
> Further research suggests that the 'Vervaeneanum' parent was a previously unrecognised rhododendron (rather than an azalea) cultivar, perhaps originating with van Nes. Thus 'Brocade' and the Brocade Group are correctly treated as elepidote hybrids.

Introduced in 1934, R. 'Brocade' builds up over the years into a large rounded bush, to around 2m high or a touch less in the sunnier south of England, but nearer to 3m in the woodland gardens along the east and west coasts at higher northern latitudes. The main branches are often found to bow slightly, weighed down by the weight of bloom produced each season on a mature specimen. Those flowers develop from the tip of each branchlet, purple-red buds expanding into trusses of six, loosely held peach-pink bells, a deeper rose-pink externally, each 5cm in length, 6cm across, with very frilly lobe margins, and they are set against oblong-ovate leaves up to 7.5cm long and 4.5cm wide, those blades matt green in hue and fairly stiff.

Without wishing to repeat earlier entires, but failing miserably, 'Brocade' is yet one more cracker from L de R, able to stop you in your tracks when awash with bloom. That it has so far been overlooked by the award committees is a complete and utter injustice.



R. 'Brocade'

R. ‘Brocade’

R. ‘Brocade Plus’


R. ‘Brocade Plus’


R. ‘Brocade Plus’

R. ‘Brocade Plus’
unknown x unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 May 5m x 4m

R. ‘Brocade Plus’ is an unregistered cross that was made by Sir James Horlick. Its epithet, however, suggests the plant is an enhancement on Lionel de Rothschild’s peach-pink *R. williamsianum* hybrid and this is certainly the case with regard to the size and the quality of the blooms, but as the parental constituents are not known, it remains unclear if R. ‘Brocade’ was indeed part of the mix, or if ‘Brocade Plus’ was the result of a duplicate or similar pairing to L de R’s original. Regardless, the plant is a stunner.

The Horlick hybrid is taller growing and wider spreading than the Rothschild plant, as a specimen long-established in the gardens at Achamore House on the Isle of Gigha - lying just off the western coastal fringe of Scotland and which Sir James owned and developed from 1944 to 1972 - will confirm, for it is a small tree, while the Brodick plant shown here is a huge dome 4 or 5m in diameter, but currently only around 3m in height. Leaf and flower shape are also retained - oblong-ovate; frilly campanulate bells - but both are larger. Flowering is just as profuse, the trusses a touch laxer, but with seven corollas gathered together, rather than six. Equally, the morphologic characteristic of those same corollas displaying 5 or 6 lobes, is another mirrored attribute.


R. ‘Brocade Plus’

R. ‘Bud Flanagan’
R. ponticum hybrid
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late May-June 4m x 3m

Right from the get-go it was clear that an innate talent for breeding stunning hybrid rhododendrons had been passed down from father to son, but when Edmund de Rothschild christened a self-sown *R. ponticum* seedling ‘Bud Flanagan’ in 1966, it became immediately apparent that the flair for choosing the perfect epithet to go with that plant had also been inherited. Because one glance at the chance hybrid spotted flowering in Witcher’s Wood at Exbury in 1962, confirms that the choice to borrow the vaudeville entertainer’s name was nothing less than inspired.

R. ‘Bud Flanagan’ has flowers that mirror the stage personality of their namesake: sparkling and boisterous, bold and piratical, over the top. Carried in tight conical trusses of up to 20 corollas, coloured pinkish-mauve with a to-die-for blotch of deep chestnut on the dorsal lobes, they appear enormous, larger than life, just like their music hall honouree. More mundanely, the foliage and habit mirror *R. ponticum;* so too the need for a planting site in no more than dappled shade if a compact, free-flowering and well-filled bush is the desired end result. Even in the southern counties.


R. ‘Bud Flanagan’


R. ‘Bud Flanagan’

R. ‘Bud Flanagan’

R. ‘Calomina’

R. ‘Calomina’

‘Queen Wilhelmina’ x *calophytum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Late March-April 7m x 4m

R. ‘Calomina’ was introduced by the Dowager Lady Muriel Rolls Loder in 1934 and is a cross between the Otto Schulz hybrid R. ‘Queen Wilhelmina’ and the botanically relocated *R. calophytum,* its *IRRC* bare-bones entry - ‘Fls pink, with a darker blotch’ - no more enlightening than that, though as the photographs show, a veritable gem is to hand. No hybridiser is named in the text, but logic dictates the pairing was almost certainly made at Leonardslee Garden, in Lower Beeding, Horsham, West Sussex, by Sir Edmund Loder, sometime before 1920, that date being the year of his death.

The foliage clearly reflects the pollen parent rather than the Queen regnant of the Netherlands, for the elegant leaves are long, oblanceolate-shaped, dark green in colour and V-profiled, with the flower truss and corolla shape also influenced by those same genes. But their colour is pure Dutch royalty, and although the dark rose-pink hue pales with age, the blooms never appear washed-out, even when hit by all-day strong sunlight. However, a woodland placement in dappled shade will allow R. ‘Calomina’ to demonstrate its full potential, a tree-like and strongly branched mature specimen resulting, with the framework awash in bloom every couple of years.

R. ‘Armantine’ is thought by some doyens to be from the same pairing, but its even sparser *IRRC* entry helps clarify this assessment not one jot.



R. ‘Calomina’



R. ‘Calomina’



R. ‘Calstocker’

The ‘Calstocker’ Pride

calophytum x ‘Doctor Stocker’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6-7	April	5m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Calstocker	William Ingham Whitaker	before 1935	1935
Exbury Calstocker	Lionel de Rothschild	1936	1948

William Ingham Whitaker II, of Pylewell Park, near Lymington, in the New Forest, was the first rhododendron hybridiser to pollinate *R. calophytum* using the John Thomas North hybrid ‘Doctor Stocker’. He introduced his tall-growing, white-flowering creation in 1935 and it immediately impressed all who saw it. All that is, apart from Lionel de Rothschild of nearby Exbury, who on encountering the hybrid, knew he could produce a better plant by using a superior clone of *R. calophytum*. And so repeated the pairing the following spring.

That judgement was proved more than correct when Edmund de Rothschild unveiled ‘Exbury Calstocker’ in 1948, six years after his father’s death, for the plant immediately scooped an Award of Merit from the RHS and just a blink of an eye later - though actually forty years - a coveted FCC, the original ‘Calstocker’ remaining bereft of such accolades.

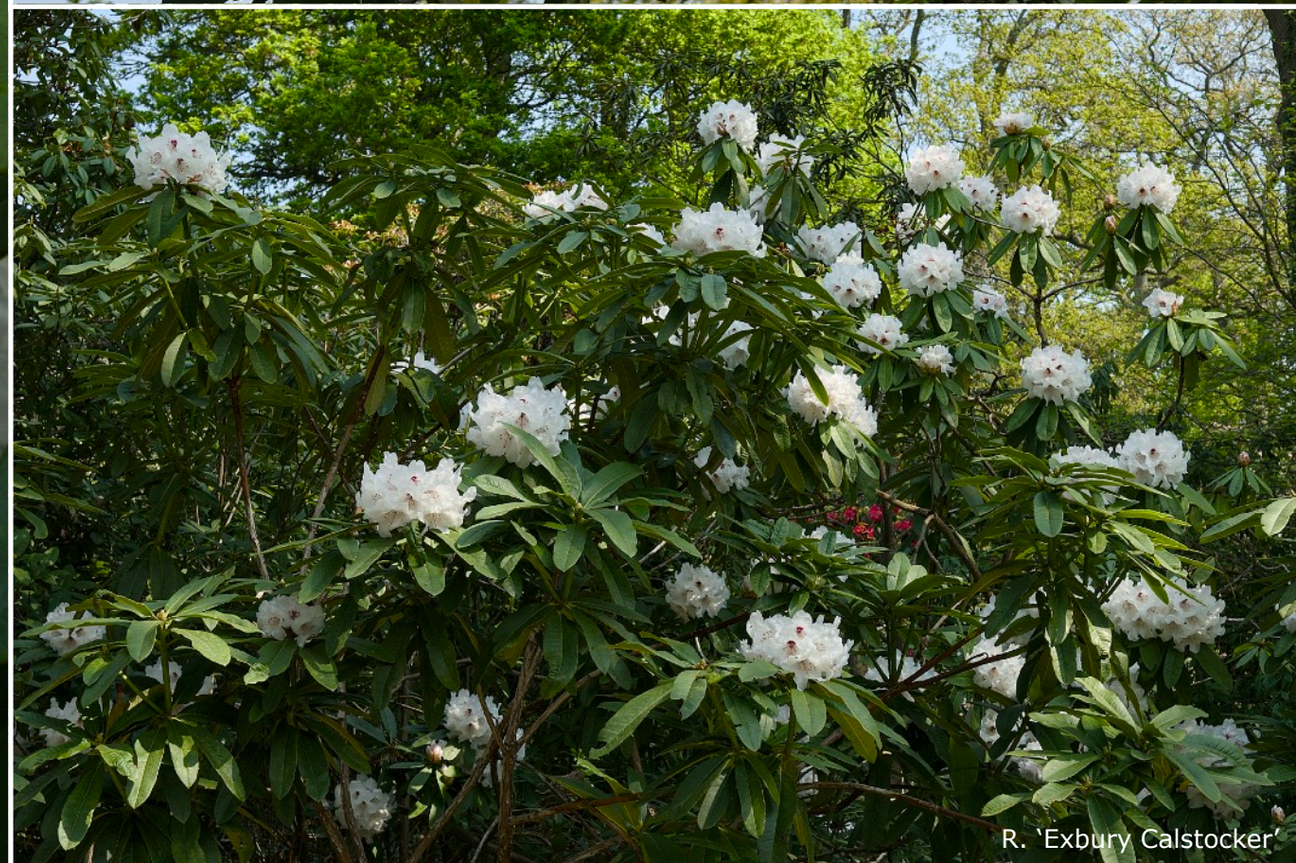
In fact, both forms develop into stunning mature plants, upright and robust, easily hitting 5m in height and spreading wider if left unpruned. Their habit is decidedly open however, even when grown in plentiful light, but the clusters of large, matt-green, narrowly elliptic leaves help disguise this failing - the only one - and they are aided in this task, if only temporarily, by the plethora of flowers that open each April. And it is here, when those blooms are fully out, that the clear difference in quality between the two hybrids becomes apparent. Because ‘Exbury Calstocker’ not only boasts more corollas per truss than the Whitaker cultivar, often amassing between 23 and 25 white bells in each cluster, but each one of those individuals is larger and the composite whole therefore, far more resplendent, indeed, a full ball more often than a flattened dome.

The flowers of either clone will prove to be very long-lasting if the site chosen to grow the hybrid keeps its corollas from being damaged by any late spring frost, the crimson- or maroon-blotched globes then lighting up their patch of woodland for much of the month. Outwith frost seeing-off the blooms, the hybrids are otherwise fully hardy and able to succeed in gardens up and down the whole of the British Isles if given an acid soil and protection from strong winds.

R. ‘Calstocker’


R. ‘Exbury Calstocker’


R. ‘Exbury Calstocker’


R. ‘Exbury Calstocker’



R. ‘Exbury Calstocker’

The ‘Captain Blood’ Pride
‘Queen Wilhelmina’ x *griersonianum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 April 2m x 3m

Doppelgängers

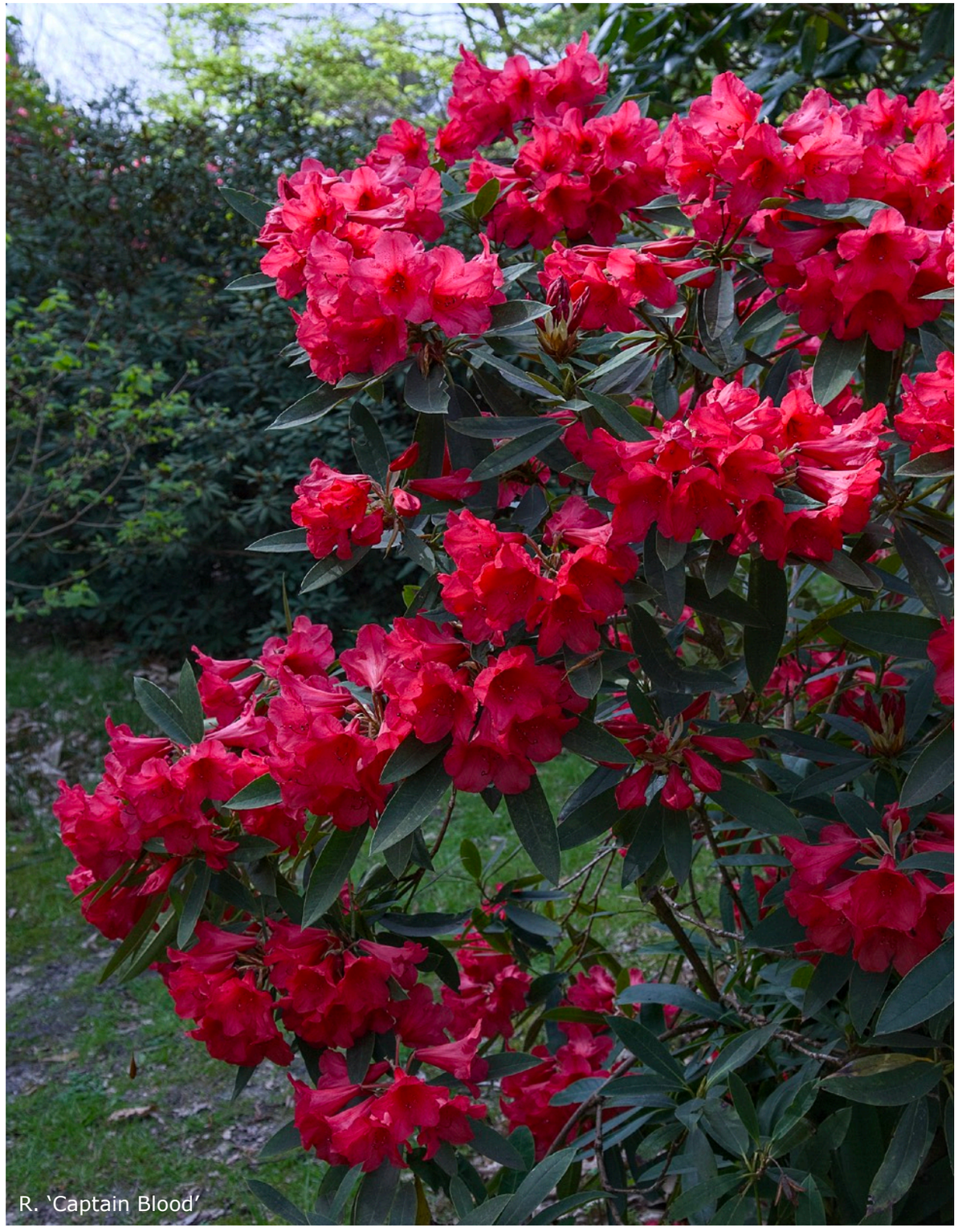
Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Betty Sherriff	Collingwood Ingram	before 1947	1966
Captain Blood	Collingwood Ingram	before 1947	1947

‘Captain Blood’ is one of Collingwood Ingram’s lesser-known crosses that really should be far more widely planted. A ‘Queen Wilhelmina’ x *griersonianum* pairing, the selection boasts fine scarlet-red flowers carried in flat-topped trusses of 9 or 10 widely funnel-shaped corollas. The leaves are narrowly elliptic in outline, up to 22cm long and dark green in colour. They often adopt a concave profile and a cluster of these circling each branch tip, immediately below a flower truss, channels your attention towards the blooms. The shrub’s habit is a flattened dome, topping off at around the 2m-mark but spreading much wider, and it was named and introduced in 1947, winning an Award of Merit in the process.

The *IRRC* grouping system currently places ‘Captain Blood’ and a latter-introduced clone - ‘Betty Sherriff’ - in a consortium with another Ingram creation, ‘Juliana’, but this hybrid is the result of a cross that reversed the parentage, with *R. griersonianum* receiving pollen from ‘Queen Wilhelmina’, so it is not included in the table above. In an age before genetic research revealed that such mirror image pairings did not have the exact same complement of DNA, such associations made sense on morphological grounds, but scientifically, today, they are no longer valid. This is because the mitochondria, chloroplasts and other organelles within a plant’s cells have their own individual DNA sequences, and the coding of such in the male’s contingent will be different to those that reside in the female. And as these are provided exclusively by the seed parent, at this level, an equal sharing of information between the two progenitors has not taken place.

The ‘Captain Blood’ epithet of course, references Rafael Sabatini’s piratical admiral of 1922 vintage, yet its selection came not from ‘Cherry’ Ingram, but from the ex-footman he employed at The Grange as a gardener:

> ‘The hybrid which I personally consider one of my most successful achievements is a plant that the aforesaid ex-footman persisted in calling ‘Captain Blood’ - an ugly name which, I am afraid I have been too lazy to change. This rhododendron was the outcome of a lucky alliance - lucky because it was only by the merest chance that its seed parent, ‘Queen Wilhelmina’ - normally a very early bloomer - happened one year to produce a solitary, belated, truss just as my plants of *R. griersonianum* were coming into flower. This enabled me to make a cross which would have otherwise been impossible. The seedlings have all turned out to be very attractive, early-flowering *R. griersonianum* hybrids, of which ‘Captain Blood’ is perhaps the pick. Its flowers are of very nearly the same vivid scarlet colour as those of ‘Elizabeth’ but are individually larger and there are more of them in the truss, usually from nine to twelve pips compared with only six or seven in those of ‘Elizabeth’. But where ‘Captain Blood’ is in my opinion superior to ‘Elizabeth’ is in its habit of growth. Being more compact and densely branched, its handsome dark, sage green foliage forms a very effective background for its freely produced, long-lasting scarlet flowers.’
> *Some Of My Rhododendrons,* Collingwood Ingram, V.M.H.,
> *The Rhododendron And Camellia Year Book 1967.*


R. ‘Captain Blood’

R. ‘Captain Blood’

The ‘Carita’ Pride

‘Naomi’ x *campylocarpum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April-May 5m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Carita	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1935	1935
Carita Charm	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1935	before 1942
CArita Inchmery	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1935	before 1942

The decision to place pollen from *R. campylocarpum* onto the stigma of R. ‘Naomi’ was described in *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* as one of Lionel’s ‘happiest and most inspired matings’, and one glance at any of the registered or unregistered offspring from that cross confirms that judgement in spades. At the time of the pollination, ‘Naomi’, along with another selection from the ‘Aurora’ x *fortunei* pairing - LR 108 in the Exbury stud book listings - had already secured two floral awards from the RHS and the pride would later garner another three, including an FCC for the ‘Stella Maris’ clone in 1939, so to partner one exalted selection, L de R chose another - a particularly good form of *R. campylocarpum* that was established in the woodland.

The resulting seedlings developed into upright, dome-shaped bushes, these around 5m high when mature and a touch more than that in width, though for many years the growth habit remains almost columnar. Older individuals however, are prone to becoming more open.

Their foliage is elliptic-ovate in shape, rounded at the apex and base, medium-sized, dark green in colour and somewhat shiny.

From mid April onwards, the shrubs begin to open a mass of flowers, the buds initially mushroom-pink, each inflorescence populated by ten, twelve or thirteen campanulate corollas, the lobe tips of which are often recurved. And just as you would expect, a well-grown, long-established specimen will be festooned with bloom from head to toe.

Four clones from the pairing have been introduced and distributed: ‘Carita’, with greenish-yellow flowers initially flushed pink; the AM plant, under the same epithet, but with primrose-yellow blooms; ‘Carita Charm’, opening cream corollas that are flushed and overlaid deep peach-pink; and ‘Carita Inchmery’, the deepest-coloured introduction, displaying flowers with a blend of rose-salmon-pink and biscuit-yellow tones that appear fawn-pink from a distance and fade to tints of opal with age. All have just one failing, most noticeable in southern gardens if set out in full sun, the leaf blades will burn on a hot and cloudless day in summer, so the initial selection of a planting site that benefits from light dappled shade in these locales, is therefore critical.

‘Carita Golden Dream’, or more properly, ‘Golden Dream’ as registered, is the selected progeny from a separate pairing that reversed the parental equation - so *campylocarpum* x ‘Naomi’ - and although clearly morphologically similar, the plant cannot be considered a member of the ‘Carita’ pride - incorrect labels notwithstanding - because genetically, the complement of organelles in each of its cells will be different.



R. ‘Carita’



R. ‘Carita AM’



R. ‘Carita’



R. ‘Carita AM’



R. ‘Carita Charm’



R. ‘Carita Inchmery’



R. ‘Carita Inchmery’

R. ‘Carita Inchmery’

R. ‘Carmen’

didymum x *forrestii* Repens Group

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 Late April-May 0.2 to 1m x 0.5 to 2m

The L de R bandwagon rolls on with ‘Carmen’, as rarely will a rhododendron garden with even a modest renown fail to have a specimen of such growing somewhere within its grounds - for the cross Exbury’s master hybridiser introduced in 1935 is probably the most perfect dwarf rhododendron in existence. Whether in bloom, or out. And so perfect in that role is the chosen *didymum* x *forrestii* Repens selection, that no one has yet felt the need to repeat the pairing. At least, officially; although given the number of clones that are now mixed-up in commercial circulation, money should not be wagered on such.

The shrub is usually graced with a compact deportment, wider spreading than tall, and filled with small, obovate through oblong, glossy leaves, each around 3cm long by half that across. The flowers appear in profusion from late April onwards, waxy bells carried in a flat truss of between two and five corollas. Their colour is dark red, an obvious inheritance from both parents, with the same tone usually staining the style. In contrast, the stamens are white, but these may also, on occasion, be charged with red.

Cultivation can be straightforward and without problem, but note that *R. didymum* has a highly-strung temperament and this is often apparent in its hybrid offspring, the situation not helped by all those various clones, with each differing slightly in their soil and positioning requirements. And habit - as the figures given above for height and spread make clear. Good drainage, cool roots and a modicum of dappled shade will usually work wonders and quell any finicalness, but too much shade will result in an open, drawn-up specimen. Equally, the assertion that the cross is tolerant of a position in full sun should only be treated as gospel in Northern England and Scotland, not in the southern counties.

The ‘Carmen’ epithet is of course borrowed from Prosper Mérimée’s gypsy femme fatale of 1845 vintage, who was murdered by the soldier who loved her after he discovered that she had been unfaithful, the novella later set to the unforgettable music of Bizet.



R. ‘Carmen’



R. ‘Carmen’



R. ‘Carmen’



R. ‘Caroline Allbrook’



R. ‘Ernest Inman’

The ‘Caroline Allbrook’ Pride

yakushimanum x ‘Purple Splendour’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 May 1.5m x 2m

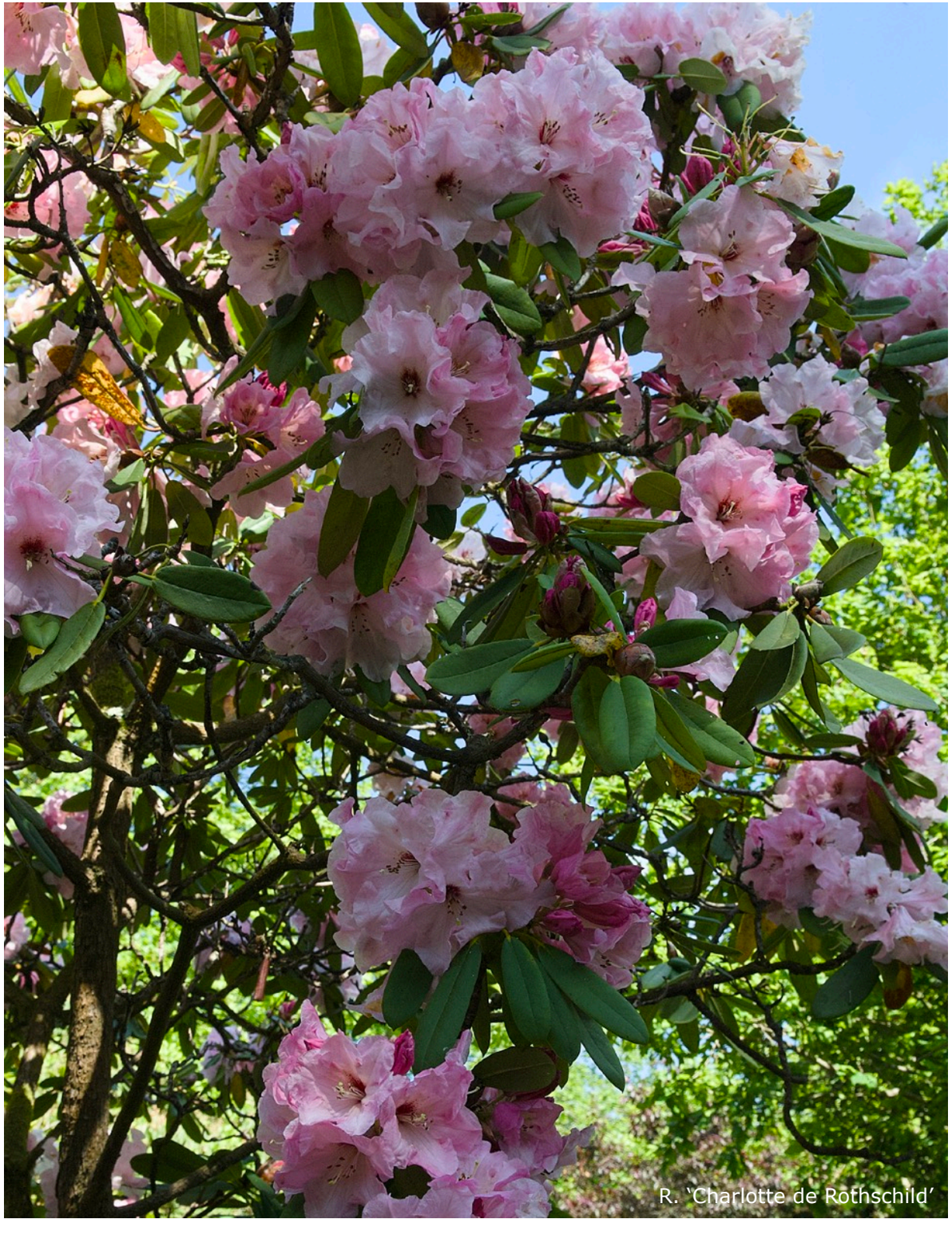
Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Caroline Allbrook	Arthur George	1963	1974
David Shelley	Edmund de Rothschild	before 2009	2018
Dinty Moores	Robert C. Rhodes	before 1980	1980
Ernest Inman	Arthur George	1963	1975
Lavender Filigree	Karel Van de Ven	1971	before 1986
Lavender Haze	E. G. Hall	around 1972	around 1992
Lightly Lavender	Harold Greer	before 1988	1988
Mervyn Settle	Fred Peste	1976	1986
Sharon Peste	Fred Peste	1976	1986
Vilhelmīne Petkevičs	Rihards Kondratovičs	1974	2010
White flare	Karel Van de Ven	1971	1986

Crossed in 1963 by Arthur George of Hydon Nurseries, Godalming, and introduced in 1974, ‘Caroline Allbrook’ is one of the better F1 *yakushimanum* hybrids to be released. Pollen was provided by the Waterer *ponticum* hybrid ‘Purple Splendour’, whose deep purple tones have been diluted here to an opening salvo of lavender-rose, this quickly waning to pale lavender, deeper around the margins but shading to white in the throat, which in this case, remains pleasing to the eye, unlike the vast swarm of other F1 ‘yaks’ released onto the market that end up looking hideous. Two small rays of greenish-yellow spots decorate the dorsal lobe, with the truss globular and compact, and holding between 16 and 20 widely-funnel-shaped, wavy-edged corollas.

The shrub’s habit results in a medium-sized dome, well-filled with foliage, the leaves elliptic, quite long, to around 11cm in length, dark green in hue and recurved, but without a covering of indumentum across their lower surface. R. ‘Caroline Allbrook’ is free-flowering from a young age, the blooms luminous in a woodland setting.

A second selection from the Hydon pairing, ‘Ernest Inman’, has darker toned flowers in shades of light purple, with the corollas paling to a silvery-white hue at the base of the throat. The dorsal lobe is spotted deep orange-yellow, although these markings fade with age, becoming near olive in colour.



R. ‘Charlotte de Rothschild’

The ‘Charlotte de Rothschild’ Pride

discolor x ‘Saint Keverne’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	May	5m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Charlotte de Rothschild	Lionel de Rothschild	1930	1958
Mary Roxborough	Lionel de Rothschild	1930	1954
Sir Frederick Moore	Lionel de Rothschild	1930	1937

The P. D. Williams hybrid ‘Saint Keverne’, introduced in 1922, was used to pollinate a specimen of *R. discolor* at Exbury in 1930, Lionel de Rothschild naming and introducing the first selection from the pairing - ‘Sir Frederick Moore’ - just seven years later in 1937. The epithet honours a former director of the Glasnevin Botanic Garden near Dublin and the plant immediately secured an Award of Merit from the RHS. Three-and-a-half decades later in 1972, it would win a First Class Certificate.

‘Mary Roxborough’, which may sometimes be found more correctly labelled as ‘Mary Roxburghe’ (the *IRRC* entry spelling notwithstanding), was selected by Lionel’s eldest son Edmund in 1954 and clearly christened post the Floors Castle siege even though the tabloid headlines and political ramifications from that event were still reverberating…

The third clone to be released, which herein gives the pride its name, did not come into its own until 1958, when the full potential of the flowers were seen for the first time: huge, whitish-pink corollas that were flushed deeper pink outside and spotted chocolate in the throat; each 8cm long and 11cm across at the mouth; with frilled lobes; held in an immense, balled truss. Edmund de Rothschild named the plant for his youngest daughter, then just 2 years of age, today, the world-renowned soprano, Charlotte Henriette de Rothschild. The RHS Floral Committee were again immediately forthcoming with an Award of Merit, the FCC duly following (this time, just thirty-four years later, in 1992).

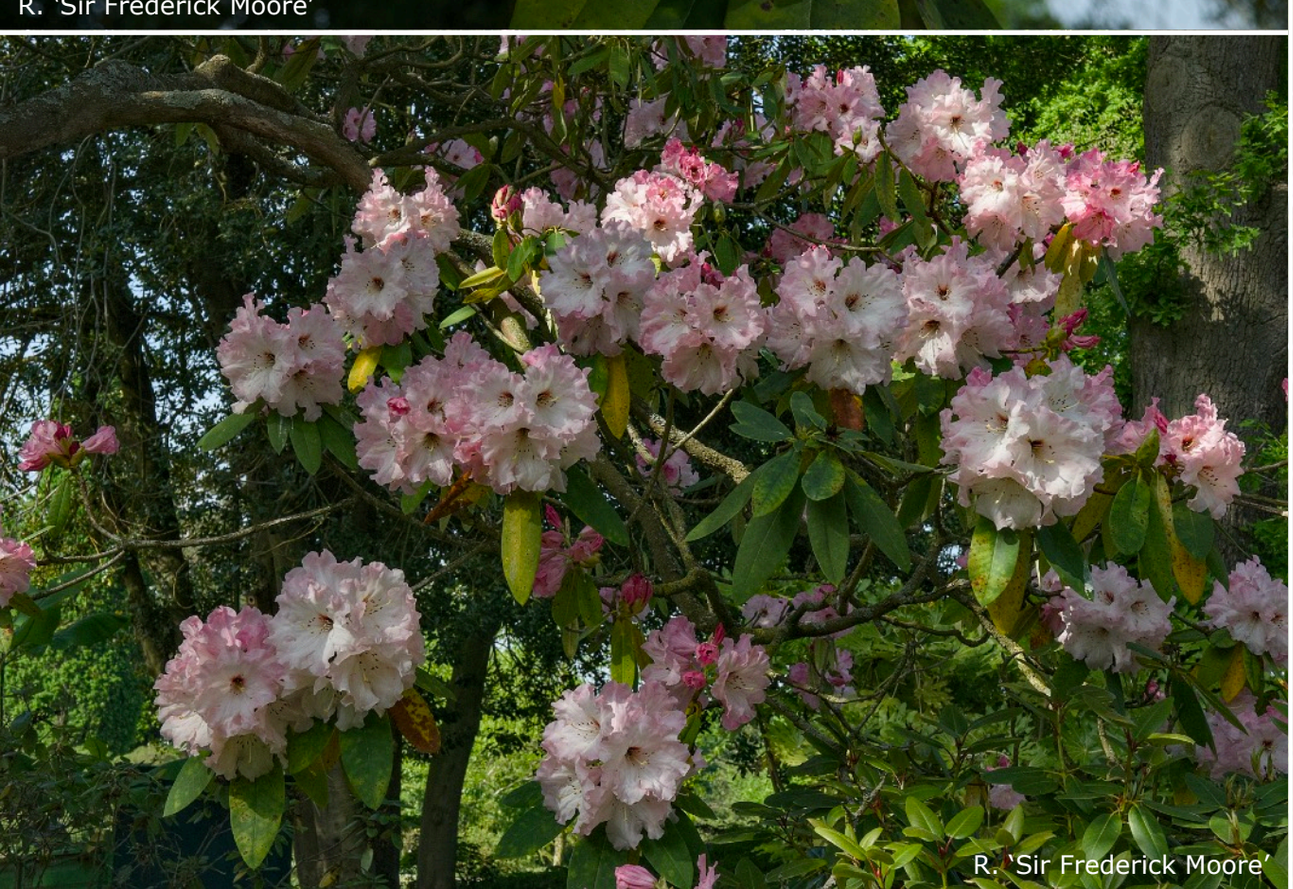
Of the three introductions, ‘Charlotte de Rothschild’ is easily the best, forming an upright and sturdy shrub that will hit 5m in height and spread wider. The structure is open, but adequately cloaked with spirals of dark green elliptic leaves at the branch tips, each of those blades up to 20cm in length. On a good year, the flowering is profuse, with enormous football-sized trusses arrayed across the whole shrub, a sweep of pink from head to foot. At other times however - when the previous growing season has been less than perfect, with the weather conditions averse and the shrub unable to garner the reserves needed to preset such a display - only a few trusses open, these reduced in size and flamboyance, a morphologic fact of life demonstrated by any number of other floral award winning rhododendrons. Yet when the environmental conditions prove more favourable to the task, this stately giant can produce such a knockout display it will literally bowl you over.

R. ‘Charlotte de Rothschild’

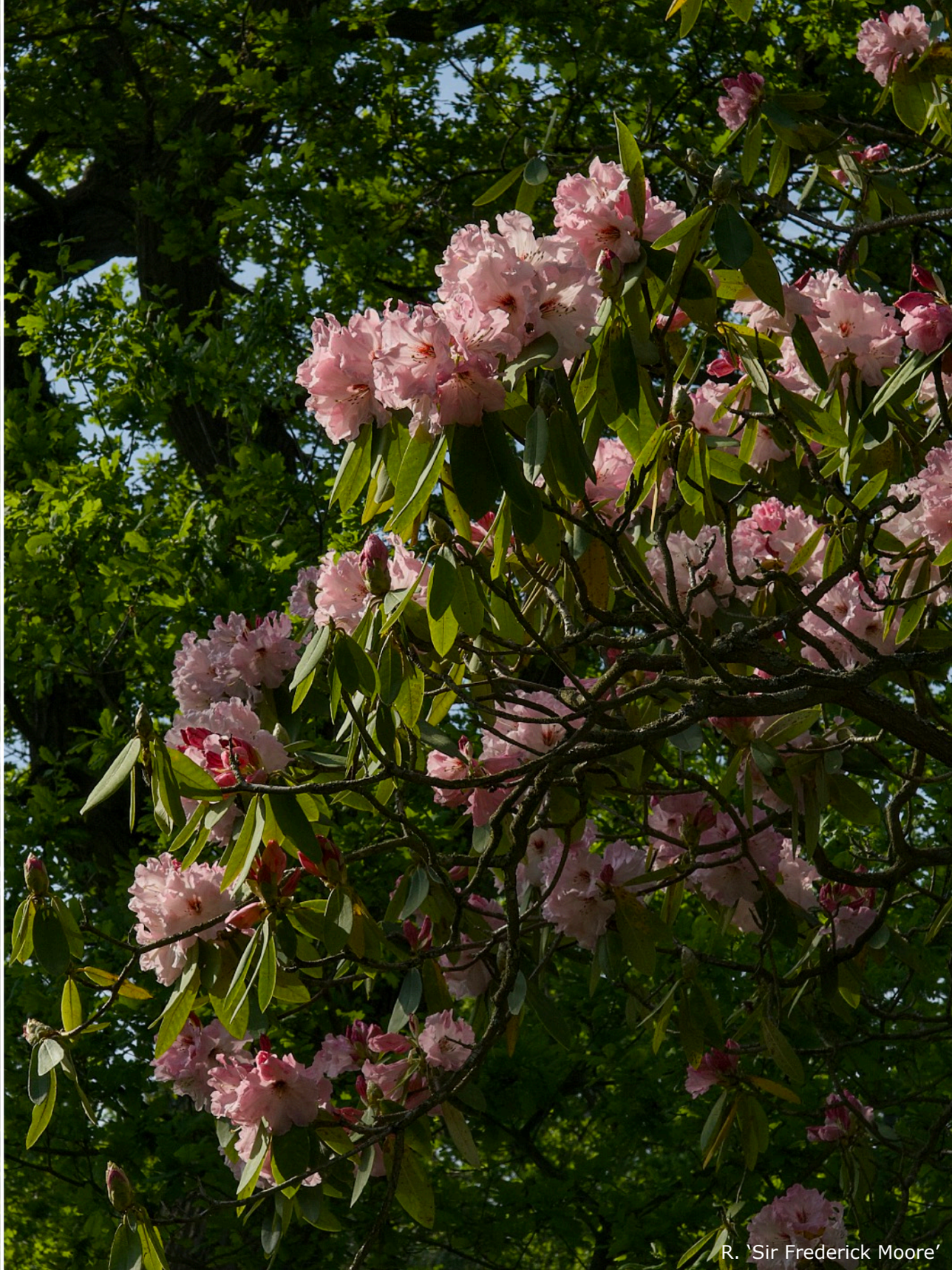
R. ‘Charlotte de Rothschild’



R. ‘Sir Frederick Moore’



R. ‘Sir Frederick Moore’



R. ‘Sir Frederick Moore’

R. ‘Charmaine’

‘Charm’ x ‘May Day’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April 1m x 2m

In 1936, Henry McLaren paired two of his red-flowering hybrids together, to produce a third, the gorgeous, semi-dwarf shrub ‘Charmaine’. The parentage is ‘Charm’ x ‘May Day’, with the pollen provider almost certainly the Bodnant form of that hybrid, which reversed the parental equation used at Werrington Park and Exbury to germinate their introductions - so, *griersonianum* x *haematodes,* not *haematodes* x *griersonianum* - even though no such qualification is given in the official *IRRC* registration for ‘Charmaine’.

The Aberconway cross was introduced in 1946 and won an Award of Merit from the RHS straight away, the blood-red flowers instantly appealing, especially as each corolla comes with a large, deeply divided calyx, the lobes splayed outwards from the tube and flushed with that same devastating hue, the whole ensemble giving an almost hose-in-hose effect. Those waxy bells are carried in open trusses of six, held above dark green, elliptic-lanceolate-shaped foliage by long, flushed-red pedicels, with the leaf blades indumented below. The plant has a compact and spreading habit, a tight twiggy amalgam never more than a metre high, though much more open if planted in too much shade.

Had Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Carmen’ not been introduced to the gardening public a decade earlier, Lord Aberconway’s cross would likely have become the dwarf red of choice, for ‘Charmaine’ is a dazzling addition to the ranks. Yet today, it will prove to be a rare find in the UK’s woodland gardens.



R. ‘Charmaine’



R. ‘Charmaine’

R. ‘Charmaine’

R. ‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’

R. ‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’
griersonianum x auriculatum
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 Mid April-May 2.5m x 3m

In bloom, R. ‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’ can be seen as a rose-pink version of ‘Sappho’, the black blotch not quite as distinctive as when set against white, but the flowers as a whole just as eye-catching. Their colour combination before the tones fade is magnetic, the compact, balled trusses of up to 28 corollas attention grabbing, and each of those corollas is around 5cm long and wide, narrowly campanulate or funnel-shaped, with frilled lobe margins. They are set atop whirls of roughly elliptic-shaped leaves, individually between 9 and 13cm long and around one third that in width, mid green in hue, with slightly recurved edges. The blades are held for around two years, so they amply fill the mounded dome-like structure, although mature specimens can become somewhat leggy if drawn-up by too much shade.

Prospective purchasers should note however that the cultivar has two known, minor drawbacks: the foliage is susceptible to leaf spot; and to chlorosis. Yet while each condition is unsightly, rarely will a well-grown and tended shrub find its floral display marred.

‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’ originated in France during the 1860s, was introduced in 1870 and still remains popular today, being widely planted. That it lacks an RHS exhibition award is criminal, but now that Brexit is done and dusted…


R. ‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’


R. ‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’



R. ‘China’

The ‘China’ Pride

‘Wightii’ (Hybrid form) x *fortunei*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late April-May 4m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
China	W. C. Slocock Ltd	before 1936	1940
China “A”	W. C. Slocock Ltd	before 1936	1946

Doyenic opinions on R. ‘China’ are mixed and distinctly divided, with some authors rating it highly, others bemoaning its shortcomings. These it certainly has, but a well-grown mature specimen of one of the two distributed clones - ‘China’ or ‘China “A”’ - will prove a delight to behold when in full bloom.

The cross is officially registered in the *IRRC* as *wightii* x *fortunei,* though given the directed pollination took place sometime before 1936, the seed parent could only have been the yellow-flowering natural hybrid with a lopsided flower truss. This originated from capsules that Joseph Dalton Hooker collected off the true species in Sikkim and introduced during 1851, but as most rhodo-savvy professional nurserymen know, small seedlings of *R. wightii* die off at the merest whim, while juvenile plants - if any reach that stage of development; none did - are amazingly slow-growing. So despite Sir Joseph’s seed being distributed to propagating geniuses far and wide, the germinated progeny perished.

Apart from one sole survivor.

And this plant, resident in the Mangles garden at Littleworth, Surrey, only pulled through because it had outside help.

From *R. falconeri*. Which provided half of its DNA.

As evidenced by those asymmetrical flower trusses.

Of course, if anyone in the mid 19th Century could have raised a seedling of the true *R. wightii* to flowering size, it would have been James Henry Mangles, but the plant he grew to adulthood was a seed pan rogue, this semi-acknowledged in 1913 when Volume 139 of *Curtis’s Botanical Magazine* was published. For it illustrated a specimen of *R. wightii,* sourced as a graft from the Littleworth plant, that was growing in the Himalayan House at Kew (Tab 8492). And any resemblance to the flower truss drawn by Sir Joseph for his own book - *Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya* (Tab 27, published in 1851) - was marginal at best. At the time, a clearer indication of natural hybridity would have been hard to find, but the existence of any such individuals was hotly denied by the botanists of the day, as well as by the plant hunters (who should have and probably did know better).

Returning to the hybrid at hand, ‘China’ too suffers from that one-sided characteristic of the inflorescence, inherited from *R. falconeri,* in its own flower truss, as the domed to conical assemblage of between 12 and 17 broadly-funnel-shaped corollas frequently takes on a fairly tousled mien. The leaf blades those blooms are set against are narrowly ovate through elliptic in shape, often with a concave profile, dark matt green in colour, and 12 cm long by slightly less than half that measurement in width. Regrettably they are only held for one year and so give mature specimens a very sparse and open appearance even when the shrub is deliberately grown in full sun to avoid just such legginess. Worse still, the foliage is also prone to leaf spot and chlorosis, as well as to insect attack. Hence all those negative reviews.

Which begs the question, why grow it? And the reply, is that poor performer in some areas of the UK it may be, yet in others, it excels. Wildly. As the photographs confirm.



R. ‘China’



R. ‘China "A"’



R. ‘China "A"’

R. `Choremia'

The ‘Choremia’ Pride

haematodes x *arboreum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 March-April 5m x 7m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Choremia	Henry McLaren	1927	1933
Choremia Tower Court	Roza Stevenson	before 1950	before 1985

The directed pollination that resulted in R. ‘Choremia’ was first made at Bodnant in 1927, the 2nd Baron Aberconway, Henry McLaren, placing pollen from a blood-red form of *R. arboreum* onto the receptive stigma of an equally rubicund *R. haematodes*. Scarlet-crimson corollas were almost preordained and they are held in tightly packed domed or ball-shaped trusses that are displayed in profusion from mid March onwards, which - in tandem with the H5 RHS hardiness rating - restricts the locales where the hybrid can be grown successfully. Reporting on a plant once grown at Glendoick, near Perth in Scotland, Peter and Kenneth Cox state that frost finally killed their specimen in the winter of 1981-2, after it had previously suffered badly from bark split and root rot (*The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988), so for similar gardens sited close to or above that latitude along the east coast, or those inland where temperatures can drop even lower, those fine waxy inflorescences will have to be eschewed, at least, until the current interglacial period we are travelling through progresses closer towards its zenith.

Along the west coast or in the south however, the hybrid is a stunner, lighting up the woodland for three weeks or more. Potential purchasers should however treat the ‘medium’ height caveat that appears repeatedly in most published descriptions with scorn, for if the genes of *R. haematodes* were supposed to curtail the small-tree nature of *R. arboreum,* they failed rather spectacularly. Equally, be aware that there are a number of clones in commerce and that while one of these may at first be reluctant to push above the 2m height mark, all the mature specimens encountered in UK gardens to date have easily doubled that figure in combination with an even wider spread.

Out of flower ‘Choremia’ displays fine elliptic-lanceolate-shaped leaves that are dark green and somewhat glossy, come with a slivery-grey coating of indumentum along the underside, and as they are often held for three years or a touch more, provide the domed framework of a mature specimen with a fully clad mantle, a vestment with barely a gap visible in its raiment.

‘Choremia Tower Court’ is a duplicate pairing made by the Stevensons at their garden near Ascot, sometime before 1950, with John Barr officially taking the credit for his wife Roza’s handiwork, equality between the sexes clearly non-existent in the fifties despite all those proclamations to the contrary. The shrub’s habit, flowers and foliage are a near mirror of the Bodnant plant, although the flowering period is a week or so earlier.

One thing is a little perplexing however: the origin of the epithet. As the only non-rhododendron search engine hit is a 1997 ironic novel on the television industry by the Italian author Guillermo Blanco, which of course was still sixty plus years away from its run through the printing presses when ‘Choremia’ was introduced in 1933.



R. ‘Choremia’

R. 'Choremia Tower Court'

R. ‘Choremia Tower Court’



R. 'Cornish Cross'

The 'Cornish Cross' Pride

thomsonii x *griffithianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 March-April-May 8m x 5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Cornish Cross	Samuel Smith	before 1927	before 1958
Exbury Cornish Cross	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1935	1935
Gilian	E. J. P. Magor	1912	1923
Marquis of Lothian	William Martin	before 1880	1880
Pengaer	Sir John Llewelyn	before 1891	1911
William Dallimore	Royal botanic Garden, Kew	around 1920	before 1958

If precedence were strictly enforced within the ranks of hybrid rhododendrons, then plants with a t*homsonii* x *griffithianum* parentage would all be grouped together under a 'Marquis of Lothian' banner, because William Martin's cross, although only registered in 1977, was introduced in 1880 and paired sometime in the early 1870s. So it was conceived fifty years before R. 'Cornish Cross' made its debut on the horticultural stage.

Martin was a Scotsman who emigrated to New Zealand in 1848. Trained at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, by 1880 he had established a thriving nursery business at Fairfield, the farm he named and built near Dunedin on the south island. And so successful was this enterprise that a printed *Catalogue of Plants Cultivated for Sale by William Martin & Son, Nurseryman and Seedsman* was issued that year listing some 1400 different species and hybrids across a wide range of genera.

Historically, 'Marquis of Lothian' was the first commercially available rhododendron bred in New Zealand. It has openly-funnel-campanulate-shaped corollas that are coloured pinkish-red on the outer surface and whitish-pink within, which is where a deeper-toned pink flush will also be found.

The Welsh Conservative MP Sir John Talbot Dillwyn-Llewellyn made the second *R. thomsonii* x *R. griffithianum* pairing at Penllergaer, his estate near Swansea, sometime before 1891. He named his hybrid 'Pengaer' and the selection has fine crimson-red flowers with a rose sheen in the centre, its corollas 9cm wide at the mouth, these carried in a loose truss of twelve. It won an Award of Merit from the RHS when shown by Llewellyn in 1911.

The third repeat mating took place the following year at Lamellen, the home of E. J. P. Magor, near St. Tudy in Cornwall, although in this case, the cross was mis-registered as a *campylocarpum* x *griffithianum* hybrid. Edward Magor realised his error in later years, this confirmed by his son, Major Walter Magor - as reported within the online edition of W. J. Bean's *Trees & Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles* - although the original parentage still remains listed in the *IRRC* entry. 'Gilian' has large, campanulate corollas of cardinal red, these also seducing an Award of Merit out of the RHS when introduced in 1923, although the floral committee may possibly have lavished their largesse in relief that the cross hadn't been christened 'Campyiffithianum' or - had the true parentage been remembered at the time - 'Thomsogriff'.

The fourth and fifth duplicate combinations were both made around 1920:

At the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the hybridiser can now only be tracked down to an anonymous member of staff, though the chosen epithet fares better as it honours one of the establishment's renowned luminaries, William Dallimore, author of the *The Handbook of*

Coniferae and Ginkgoaceae, which would be published in 1923, though he is principally remembered for setting up the National Pinetum at Bedgebury in Kent.

At Penjerrick, the home of Robert Barclay Fox (1873-1934), located near Falmouth, in Cornwall, the hybridiser was Samuel Smith, who had been appointed as head gardener by Fox's older cousin Anna Maria in 1889, some years after she had inherited the property from her father Robert Were Fox (1789-1877), as her brother, the first Robert Barclay Fox (1817-1855), had predeceased them both.

Smith's plant, which was propagated and distributed by the Veitch Nursery, is of course the 'Cornish Cross' familiar to rhodophiles the world over.

It has peeling, pinkish-brown bark and an open tree-like habit, bears elliptic through obovate leaves some 15cm long by 9cm wide that are deep green and glossy, but as those same rhodophiles will know, very susceptible to the powdery mildew fungus. The flowers are large and heavily-textured, carried in a loose truss of six to nine funnel-campanulate corollas, 5-lobed and 8cm long and wide. Their colour is a mottled rose-pink inside, darker outside, with 5 crimson nectar pouches at the base of the throat. At a distance, the effect they generate is two-tone. An equally large and irregularly-lobed calyx grasps each corolla, this usually dressed in a matching hue.

Many commentators have suggested that the parent plants Smith used were inferior forms of the species, and while this may indeed be so, Samuel Smith himself made the selection, so it should perhaps also be remembered that this was the same hybridiser responsible for the delectable 'Penjerrick', the stunning 'Barclayi' and 'Cornubia', plus a number of other highly rated crosses. A horticultural artist then, who perhaps decided that the luminous character of the blooms was more important than offering up yet another tonally pristine concoction. A decision that is vindicated by the shrub's continued worldwide popularity, as opposed to another entry we shall come to shortly.

Detractors should also note that Samuel Smith, despite only raising 15 named hybrids, was described as a head gardener with 'a keen eye for a good flower, and a ready bonfire for a bad one', who permitted no plant to 'leave the nursery unless it has the merit to shine in a most distinguished company' and showed 'fine judgement in selecting the parents'. Those three quotes are compliments that were paid by no less an authority on rhododendron hybrids than the 2nd Lord Aberconway of Bodnant, Henry McLaren, and they appear in the portrait of Penjerrick Garden he wrote for Volume 3, Number 4, of *The Rhododendron Society Notes,* which was published in 1928.

The RHS too were fans, awarding the Cornishman a Veitch Memorial Medal for his hybridising work with rhododendrons.

'Exbury Cornish Cross' is the registered epithet for the final pairing of the species, though a 'to date' caveat probably needs to be appended to that statement. The two parent plants Lionel de Rothschild used were indeed 'superior' forms, with the match made in the late 1920s and logged-in as LR 107 in the Exbury studbook. And it is as different to the Penjerrick plant as 'Kewense' is to 'Loderi'.

The FCC-winning form of *R. griffithianum* supplied the pollen, while the *R. thomsonii* clone came from the Sunningdale Nursery, this propagated from the very best specimen of the species they grew, which could trace its origin back to Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker's premier introduction of seed from Sikkim in 1850.

Rhodophiles visiting North Yorkshire during the spring should call in at Castle Howard, where a layer from that original Sunningdale plant, lifted in 1968 and now a small tree, can be seen in Ray Wood. And it stunningly attests to the plant's brilliance.

Combined, the result mirrors the Smith plant in habit, bark and foliage, but gone is any mottling on the corollas, for the flowers are a pure crimson in tone, their hue only varying in its depth. The outer surface of those wide-open funnels is graced with a soft bloom and the nectar pouches at the base of the throat, are smaller and darker. In 1935 it too won an Award of Merit, but for every garden that can boast a clone of L de R's pairing, a thousand more will have ascribed to its far more personable predecessor.

All six members of the 'Cornish Cross' pride are creatures of a sheltered woodland glade, their hardiness rating only really sufficient long-term for gardens along the west coast and in the south. Those with spring frost problems should note that the Exbury clone begins opening its blooms in mid March, earlier if the season is mild, while the Penjerrick plant starts to dazzle onlookers almost a full month later. A height of 3-5m is the more oft quoted figure than the 8m shown here, but how many devotees will have seen the fabulous specimen at Benmore in all its glory? Note too that only the Penjerrick and Exbury hybrids are available today from the specialist nurseries.



Samuel Smith

R. ‘Cornish Cross’

R. 'Cornish Cross'

R. ‘Cornish Cross’

R. ‘Exbury Cornish Cross’

The ‘Cornubia’ Pride
arboreum x ‘Shilsonii’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4-5 February-April 8m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Cornubia	Samuel Smith	1901	1912
Lilianae	Samuel Smith	1901	1914

An account in W. J. Bean’s *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles,* which is now freely accessible online, explains why there is so much variation in the hybrids of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as it details the rather astounding fact that the ‘Cornubia’ cross - made by Samuel Smith at Penjerrick in 1901 - has some 200 variations in cultivation, and that ‘Lilianae’ - a second ‘selection’ from the same *arboreum* x ‘Shilsonii’ pairing - boasts an equal number. For the cross:

> “was named ‘Lilianae’ at Penjerrick, but half of the 400 or so seedlings raised were made over to Messrs Gill, who named their share ‘Cornubia’, with the plants variable in the shade of red of their flowers”.

So much for vegetatively propagating named clones then. Yet this somewhat - if not outright - unethical practice - at least when viewed from today’s standpoint - does at least answer the question of how the nurseries of the time were able to bring their new hybrids onto the market so quickly. Because they likely - if a large dose of salt was consumed and they were all wearing blinkers - assumed that all the seedlings would turn out to be the same, the visual impairment device required to avoid acknowledging some fairly obvious, side-by-side differences that would have been apparent in the cold frames or nursery beds, which could not be put down to different growing conditions post their sale.

John Guille Millais thought differently:

> ‘About 400 examples of this hybrid were raised by Mr Smith, and about half of these were transferred to Mr Gill at Tremough. I have seen the majority of these in flower, and was much struck by the variability of the plants, which, in their leaves, flowers, and habit, take after all three species from which it owes its origin. Some have bluish stems, leaves and flowers like *R. barbatum,* others again favour *R. thomsonii* or *R. arboreum,* whilst many are types in which either of the species predominate or are composite examples of all three parents. I have 23 examples, and notice that those which possess the most brilliant flowers are those which seem to have the smallest leaves. The big-leaved examples favouring *R. barbatum,* with the coriaceous upper surface of *R. arboreum,* all have grand red flowers, but they are not so brilliant as those that incline towards the *R. thomsonii* like truss’.
> *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* 1917.

So the blood-red blooms of ‘Cornubia’ will come in slightly different shades dependent on which of the original 200 clones you are viewing, or from which your specimen was subsequently propagated. In the main, they are held in a balled truss of around twelve corollas, campanulate in shape, unspotted, but with darker nectar pouches at the base of the throat. The leaves too, as Millais indicates, will vary slightly from plant to plant, but fall within an elliptic through obovate descriptor and be some 15cm long, matt green in colour and have a thin indumentum across their abaxial surface.

Alternatively, examples of ‘Lilianae’ hold around eighteen corollas in their flower truss, the corollas of a blood-red hue shaded carmine, which means that presumably, one of the gardening staff at Penjerrick must have gone round and dug-up all those clones with a less populous inflorescence and set them aside for Richard Gill to collect.

The Penjerrick-retained clone - or clones - received an Award of Merit from the RHS in 1914, but it is - or rather, they are - now rarely found in gardens, at least with a ‘Lilianae’ label, a fact which might prompt owners of a specimen - or their near-twin - to pop out and make a corolla count of their own.

‘Cornubia’, recipient of its own AM in 1912, can grow into a fine, wide-spreading small tree when set in a woodland environment, or be kept more compact if grown in full sun, but should only be planted where winter lows stay above -12ºC, the mid point of the H4-5 rating. Flowering can commence as early as February and extend over many weeks if frost is held at bay, though the display is normally at a peak from late March into early April. And the best of those clones will put on a stunning floral spectacular, which is the facet that has prompted their inclusion herein.

One other fact that needs to be put right concerns the epithet, for it does not - as most of us would have believed - reference a species of mite from the *Epicriidae* family, namely *Cornubia ornata,* but is a latinisation of the word ‘Cornwall’, traceable to a deed from the mid 9th Century that professes to be a copy of one written more than two hundred years earlier in 705. Tangential to this revelation, it is also highly likely that the 23 specimens of ‘Cornubia’ owned by J. G. Millais were intermixed with plants of ‘Nobleanum Venustum’, for he had ‘over 100 in the open garden near my house, and visitors are always delighted to see such a gay show so early in the year’ (*ibid,* page 119). Which confirms the belief that sometimes, change is for the better.


R. ‘Cornubia’



R. 'Cornubia'



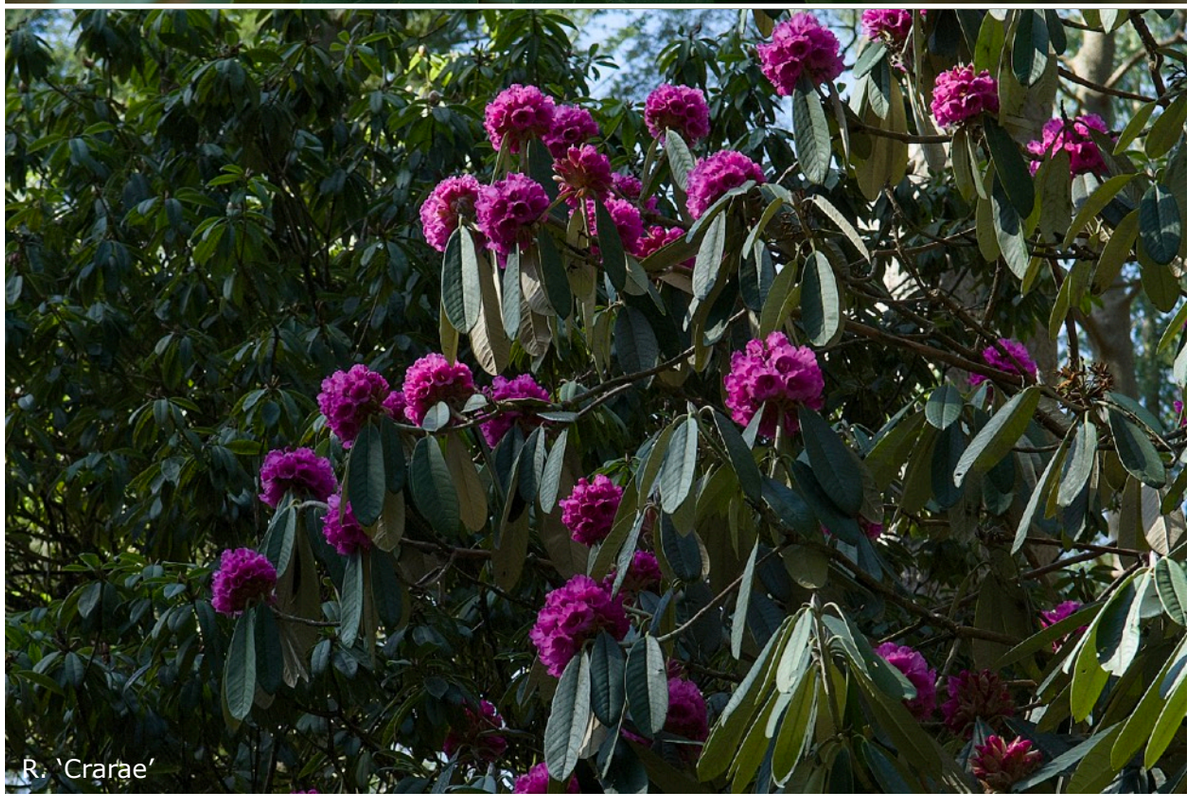
R. 'Cornubia'



R. 'Cornubia'



R. ‘Crarae’



R. ‘Crarae’

R. ‘Crarae’

R. niveum hybrid

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 March-April 8m x 6m

‘Crarae’ is simply the best large-leaved *R. niveum* hybrid introduced to date.

Sir George Campbell, owner and creator of Crarae Woodland Glen - the fabled ravine garden overlooking Loch Fyne in Argyll, which is now in the care of the National Trust for Scotland - who made the cross, registered its parentage in 1963 as either a seedling or hybrid of *R. niveum,* but one glance at the flower truss and its colour, or the leaves, will immediately suggest that *R. hodgsonii* played a rather significant part in the conception. Mature specimens are tree-like in habit, require shelter from the wind and protection from any cold snap that drops temperatures much below -12ºC, but if such can be offered where you garden, the floral display adorning a mature specimen will amaze and astonish anyone fortunate enough to behold the spectacle.

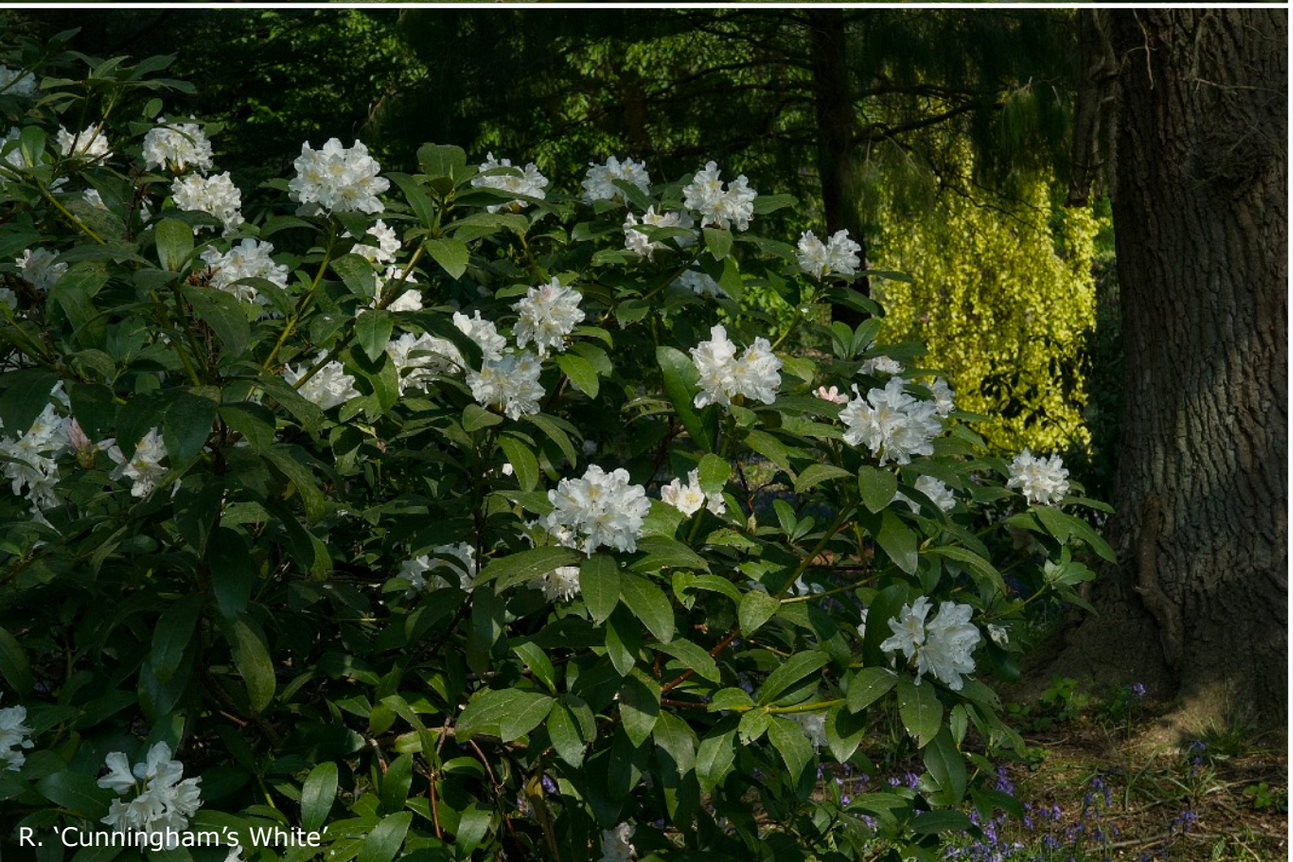
For when the blooms are first out and fully open, their colour is a stunning orchid-purple, and every truss will be a football-sized compact ball holding twenty or more fleshy corollas, each individual bell 5 to 6.5cm in length, 7-lobed and tubular-campanulate in shape. And hundreds of those blooms will decorate a full-grown plant, though as with all the large-leaved rhododendrons, the cycle of flower bud production will only produce such a bonanza every two to three years. A small dahlia-purple blotch will be found deep in the throat of each corolla, but this only really becomes apparent when the primary tone begins to fade, a process exacerbated by strong sunlight even in northern gardens. Because the flowers are prone to the same fallacy that afflicts the inflorescences borne by both *R. niveum* and *R. hodgsonii* - the purple pigmentation quickly washes-out to a soiled whitish-mauve. So while strikingly beautiful at first, the blooms are sadly mediocre at the close.

As if to compensate for this, ‘Crarae’ is adorned with superb foliage: obovate in shape and easily 18cm long if not more, the leaves mid green above with a thin, whitish indumentum below, and they are held for at least two years. That the blades lack the metallic sheen found on the foliage of *R. hodgsonii* is unfortunate, but they are otherwise visually very similar, though reduced in overall size.

R. ‘Crarae’


R. ‘Cunningham’s White’


R. ‘Cunningham’s White’


R. ‘Cunningham’s White’


R. ‘Cunningham’s White’

The ‘Cunningham’s White’ Pride

caucasicum x *ponticum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 Late April-May 3m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Cunningham’s Blush	James Cunningham	around 1830	around 1850
Cunningham's White	James Cunningham	around 1830	before 1850

James Cunningham (1784-1851), may only have six rhododendron hybrids logged against his name in the pages of the *IRRC,* but one of those is the commonest and most widely planted cross in the whole country: ‘Cunningham’s White’.

The *caucasicum* x *ponticum* pairing was made during the 1830s at Cunningham’s Comely Bank Nursery in Edinburgh, an establishment described in the 1817 edition of *The Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* as:

> “a sort of flower-nursery, established at Comely Bank, about midway between Stockbridge and Craigleith, by Mr James Cunningham, an experienced practical gardener and botanist. This flower-nursery was begun pretty much on the plan of similar establishments near London, but the very limited demand in this place for plants merely ornamental, has gradually led the adventurer to conjoin with his primary employment the cultivation of some culinary articles. He finds it advantageous also to keep several cows.”

The article then goes on to describe in great detail what James Cunningham did with ‘the cleanings of the cow house’, adding them to ‘quantities of stable dung bought from Edinburgh’ to build ‘a number of long and narrow beds, perhaps 50 feet long by 5 in breadth, and somewhat more than a foot in thickness or depth’. Upon which he grew mushrooms, potatoes and radishes to supplement the income from his ornamental stock. Yet his *caucasicum* x *ponticum* cross would soon be duplicated by the very same London nurseries on which Comely Bank had been modelled, as well as by other firms around the country, the renowned Veitch establishment at Exeter to mention but one. For the hybrid was highly esteemed; its hardiness and versatility second to none.

It was used extensively for shelter as a windbreak and as cover for grouse and pheasants on the shooting estates, and it was also planted in areas where pollution from the factories of the Industrial Revolution had killed off everything else. Another discovery found that ‘Cunningham’s White’ could thrive in neutral or even moderately alkaline soils, as James Smith of the Darley Dale Nurseries in Buxton, Derbyshire - the town famous for its limestone caverns - reported to Kew in the early 1900s. European nurserymen had soon found it to be the perfect rootstock for propagating their own hybrids, grafting scions onto it in their hundreds of thousands, if not millions, and they also used it as an understock for plants exported to the colder regions of North America. Indeed, James Cunningham’s hybrid was found to prosper even in Norway and Iceland, though the flower buds would be lost in the coldest winters.

R. ‘Cunningham’s White’ is tolerant of full sun or deep shade, the habit compact and bushy in the first locale, straggly and untidy in the second. Its leaves are oblanceolate in shape, dark green in colour and average 10cm in length. The flowers are usually mauve in the bud, opening white with two rays or a fan of greenish-yellow spots and speckles that can also coalesce into a full-blown blotch. Equally, the dorsal markings might be brown or pale purple. The corollas are funnel-shaped and carried in loose trusses of eight, with one clonal variant displaying an upright arrangement holding around twenty flowers, so any admirers wishing to add the hybrid to their collection would best be advised to time their purchase for late April into May when the blooms are on display. For there are probably enough clones available on the market for connoisseurs to fill entire medium-sized gardens with the hybrid and not have two plants exactly the same, especially as it may also be found labelled under its synonym ‘Coelestinum’,

One final point to note: had British nurserymen from the 1850s onwards not been so pig-headed and averse to change, but followed the lead of their Belgian, Dutch and German counterparts - who grafted onto ‘Cunningham’s White’ instead of *R. ponticum* - much of the UK countryside would have been spared the vast swathes of *R. x superponticum* to which it is now home. Even more galling is the fact that ‘Cunningham’s White’ actually increases the health and vigour of the scions grafted onto it rather than swamping and ultimately killing them off - as the shoots that sprout directly from the rootball or below the graft union on a *R. ponticum* rootstock take over. Even better, it often dwarfs those hybrids with a leggy demeanour. Plus, it extends the areas where rhododendrons can be grown thanks to the plant’s tolerance of soils with a pH value of 7 or a little above.

So using it should have been a no-brainer…



R. ‘Cunningham’s White’

R. 'Cynthia'

catawbiense x *griffithianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 Late April-May 9m x 9m

Despite the given parentage of R. 'Cynthia' shown above, many authors believe that no one in fact has actually made a pure, unadulterated pairing between *R. catawbiense* and *R. griffithianum.* To confirm such, the *IRRC* pollen parent entry is proceeded by a question mark and indeed, only one rhododendron hybrid out of the 28,000 cultivars logged in that text - 'Cynthia' - lays claim to such a heritage. Which given the date of its conception and introduction - 1856 and 1860, respectively, with the *IRRC's* text giving 1862 for the latter occurrence - those detractors believe that obtaining pollen from *R. griffithianum* would have been a physical impossibility. Because the species had only been introduced in 1850, and its first flowering in UK cultivation is officially documented as having taken place during May of 1858 (*Curtis's Botanical Magazine,* Volume 84). So such a marriage would have been impossible prior to that date. And nor would the offspring from any match made in 1856 or 1858 been ready for distribution just four or six years later.

Except the two nurserymen who made the directed pollination, John Standish and Charles Noble - now running separate businesses as their partnership had recently broken-up - apparently did exactly that.

In 1856.

So were they marketing a falsehood?

Or is the accepted timeline in error?

Arguably, the latter is the case, because everyone neglects to recall that Standish & Noble practised a horticulturally cherished technique known as top-grafting:

In an article detailing the history of their Sunningdale Nursery - written in 2010 for the Scottish Rhododendron Society's *Yearbook No. 12* - John Hammond notes that present on the site:

> 'were a number of old standards in a greenhouse on to which Standish & Noble used to graft scions of new species and hybrids, thus getting a flower much sooner than they would from the parent seedling'.

He also confirms that *R. griffithianum* was offered for sale to the nursery's customers in the Standish & Noble catalogue of 1854, these youngsters germinated and grown from Sir Joseph Hooker's seed that had been returned from Sikkim just four years earlier.

So it is no great leap to suspect that *R. griffithianum* was indeed one of those top-grafted scions. Nor that its pre-1858 flowering would go unreported, for competition in the horticultural world was cut-throat even in the 1850s. Thus the style of *R. catawbiense* was daubed with gold dust and in 1856 Standish marked-out one of the seedlings grown from that pollination for mass propagation. Post the business split, the nursery stock was divided half-and-half between the partners, and once again quoting John Hammond:

> 'in the spring of 1860 both firms distributed the plant, one calling it R. Cynthia and the other R. Lord Palmerston. Interestingly, Noble's catalogue of 1860 lists both names'.

A second synonym also exists - 'Mirabile' - but rarely will a shrub be found labelled as such, or as 'Lord Palmerston', for the thousands upon thousands of now massive, mature specimens established in gardens big, small and too small, located from Land's End to John o'Groats, are overwhelmingly tagged 'Cynthia'. A sun tolerant, heat-resistant, plant-and-forget rhododendron until the upright dome turns into a sheet of magenta-rose-pink each spring. When its floral display is literally beyond stunning. And its owner-admirers are rudely awoken to how big it has grown since last they looked.

For a height and spread of 9m or more is not exceptional if left unchecked. And entire suburban gardens can quickly disappear under its branches, bedecked with a bushy canopy of insect-proof leaves, oblong-elliptic through obovate in shape, up to 15cm long and mid green in colour. And yes, the whole plant may be unappealing for much of the year, chiefly when the foliage hangs down in winter, but it will be decidedly useful if a nearby two- or three-storey block of flats needs to be obscured. Or equally, the blades of a more distant wind turbine. Until late April, when once again the flower buds begin to swell…

'Cynthia' carries its funnel-shaped and ribbed corollas in an upright, pyramidal truss of twenty-four. Each is 5.5cm long and some 7.5 to 8.5cm across at the mouth. Their colour is a deep rose-pink with a distinct undertone of magenta, the upper lobes, primarily the dorsal, heavily spotted and speckled a darker crimson-purple. So the blooms are huge, and hundreds, if not thousands, can festoon an aged monster mastodon.

And their splendour is widely acknowledged, while justly, they garnered the hybrid a popularity second only to 'Pink Pearl' in the first half of the last century and *R. yakushimanum* in the latter half.

That acclaim remains undimmed, with 'Cynthia' still in vogue and available from all the specialist suppliers plus many of the larger garden centres, for it is a commercial standard in the UK and wherever else rhododendrons are grown in the world. And it is still regularly planted in patches of soil where you couldn't swing half a dead cat.

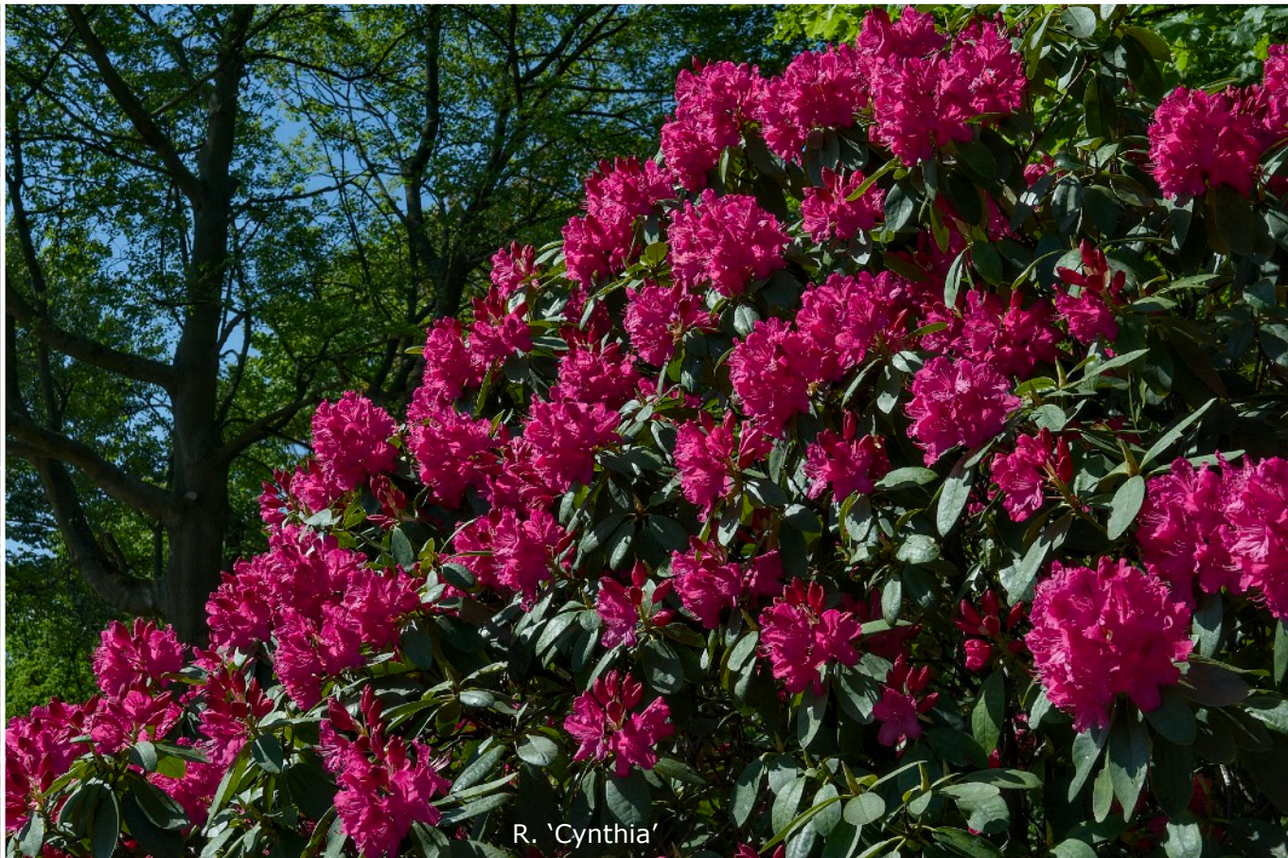


R. 'Cynthia'

R. ‘Cynthia’


R. ‘Cynthia’


R. ‘Cynthia’


R. ‘Cynthia’

R. 'Cynthia'

Elepidote Hybrids
D-G



R. ‘Damaris’

The ‘Damaris’ Pride

‘Doctor Stocker’ x *campylocarpum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April-early May 3m x 4.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Cornish Cracker	E. J. P. Magor	1918	1956
Cream Cracker	E. J. P. Magor	1918	1956
Damaris	E. J. P. Magor	1918	1926
Golden Drop	E. J. P. Magor	1918	1931
Goldilocks	Michael Haworth-Booth	1974	1983
Lamellen Damaris	E. J. P. Magor	1918	1989
Logan Damaris	E. J. P. Magor	1918	1948
Townhill Damaris	Lord Swaythling (Gardener - Mr. F. J. Rose)	before 1948	1948

R. ‘Damaris’ is a ‘Doctor Stocker’ x *campylocarpum* pairing made by Edward Magor in 1918, which he named for his youngest daughter and introduced in 1926. The honorific stems of course from the Celtic goddess of fertility ‘Damara’, Hellenised around the time of the BC/AD switch, with its first noted personage a Greek convert to Christianity who lived in Athens around 55 AD.

The rhododendron so christened has an open, flat flower truss of six primrose-yellow corollas that are broadly campanulate in shape. They shade to ivory-white at the lobe margins and are without spots or a blotch, each being around 5cm long and flaring to 8cm wide at the mouth. The ‘Damaris’ leaves are ovate through narrowly-ovate in shape, dark green and shiny, but held for just one year, which can give the shrub a sparse appearance when devoid of bloom, the upright-ascending habit not helping. A second clone, ‘Lamellen Damaris’, although only formerly named and registered in 1989 by Walter Magor (Edward’s son), was actually the plant distributed under the old grex/group name. It has a flower truss of 6 to 10 corollas, these bright yellow-green in colour dimming to pale yellow-green, and comes with more oblong-elliptic leaf blades.

A third clone also exists, which is superior to the two introduced from Lamellen and indeed today, is the only member of the pride available, even from the specialist nurseries. It was grown by Kenneth McDouall of Logan, near Stranraer, in southwest Scotland, but not crossed or introduced by him. Despite reports to the contrary. Because the history behind ‘Logan Damaris’ is just a mite complicated, to put it mildly.

Brothers Kenneth (1870-1945), and Douglas (1872-1942), McDouall were both avid gardeners who filled their estate’s grounds - now divided into two as Logan Botanic Garden and Logan House - with the exotics then arriving in the UK from the plant hunters scouring South East Asia for new species. And as anyone who has visited either garden will confirm, rhododendrons took pride of place, with the near frost-free climate of the woodland perfect for their cultivation. Kenneth McDouall wrote several articles about the garden in the 1920s and 1930s, with many eminent visitors also extolling its virtues in the horticultural press. One of those callers at the garden gates was a gentleman by the name of John Guille Millais, who published a list of pairings made at Logan by McDouall in the second volume of his *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* which was published in 1924. Of the dozen crosses listed, one is a *R. campylocarpum* x ‘Doctor Stocker’ pairing.

Now, on paper, this reverses the parental combination Edward Magor used, but seed and pollen parent may have been inadvertently switched in the reporting or the telling - for at the time, such detail was not given the same import as today. Moreover, the hybridiser credit was also misconstrued or written in error.

Volume 3, Number 2, of T*he Rhododendron Society Notes,* published in 1926, contains a short listing of hybrid rhododendrons with their parentages. 'Damaris' is included, with its equation given as 'Doctor Stocker' x *campylocarpum.* Accompanying the entry is a note stating that 'the same cross raised and shown by K. McDouall, received an AM at the RHS in 1925'.

Yet Kenneth McDouall's name is absent from the 1544 pages of the 2004-published Second Edition of the *IRRC,* so no selections from the combinations listed by Millais were ever named or introduced by their supposed creator, at least formally. However, the name of John Barr Stevenson, another member of the Rhododendron Society, and editor of *The Species of Rhododendron,* published in 1930, does appear in relation to 'Logan Damaris', or rather, 'Damaris Logan', which is how the plant was first introduced in 1948. Stevenson, creator of an equally impressive rhododendron fairyland at Tower Court, his home near Ascot, also scooped an Award of Merit from the RHS in the process. Presumably, he saw the clone in flower at Logan some years earlier, and secured a scion or two for grafting.

'Logan Damaris' - as it now officially appears within the pages of the *IRRC* - like 'Lamellen Damaris', has greenish-yellow corollas, although their tone is described by some authors as lemon-yellow, others as Dresden Yellow. They are without spots or a blotch and held in a domed-shaped truss composed of 12 funnels, while the leaves are elliptic in shape and up to 12.5cm long.

Back in 1931, Sir James Horlick too had introduced another clone - 'Golden Drop' - although again, no hybridiser credit is given in the *IRRC* for the matching parentage.

And two other equally unacknowledged hybrids are now known to have originated from the Magor pairing of 1918, namely 'Cornish Cracker' and 'Cream Cracker'. These were introduced by Major-General Eric Harrison, of Tremeer, Cornwall, in the mid 1950s, but as with the 'Logan Damaris' and 'Golden Drop' *IRRC* entries, have no hybridiser detailed. However, given the fact that the rhododendron planting at Tremeer was begun in the 1930s with stock supplied from nearby Lamellen - as detailed in *A History of Rhododendrons,* by Walter Magor (*JARS,* Volume 44, Number 4) - their ancestry can no longer be in doubt.

The directed pollination equation was also duplicated by three other hybridisers: Lord Swaythling, who registered 'Townhill Damaris' in 1948; the Hillier Nursery, whose hybrid is currently unregistered, but has blooms that are sparsely spotted crimson; and Michael Haworth-Booth, who created 'Goldilocks' in 1974.

In an article for the 1992 RCMG Yearbook - *Rhododendrons with Camellias and Magnolias No. 44* - Walter Magor writes that Kenneth McDouall duplicated the Damaris cross around 1938, and Eric Harrison did the same ten years later in 1948, but this account clashes with his own 1990 *JARS* article in respect to Harrison, and with Millais in regard to McDouall, so its accuracy must be challenged.

What actually transpired, but went unremarked by any of the sources above, was Edward Magor's annual 'List of Surplus Plants for Sale' event, with consignments of species and hybrids from Lamellen regularly despatched off to rhododendron besotted members of the landed gentry. Post the arrival of their selections, the wires of historical reportage clearly got crossed, but such eventualities explain why Kenneth McDouall never personally claimed 'Logan Damaris' as his own or wrote of his hybrid breeding programme in the contributions he submitted to *The Rhododendron Society Notes*. And why the clones introduced by Horlick and Harrison lack 'R', 'H' and 'G' details in their *IRRC* entries.



R. 'Damaris'

R. ‘Damaris’



R. ‘Logan Damaris’



R. ‘Logan Damaris’



R. ‘Dame Nellie Melba’



R. ‘Dame Nellie Melba’

R. ‘Dame Nellie Melba’

‘Standishii’ x *arboreum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April-early May 5m x 4m

Nellie Melba was the stage name of a world-renown Australian operatic soprano Helen ‘Nellie’ Porter Mitchell (1861-1931), who was created a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in March 1918 for her fund raising charity work during the First World War. The ‘Melba’ comes from Melbourne, which was her hometown, and the pseudonym was immortalised by the French chef Auguste Escoffier’s mouth-watering mix of peaches, vanilla ice cream and raspberry sauce that he named the ‘Peach Melba’ in her honour. There is also a Melba sauce - a purée of raspberries and red currants - Melba toast - crisp and dry - and a Melba garniture - chicken, truffles and mushrooms ensconced in tomatoes with a velouté sauce - all Escoffier gastronomic inspirations dedicated to the Diva. And then there is R. ‘Dame Nellie Melba’, named and introduced in 1926, the year of the singer’s farewell concert at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Sir Edmund Loder made the cross at Leonardslee, placing pollen from a blood red form of *R. arboreum* onto the stigma of R. ‘Standishii’, of which there are two possible candidates: a Standish & Noble oeuvre of 1851 vintage that was the result of an unnamed *maximum* x *ponticum* hybrid pollinating the J. R. Gowen cross, R. ‘Altaclerense’; and a *griffithianum* hybrid introduced around 1910 that has been attributed to either the Veitch Nursery or James Mangles. Sir Edmund died in 1920, so missed the concert, but Lionel de Rothschild of Exbury stepped up to the plate and as so often, chose the perfect epithet for his friend’s creation.

‘Dame Nellie Melba’ has rich pink flowers, darker on the exterior surface, which on the inside pale towards the centre of each lobe and have two narrow fans of brown spots on the dorsal. At the base of the throat five small, crimson-stained nectar pouches encircle a tight ring of contrasting white stamens. Each corolla is large, 6.5cm long, the funnel flaring to near 9cm across at the mouth, and they are carried in big conical trusses of a dozen individuals. Over time the deeper hues fade, becoming light pink and then white, but the blooms retain their flamboyance and flare throughout. They are set against dark green and glossy foliage, the leaves oblong-obovate in shape and close to 16.5cm long, these held for just over two seasons and so delivering a bushy appearance to the shrub’s upright structure.

In the southern counties, devotees will need to select a site with enough shade to prevent leaf burn from the sun’s strongest rays, but which still allows sufficient light to maintain a good habit and prodigious flower bud production. To that end, the abundance of bloom may sometimes bow the branches.

R. 'Darigold'

griersonianum x auriculatum

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Mid May-June 2.5m x 3m

R. 'Darigold' is a Bill Whitney cross from the early 1960s that is probably better known as one of the parents of 'Ring of Fire', which is a shame, for this medium-tall bushy shrub is a stunner and the two-word 'orange-cream' description of its blooms found within the pages of the *IRRC,* woefully inadequate. Because when they first open, bands of colour decorate the flowers almost like the spokes of a wheel, pinkish-red interspersed with orange-yellow.

Each corolla is 7-lobed, broadly funnel-campanulate in shape, carried in a flat, one-sided truss of a dozen or more trumpets. Their stamens and style are held in a tight ring in the centre of the bloom, with the cluster of black-brown anthers an instant point of focus. As with all rhododendron flowers, the colours pale over time, stridency replaced with more muted, pastel tones, but the radial pattern remains and the narrow fan of green spots on the dorsal lobes, present from the get-go, becomes more pronounced, the whole just as enchanting.

In contrast, the foliage is dark green and matt, the leaf blades elliptical in shape, with a convex profile, and the groove of the adaxial midrib distinct. They are held for two or more years so fully cloak the upright-ascending but much branched framework, this developing into a bushy dome a touch wider than it grows tall.

William E. 'Bill' Whitney (1894-1973), was an electrician by trade and a self-taught hybridiser and nurseryman. A lifelong resident of Washington State, he was first captivated by camellias, but in 1931 bought thirty or so rhododendrons to brighten-up the grounds around his home, and after that, tunnel vision simply took over and hobby soon became profession, so much so that the original nursery was abandoned in 1955 for a much larger site - the 7-acre garden on the Hood Canal near Brinnon, which today attracts upwards of 10,000 visitors annually. Whitney spent close to forty years hybridising rhododendrons, raising five generations from seedlings to fully evaluated blooming plants, his most widely distributed and well-known crosses on this side of the Atlantic probably 'Anna Rose Whitney' and 'Virginia Richards', but many more are standard fare along America's Pacific coast, including a host of crosses introduced after his death by George and Anne Sather, who had purchased the nursery from their friend in 1970.

Remarkably, 'Darigold' is not listed amongst their ranks, with the hybrid completely absent from nursery catalogues in the UK, or in the US, except when shown as a parent. And its four registered offspring to date are all the work of Willard Thompson and his wife Margaret, of Waldport, Oregon. Because no one else from the hybridising fraternity has apparently seen the genetic potential for further breeding that is present on the 'Darigold' DNA strands, despite 'Ring of Fire' taking the rhododendron world by storm. And that is an oversight of simply monumental proportions!


R. 'Darigold'


R. 'Darigold'


R. ‘Doctor Stocker’


R. ‘Doctor Stocker’


R. ‘Doctor Stocker’

R. 'Doctor Stocker'
caucasicum x *griffithianum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 April 4m x 5m

John Thomas North (1842-1896), was a self-made millionaire of humble origins, in fact, the son of a Yorkshire coal merchant. He amassed his fortune in Chile during the short, four-year "Guerra del Pacifico" - the "War of the Pacific" between Chile, Bolivia and Peru, which took place from 1879 to 1883 - when luck and shrewd business sense gave him a monopoly holding in the nitrate industry from a very small initial investment. He quickly went on from that base to achieve exclusive control over the country's freight railways and waterworks, later expanding into iron and coalfields. In doing so, he became internationally known as 'The Nitrate King'.

Such approbation required a London residence that befitted this new status. Thus the 600-acre Avery Hill estate in Eltham was purchased, an area that in 1888 was a rural enclave to the southeast of the capital city, though nowadays, simply part of suburbia's unending monotonic repetitiveness. The original house was significantly enlarged; galleries were added for his art collection; and a huge iron and glass domed structure, known as the 'Winter Garden', was built for a collection of hothouse exotics. The surrounding gardens were also further developed, with rhododendrons added into the mix of plantings.

G. Abbey, employed as the estate's head gardener, although uncredited with a role in the *caucasicum* x *griffithianum* pairing that produced 'Doctor Stocker', is likely nonetheless to have been responsible for its creation, as John Thomas was taking London high society by storm, racing horses and being appointed Honorary Colonel of the Tower Hamlets Regiment of Volunteer Engineers (who were regularly allowed to camp in those same grounds, alongside the rhododendrons). In May 1896, the Vanity Fair-caricatured Colonel died suddenly, probably of a heart attack, soon after eating a plate of oysters and possibly whilst browsing a recently published tome on English slang, though the 'John Thomas' derivation has an etymology that dates back to the 17th century, so cannot be considered a personal descriptor for the gentleman in question.

Almost immediately his family put the estate on the market.

Whence it languished for two years until Alonzo Henry Stocker, a qualified M.D., senior doctor at the London Hospital and medical superintendent of the Grove Hall Asylum, Bow - to quote from his obituary: 'one of the best known specialists in lunacy' - picked it up for a song. Stocker never took up residence, as he owned several other properties around the capital, but with an interest in horticulture - he had won second prize in botany from the Apothecaries' Society of London - spotted some of Abbey's creations when touring the grounds.

So it was Doctor Stocker himself who introduced R. 'Doctor Stocker' to the gardening world in 1900, crediting North with its raising, which was the customary practice of the time, and securing an Award of Merit from the RHS for the milk-white-flushed-cream flowers. Two other Abbey rhododendrons were also named and shown by the good doctor that year, 'Ethel Stocker' and 'Abbeyi', these being attributed to their true hybridiser, rather than the Colonel, though women successfully transferring pollen from anther to stigma, and then raising, naming and introducing the progeny of their own crosses, would have to wait somewhat longer for such recognition.

'Doctor Stocker' is a medium to tall growing shrub with long-lived mature specimens hitting 4m in height and spreading wider, but taking several decades to do so. The flowers they bear are produced in profusion each April, with 6 to 12 broadly campanulate corollas gathered into a loose, usually flat-topped truss. A pair of brownish-crimson rays, composed


John Thomas North


The Vanity Fair Caricature

of spots and flecks, fan out across the dorsal lobe, while the small nectaries deep in the throat are stained a bright crimson. The shrub's leaves are ovate-elliptic in shape, dark green and somewhat glossy, to around 14cm in length, and they are held for two, or occasionally three years, so fill-in the criss-cross tangle of branches to a degree, but usually not to such a sufficient extent that would allow the term 'bushy' to be applied to the plant's morphology.

The Exeter branch of the Veitch family's horticultural emporium was first nursery to propagate the hybrid and offer it for sale, this swiftly followed by the UK's other specialist and entrepreneurially-minded nurseries, who were then joined by the rhododendron firms of Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Because 'Doctor Stocker' was one of the first *griffithianum* hybrid introductions with mass appeal, and it still remains popular today. Equally, a glance down the parentage lists will show that its genes have also been directly incorporated into some thirty other hybrids, the five most well-known of these probably 'Calstocker', 'Damaris', 'Mariloo', 'Mrs James Horlick', and 'Pipaluk'.

Finally, contradicting the officially registered and accepted parentage, some authors believe the seed parent was actually a hybridised form of *R. caucasicum,* with 'Caucasicum Album' or 'Cunningham's Sulphur' the two suggested alternate contenders.

R. ‘Dolly Mixture’
‘Fabia Tangerine’ x ‘Crest’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 April-May 1.5m x 2m

The ‘Dolly Mixture’ epithet is borrowed from a brand of British confectionery: a jumble of small soft sweets and sugar-coated jellies, variously flavoured, cast in a multitude of shapes and colours. And it is the perfect epithet choice for this little known or grown, but still superlative hybrid.

The cross was made by John May of Wimborne Botanic Garden (now Knoll Gardens), in Dorset, during 1968, and introduced twenty years later, the parental combination of Henry McLaren’s ‘Fabia Tangerine’ pollinated by Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Crest’ almost guaranteed to produce something special, and in this case, something completely different, to quote a certain Python, Monty.

Funnel-shaped corollas in an open truss of nine, each five-lobed and 7.5cm across at the mouth, begin their life coloured deep salmon-pink in the bud, with a hint of orange at the apex. They open with that darker tone forming a wide band around the lobe margins on the inside, their centres and the tube a yellowish-orange. On the outside, the banding is not as defined, but the striping is deeper hued. Now jump forward a few days, and the entire corolla, inside and out, will have turned completely pale yellow, with just a hint of that pink pigmentation remaining where the lobe edges overlap. Let another twenty-four hours pass and all trace of the swirl of shades present at inception will have vanished, primrose alone remaining, pristine and clean.

Large, and deeply divided calyx lobes, standing proud of the tube, are an inheritance from ‘Fabia Tangerine’, but here, revolute has taken on a whole new meaning for the lobe crests are often completely rolled-back on themselves. And not only are they coloured as the corollas, with the same initial mix of tones, they fade in concert.

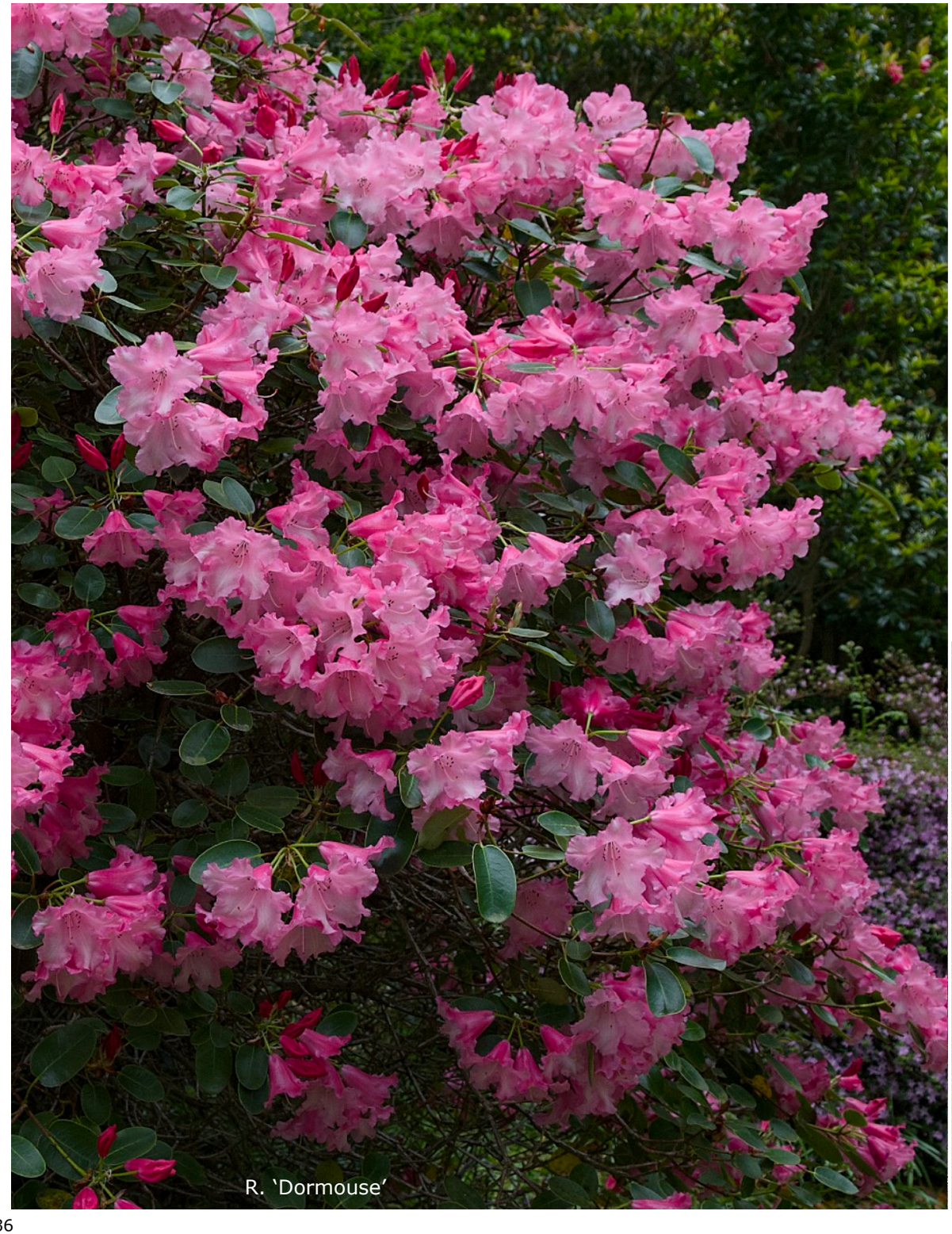
The leaves are lanceolate through oblanceolate in shape, the blades around 10cm long, mid to deep green in colour, with a distinct yellow mucro at the apex. Susceptible to chlorosis and powdery mildew, they are the hybrid’s only imperfection.


R. ‘Dolly Mixture’


R. ‘Dolly Mixture’


R. ‘Dolly Mixture’

R. ‘Dolly Mixture’


R. ‘Dormouse’

R. ‘Dormouse’

‘Dawn’s Delight’ x *williamsianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April-May 2m x 2.5m

Like its seldom-seen mammalian namesake *Muscardinus avellanarius,* so too is Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Dormouse’ rarely encountered in the UK’s rhododendron gardens, despite being one of the most beautiful crosses that that master hybridiser ever created. Indeed, it is even lacking an entry in the otherwise exemplary record of the gardens at Exbury, *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* written C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber.

R. williamsianum gifted the pollen, while another L de R stalwart, the pink-flowering Mangles *griffithianum* hybrid ‘Dawn’s Delight’, was again put into service as the seed parent. A check of the Exbury stud book would show that it had already been used in just such a capacity to germinate the hybrids ‘Brigadier’, ‘Bauble’, ‘Break of Day’, ‘Blushing Bride’, and ‘Dolly’ - with *R. arboreum, R. campylocarpum, R. dichroanthum, R. discolor* and *R. griersonianum* respectively - and would later be assigned ‘Tally Ho’ to give ‘Phoenix’, and *R. thomsonii* to create ‘Dunlin’, but none of those pairings would come remotely close to the refined, delicate pink bells of ‘Dormouse’.

Each widely campanulate corolla is deep pink around the frilly lobe margins, paler pink towards the centre, giving a delightful two-tone effect. The trusses are loose and open, holding clusters of 4 to 6 blooms, these often amassed into a mantle that covers the entire plant, though never so tightly as to completely obscure the leaves or the branches. The foliage has a broadly elliptic through rounded outline, sometimes kidney-shaped, with the blades up to 7.5cm long and 5.5cm wide, copper-coloured as *R. williamsianum* when they first extend from the bud, a dark glossy green when mature, and they are held for three, sometimes four years, so give the rounded structure a very bushy appearance.


R. ‘Dormouse’

R. ‘Dormouse’


R. ‘Double Winner’


R. ‘Double Winner’


R. ‘Double Winner’

R. 'Double Winner'
R. strigillosum hybrid
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 April 3m x 5m

R. strigillosum was often used by Hjalmar Larson (1897-1983), a nurseryman based in Washington State on the US Pacific Coast, to create his hybrids, for he incorporated its genes as either seed or pollen parent, into matches with *R. yakushimanum, R. neriiflorum, R. kyawii,* and *R. elliottii,* as well as pairing it with Lionel de Rothschild's 'Diva' and 'Fusilier', the George Paul cross 'Essex Scarlet', 'Gill's Triumph' from Cornish nurseryman Richard Gill, and finally with one of Sir Edmund Loder's flock of *fortunei* x *griffithianum* clones, 'Loderi Venus'. But his choice of partner for 'Double Winner' regrettably remains a mystery, which is a shame, for as every single rhodophile who has seen the cross in bloom will confirm, the epithet says it all.

Some authors give the parentage as *strigillosum* x unknown, but that overlooks the seed supply half of Larson's nursery business, which in 1931 for instance, offered 204 species, each personally hand pollinated, so few if any spent flowers would have escaped deadheading, as their open-pollinated capsules when fully developed could have been gathered-up in error. Then add in the fact that Hjalmar was a stickler for detail - as no less a personage than H. H. Davidian has commented, stating that he had just visited 'the best and most accurately labelled species collection in the country' after touring the grounds at Bridgeport Way, Tacoma. So the likelihood that 'Double Winner' was a chance hybrid, the random result of a visiting bee, is pie in the sky. Equally, some claim that the cross is very close to the species itself, even mirroring the habit of opening its blooms over several weeks and so degrading the spectacle, but that is not the morphological case (as the photographs evidence), with only the corolla colour truly a match.

'Double Winner' opens its bright red flowers in April, the trusses densely packed and ball-shaped, the corollas funnel-campanulate and heavily spotted darker on the dorsal lobes, which immediately rules out the suggestion that the cross was *R. strigillosum* selfed. A more likely alternative is that it came from the same capsule that matured 'Red Majesty', the *elliottii* x *strigillosum* pairing that Larson registered in 1964 and a plant that also has long, narrow and lightly indumented leaves. The foliage here is actually linear-lanceolate in shape, with a distinctly convex profile, each blade around 20cm long and less than a quarter of that wide, deep matt green in colour, the midrib and veins impressed, the whole ending in a long, pointed and mucronate apex that is bent downwards. Habit is wider spreading than tall, which again mirrors 'Red Majesty', the whole framework a fairly bushy mantle thanks to the leaves being retained for two years.

So *R. strigillosum* it is not; stunning, is what it is.


R. 'Hjalmar Larson'

R. ‘Double Winner’

R. ‘Double Winner’

The ‘Duchess of Rothesay’ Pride

‘Hotei’ x *decorum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April-early May 4m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Duchess of Rothesay	Edmund de Rothschild	1966	1984
Jessica de Rothschild	Edmund de Rothschild	1966	1996

The choice of epithet for this ‘Hotei’ x *decorum* cross, made by Edmund de Rothschild at Exbury in 1966, but only named and introduced during the early 1980s, is somewhat tangential for those not familiar with royal titles and to whom they apply. Helpfully the candidate list is short, because since its inception in 1398, there have in fact been only nine eligible ladies who could be addressed as such when physically north of the Scottish border. The most beautiful of those contenders was Lady Diana Spencer, who on July 29th, 1981, became the Princess of Wales, the Duchess of Cornwall, the Countess of Chester, the Baroness of Renfrew, and lastly, the seventh Duchess of Rothesay. And it was for her that the rhododendron was named, rather than her two more recent successors.

With pale yellow flowers shading deeper towards the centre of the lobes and into the throat, held in domed trusses of 17 funnel-shaped corollas, the hybrid outshines both of its parents, the pure-toned, unspotted blooms as equally sublime as their namesake. Ovate-elliptic dark green leaves complete the picture, the perfect frame for the sweep of colour that covers a mature plant from early May onwards.

A second selection from the pairing, named for the daughter of Sir Evelyn de Rothschild and his second wife Victoria Schott, the theatre producer Jessica de Rothschild (who is also the wife of film director Sacha Gervasi), has light greenish-yellow flowers that shade darker towards the throat. When they first open, each of the lobe tips displays a blush of yellowish-pink, an enhancement that is comparable to the beauty spot on the face of a goddess. Gathered into globular trusses of between 13 and 16 individuals, the seven-lobed, tubular-campanulate corollas are each 3cm long by 5cm across, so a touch smaller than those of their sister seedling, but with more petals. The leaves too are more petite, 7.5cm long by 3.5cm across, with an ovate profile.



R. ‘Duchess of Rothesay’



R. ‘Jessica de Rothschild’

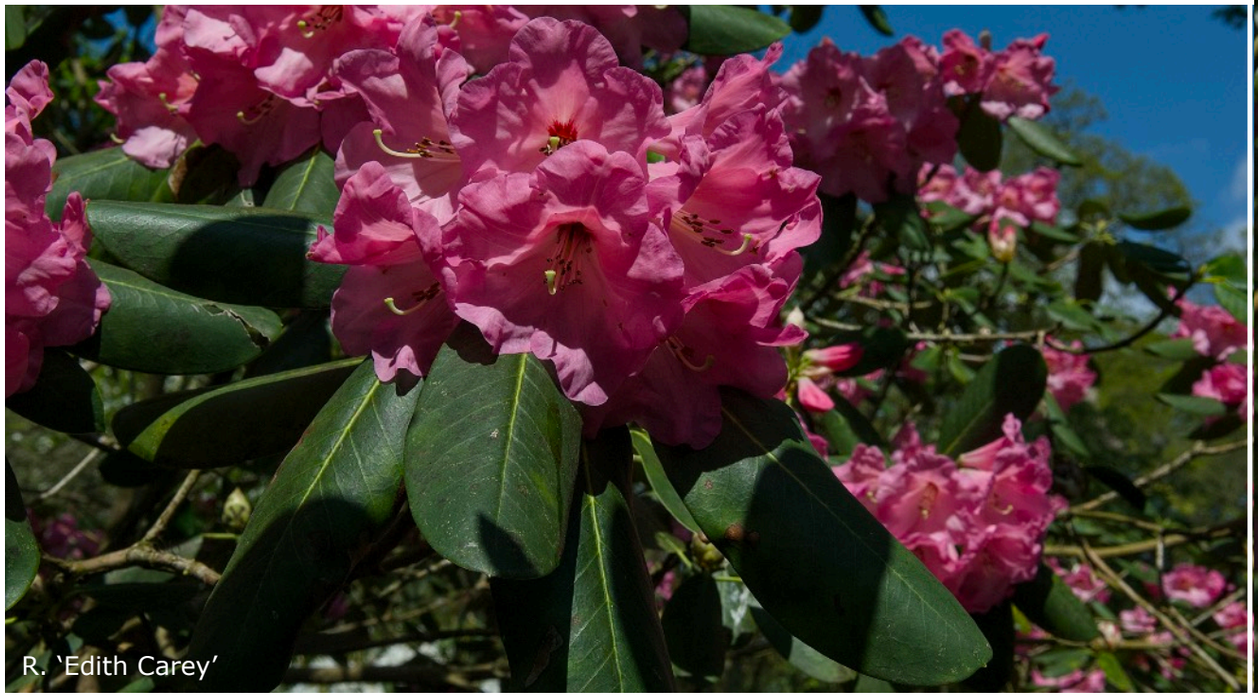
R. ‘Duchess of Rothesay’

R. ‘Jessica de Rothschild’

R. ‘Edith Carey’
(‘Luscombei’ x *fortunei*) x ‘Coombe Royal’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 April 6m x 4m

Edith Frances Carey (1864-1935), a respected author specialising on the history of the Channel Islands, lived at Le Vallon on Guernsey, while another of the mansions owned by the family, Castle Carey, was for a time, the official residence of the Governor of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, and it was during this period that Charles Smith (1830-1910), was employed as head gardener. He would later establish the Caledonia Nursery at Saint Peter Port, the island’s capital, which specialised in bamboos, *Berberis* and dwarf conifers, held an extensive collection of *Nerines* - some of which were his own hybrids - plus a stock of rhododendrons, with four of these also registered in his name. One such, which as the parental equation shows combined the genes of *R. fortunei* with those of two well-known crosses - ‘Coombe Royal’ and ‘Luscombei’ - he named for Guernsey’s author in residence. And it is a beauty, although today, the hybrid is apparently more often found in New Zealand’s rhododendron gardens, than those dotted across the English shires.

An April flowerer, ‘Edith Carey’ sports large, domed trusses of deep rose-pink blooms, the tubular-funnel-shaped corollas paling slightly towards the centre of the lobes. The narrow tube is deep crimson within, with rays and flecks of the same hue spilling out onto the upper lobe. Foliage is oblong in shape and matt green in colour, the rounded blades often adopting a convex profile when overly warmed by the sun. Habit is upright and open, the leaf blades - the majority held for just one year - doing little to fill the framework of this small tree; and while a failing of little consequence when twelve or more large trumpets are loosely gathered at the tip of each branch, when these are absent, such a threadbare mantle is decidedly apparent unless lower-growing shrubs can be planted as a foreground surround.


R. ‘Edith Carey’


R. ‘Edith Carey’

R. ‘Edith Carey’



R. ‘Edmund de Rothschild’



R. ‘Edmund de Rothschild’



R. ‘Edmund de Rothschild’

R. 'Edmund de Rothschild'
'Fusilier' x 'Kilimanjaro'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Late May-June 6m x 4m

In 1946, when Edmund de Rothschild returned to Exbury after being discharged from the Royal Artillery at the end of the Second World War, he found the woodlands in a parlous state, strewn with fallen branches, brambles running riot, weeds everywhere. For the army of gardeners employed to keep the estate grounds in a pristine state were long gone, most called up into military service, and the few who remained were unable to do more than tinker at the edges of those 200 acres. Gone too was Francis Hanger, who was the head gardener throughout the war years, now installed as curator at Wisley. Just as daunting was the fact that the woods and their contents had effectively been the sole preserve of his father Lionel, who had died in January, 1942, so at first, his eldest son was reluctant to take on the task of their restoration, especially in parallel with his growing responsibilities at the family bank.

That he did, restoring the grounds to their former glory not once, but again - after the long summer drought and subsequent autumn deluges of 1976 - and for a third time after the great storm of October 1987, are facts unknowingly appreciated by every one of the thousands of visitors who flock to Exbury during the flowering season. That he became an expert on the genus in the process and a master hybridiser in his own right was confirmed by the award of a Victoria Medal of Honour by the RHS in 2005 and is illustrated each spring via the legacy of plants that now adorn rhododendron gardens all across the world: 'Bud Flanagan', 'Elizabeth de Rothschild', 'Fred Wynniatt', 'Galactic', 'Nimrod', 'Our Kate' and 'Revlon' (to mention just a few personal favourites). Moreover, he continued the quest begun by his father to breed a dark red rhododendron flower with no undertone of blue, and with his pairing of 'Kilimanjaro' and 'Fusilier', made in the 1950s, he succeeded. For it resulted in the RHS AM and FCC-awarded hybrid that today proudly bears his name: R. 'Edmund de Rothschild'.

Between 22 and 24 large, openly funnel-campanulate corollas form each of the spherical, slightly pendent flower trusses that the shrub bears, each of those individual components some 7.5cm long by up to 9cm across. Their hue is deep red, heavily spotted darker on the upper lobes, and the buds open late in the season, with the inflorescences more often than not, emerging from their protective scales during the first week of June.

Supporting such well-built trusses is a robust framework of branches, well-cloaked with long, oblanceolate-shaped leaves, dark green in colour, matt, some 15cm in length and a third that in width; blades that are held for at least two years. The rhododendron is therefore large and vigorous, with an upright habit, though this will become straggly and leggy if grown in too much shade, so the balance between light and dark must be critically judged and set so those superlative blooms are not bleached by too much sunlight, but the shrub, not drawn-up by too little.

Hardiness values for R. 'Edmund de Rothschild' have been reassessed from the -10ºC figure initially quoted on its introduction in 1963, that H4 rating increased to H5 for mature specimens. Reports from the recent hard winters may well see that survivability edge towards -18ºC, though whether this will prompt a British rhododendron nursery to finally seek out a specimen to propagate is anyone's guess. Potential purchasers passing through New Zealand may well be able to pick up a youngster, for the hybrid is highly regarded, widely planted and commercially available. Yet emigration is probably a better option than a custodial sentence for breaching the plant importation regulations, despite the UK's exit from the European Union.


Edmund de Rothschild

R. ‘Elizabeth’

R. ‘Elizabeth’

forrestii Repens Group x *griersonianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April-early May 2m x 3m

‘Elizabeth’ is the quintessential rhododendron hybrid.

Introduced in 1939, if the escape of *R. x superponticum* into the wild is overlooked, the shrub has likely become the most widely planted member of the genus, and not just in the UK, but worldwide, wherever rhododendrons are grown across the globe. Which means that today, specimens of Henry McLaren’s 1933 pollination of what was then *R. repens* by *R. griersonianum,* will be found in literally millions of small suburban gardens, though of course, the hard work that went into raising the cross was the exclusive province of Frederick Puddle and his gardening staff.

Puddle, Lord Aberconway’s head gardener between 1920 and 1947, does not have a single rhododendron registered in his name as hybridiser, but is eulogised in the honorific for a *neriiflorum* x *griersonianum* cross that was introduced by Bodnant in 1932. Without doubt however, it was his expertise that germinated the wild-collected seed of Forrest and Kingdon-Ward, grew those plants to flowering size, and then nurtured the pairings devised in association with his employer.

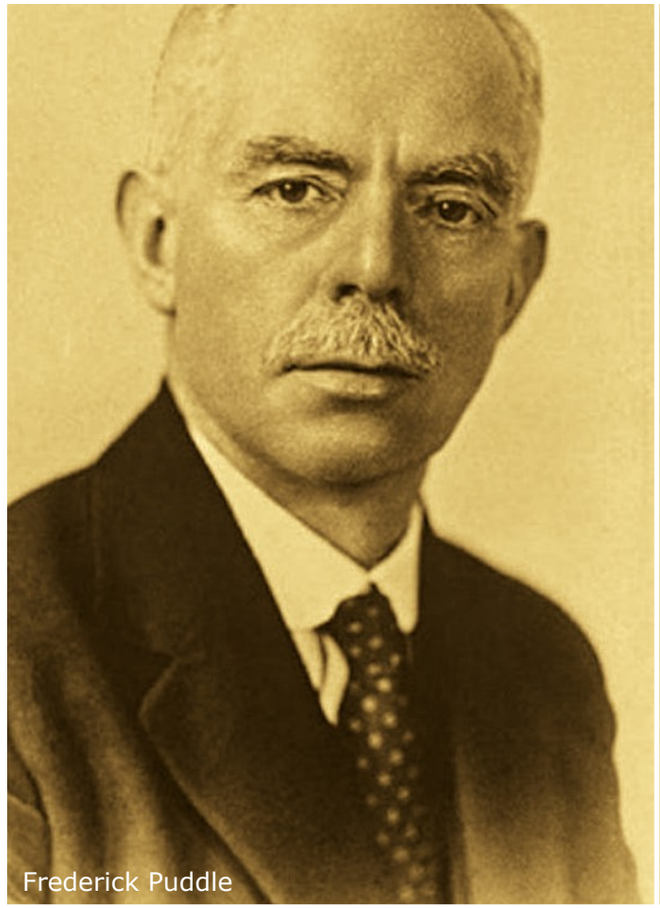
Few - if any - rhodophiles will be unfamiliar with the morphological characteristics of R. ‘Elizabeth’, but just in case:

Mid-green and matt ovate leaves, 5cm long by 2cm wide, are held for two to three years, densely cloaking a rounded, compact, low bush. A mature specimen would hit 1m high when grown in full sun, double that, with a more open framework, when planted in shade, and a spread of 3m or more after twenty years or so is not unusual. The corollas are broadly campanulate in shape, scarlet-red in tone and carried in trusses of 5 to 9. And there will be an abundance of trusses, for a flower bud will form at the tip of each and every branch on even very young plants. So when they open en masse early in April, their sheer fecundity is a spectacle in and of itself.

However, outwith the protection of a woodland environment, or placement close to the exterior walls of a house, if night-time temperatures drop low enough to produce a late spring frost, which is almost guaranteed that early in the season, then the flowers will be decimated and bark split will result in branch dieback. Moreover, if the hit is really severe, the whole plant could be lost. Equally, at the other end of the year, ‘Elizabeth’ not only has a tendency to open some of her flower buds in the autumn, so diminishing the following spring display, but worse, to then send out more new shoots, which an October or November frost will almost certainly ruin. Oh, and weevils, along with the powdery mildew fungus, find the leaves irresistible, the latter an especial problem that thwarts even expert growers. For instance: Peter and Kenneth Cox of Glendoick Gardens, Perth. Who report in their 1988-published *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* the loss of their largest specimen to just such an attack.

Note too that at least two clones of R. ‘Elizabeth’ are in circulation, matched with the award citations, the 1943 FCC-awarded plant having slightly larger flowers than the 1939 AM clone, yet any number of specimens in public gardens bear labels that claim their plant to be both. Genetics has shattered the illusion that ‘Creeping Jenny’ can be considered part of the same pride, although the reversed-parentage cross is considered to be a member of said grex/group in much of the classic literature still available in print and online, though not within the pages of the *IRRC*.

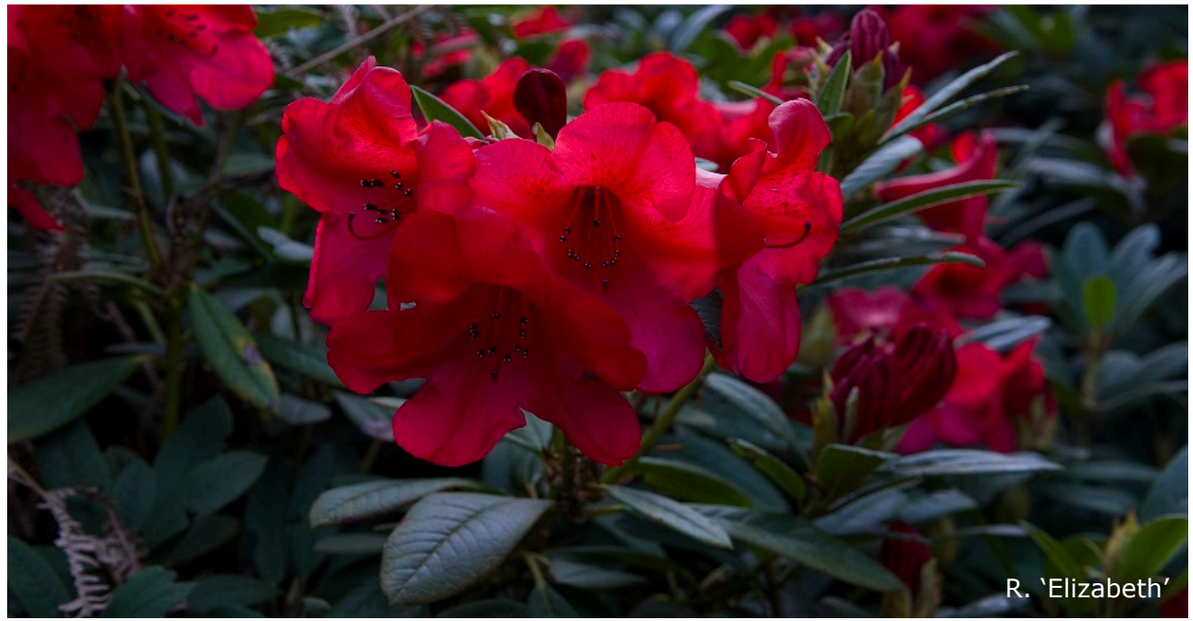
‘Elizabeth’ was named for Henry McLaren’s eldest daughter, the Hon. Elizabeth Mary McLaren (1911-1991).



Frederick Puddle



Henry McLaren and R. ‘Elizabeth’



R. ‘Elizabeth’

R. ‘Elizabeth de Rothschild’

‘Lionel’s Triumph’ x ‘Exbury Naomi’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 May 6m x 6m

A match between ‘Lionel’s Triumph’ and ‘Exbury Naomi’ was always going to result in a plant that was nothing short of stunning, and the selection rhododendron hybridiser extraordinaire Edmund de Rothschild made from his own mid 1950s pairing, meets that expectation in spades. Introduced in 1965, the merchant banker named the cross for his wife, Elizabeth Edith de Rothschild *née* Lentner (1923-1980), and it is fully hardy and easy to grow, content with a full sun placement even in the southern counties, but at its best in dappled shade, with a modicum of shelter to protect the large leaves. Yet an aversion to rooting from cuttings will mean that only a few grafted juveniles are sporadically available from the specialist nurseries, these highly priced, yet a worthwhile long-term investment if a superlative shrub is desired. Moreover, it is one that should be allowed to develop without any footprint restriction.

For a number of years, devotees will only be rewarded with a symmetrical, well-branched bush, robust and fairly vigorous, bedecked with mid-green elliptic leaves, each around 16cm long by 5cm across, auricled at the base and held on thick, red-flushed petioles. Until such time as the first flower buds are set, which over the next few seasons, will be few in number. But their presence signals that the waiting game is almost over and soon after, an abundance of bloom will burst forth annually: deep cream corollas, 7cm long and 11.5cm across; each with frilly margins and a chestnut-red flare of spots and streaks in the throat; held in a dense rounded truss of 18 openly-funnel-shaped trumpets. That confirm ‘Elizabeth de Rothschild’ to be a masterpiece. A paragon. A true connoisseur’s plant, though not in any restrictive or elitist sense.

In thirty years, if left unchecked, the hybrid will develop into a dome 6m or more high and wide, which will be arrayed each May with a multitude of football-sized blooms. But if space is at a premium and secateurs are needed to keep a bush in check, the better option would be to seek out and admire the mature specimens established at Exbury, Muncaster and a host of other rhododendron gardens, rather than cramp a Goliath into a shoehorn.



R. ‘Elizabeth de Rothschild’



R. ‘Elizabeth de Rothschild’

R. ‘Elizabeth de Rothschild’

R. ‘Elsae’

R. 'Elsae'

grande x *falconeri*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4 April 8m x 6m

Not only is the parentage of this fabulous hybrid open to challenge, but so too the origin and history of 'Elsae', with contradictory facts dotted throughout.

Volume 3, Part 2, of *The Rhododendron Society Notes,* published in 1926, contains an article by Henry McLaren and Eustace Wilding that sets out in a list all the named hybrids that had flowered up to that date. To secure a place, each entry also had to have a declared parentage. Specifically, one that could be 'traced back to species on both sides'.

'Elsae' is shown as *grande* x *hodgsonii,* but with a 'probably' proviso appended.

The hybridiser - raiser - was credited as being the Hon. John Townsend Boscawen (1820-1889), Rector of Lamorran, and a resident of Tregothnan, the Cornish estate owned by his brother Evelyn (1819-1889), who was the sixth Viscount Falmouth. An addendum indicates that the plant was later given to George Carlyon of Tregrehan.

Separately, John Guille Millais also concurred with the parentage as listed by McLaren and Wilding, writing that:

> 'Some doubt seems to exist as to the origin of this beautiful hybrid. The original plants which Reuthe sent out under this name come, I believe, from a large plant at Menabilly, Cornwall. The parentage was given as *R. grande* x *R. hodgsonii*. I believe that this view is correct, because Mr Wright of Clyne Castle, Wales, made a similar cross, using these species, and his plant and the original plant at Menabilly are growing side by side in my garden and they are practically identical. Such good judges as Sir Herbert Maxwell and Mr Charles Nix tell me they fail to trace any sign of influence of *R. hodgsonii* in R. Elsae, but this is not remarkable, because we know of hundreds of hybrids which exhibit no character of one undoubted parent'.
> *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* Second Edition, 1924.

In *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles,* W. J. Bean writes that in 1877 the Reverend Boscawen showed 'a splendid truss of campanulate waxy white flowers from a fine tree at Tregothnan' to the Scientific Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society and this may have been the original 'Elsae'. Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, who was chairman of the committee at the time, declared the cross to be a *grande* x *lanatum* pairing, and a date of *c.* 1860 is given in the *IRRC* for when pollen was applied to style, which would tie-in perfectly with the first recorded UK flowering of *R. grande* in the greenhouses at Kew during 1858. Except Hooker's pronouncement on the parentage suggests either a clerical slip of memory or that 'Elsae' arose courtesy of a random visit by a bumblebee (though whether native to Cornwall or from somewhere rather further afield is open to question).

Because James Mangles, writing in *The Garden* (April 8th, 1882) on the subject of *R. grande* - although then, more widely known as *R. argenteum* - reports that:

> 'from Messrs. Downie & Laird, of Edinburgh, from Glasnevin, from France, and elsewhere, I have received many types, and several that seem intermediate between *R. argenteum* and *R. falconeri.* These last may be natural hybrids, for Sir J. Hooker relates how "on Tonglo, as it approaches 10,000 feet, *R. argenteum* is suddenly replaced by *R. falconeri*" so that in certain localities the species grow side by side'.

Supporting that view, in an article titled *The Arboretum at Tregrehan* - written for Kew's 1916-published *Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information* - W. J. Bean, in concert with most other experts, also considered the true parentage of 'Elsae' to be *grande* x *falconeri,* which syncs with the mid-April bloom time and flower colour. This was certainly the lineage registered by the Kent-based nursery firm of G. Reuthe Ltd for their version of the cross, which won an Award of Merit from the RHS when exhibited in 1925.

However, two hundred miles to the west at Clyne Castle, near Swansea, and eight years later, Admiral Algernon Walker Heneage-Vivian repeated the *grande* x *hodgsonii* pairing to produce a quintet of shrubs, one of which, named 'Clyne Elsae', scooped an AM in 1940. All show the influence of the pollen provider in their flower colour - cerise; pale fuchsia purple for the award-winner; pink; or cream flushed pink - their oblanceolate leaf shape, and the thin covering of tomentum that cloaks their abaxial surface. Previously considered part of the 'Elsae' clan, that tentative association shown in the *IRRC,* must herein be revoked, the choice of registered epithet notwithstanding.

For true specimens of *grande* x *falconeri* have dark green obovate leaves up to 30cm long, these reticulate and rugulose above, with a thick, brown woolly indumentum below, the upper layer of which often wears away revealing a compacted, lower cloak of hairs beneath. The flowers, carried in a ball-shaped truss of 20 or more ventricose-campanulate corollas, are pale creamy-yellow through ivory-white, with a flare of crimson deep in the throat on the dorsal lobe. And as would be expected, the shrub's habit is tree-like, which requires the shelterbelt protection of a woodland to thrive and west coast rainfall levels to achieve its full potential. Hardiness is good, but not sufficient for 'Elsae' to be cultivated along the east coast outwith the mildest of locales.

The Reuthe clone has certainly been widely distributed, with mature specimens found at gardens such as Inverewe in the Scottish Highlands, Castle Kennedy near Stranraer, and Muncaster in Cumbria, though whether these were sister seedlings from the same capsule, grafted scions or rooted layers is unknown. They could equally be natural hybrids, grown from wild collected seed and later bestowed with a label declaiming 'Elsae'. W. J. Bean, in his report on Tregrehan, implies that the Boscawen plant, or others like it, were widely grown in Cornish rhododendron gardens in the years pre 1916, which suggests just that.



R. 'Elsae'

R. ‘Elsae’

R. 'Elsae'

R. ‘Etta Burrows’

R. ‘Etta Burrows’
‘Fusilier’ x *strigillosum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Late March-April 4m x 6m

‘Etta Burrows’ is usually considered to be Hjalmar Larson’s best *R. strigillosum* cross and certainly, if its use in the pairings of other enthusiasts were the benchmark against which such were judged, the mating with Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Fusilier’ would be top of the list. A sawmill worker before he became a nurseryman, Larson began hybridising in the 1930s after catching the rhododendron bug a decade earlier and was still making new parental combinations up to his death in 1983. Around fifty of his hybrids are registered with the *IRRC* and as these were bred for the Pacific Coast climate of Tacoma - at the head of Puget Sound in Washington State, where he lived - can be widely grown across much of the UK, but not in the coldest northern or east coast gardens, though as the photographs show, ‘Etta Burrows’ fares perfectly well in the woodland at Glendoick.

Given its constituent parts, the hybrid’s flower colour could never really have been anything other than blood red, and those individual corollas, 5cm long and 7.5cm across, are campanulate in shape, with a faint flush of darker spots on the dorsal lobes, and have a ring of five black nectar pouches circling the ovary at the base of the throat. Up to thirty blooms are held in each tight, rounded truss, and mature plants will often produce a flower bud at each branch tip. The leaves, which are retained for up to three years, are long and narrow, to 22.5cm in length, but less than a quarter of that in width, come with a convex profile and recurved margins, and have a thin brownish tomentum below, this loose and often lost. The shrub has a wider-than-high habit, but needs an unshaded yet still sheltered position in northern gardens to avoid vigour becoming legginess; dappled shade being the de rigueur requirement further the south.

Etta Burrows (1913-1991), was a Tacoma resident and one of the ‘local, well-to-do women’ Hjalmar Larson chose to name many of his crosses after, the quote coming from the ARS Portland Chapter’s 2001 publication *The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story*.


R. ‘Etta Burrows’


R. ‘Etta Burrows’

R. ‘Everestianum’
R. catawbiense hybrid
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 Late May-June 4m x 6m

Although now a rare find in British gardens, R. ‘Everestianum’ is highly regarded in Europe and the east coast states of North America for its hardiness - surviving winter temperatures as low as -26ºC - as well as for its heat tolerance, an ability to grow and flower profusely in full sun or deep shade, and its resistance to pests, the foliage only rarely spoilt by munching insects (apparently). Scarcity in UK cultivation is almost certainly down to the close resemblance ‘Everestianum’ has with *R. x superponticum,* this rampantly colonising lowland woods and highland glens from Land’s End to John o’Groats.

Crossed around 1813, just four years after *R. catawbiense* was first introduced to the British Isles from near the headwaters of North Carolina’s Catawba River, one glance at the hybrid in flower is enough to confirm that *R. ponticum* and the genes of *R. maximum* are also likely to be swirling around in the mix, W. J. Bean’s modern-day team of ghostwriters suggesting the all-inclusive option of *catawbiense* x (*maximum* x *ponticum*). That online edition of *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles* credits the Knap Hill Nursery with the birthing, which is at odds with the *IRRC,* which opts for Bagshot, but as Michael Waterer II only purchased John Taylor’s Nursery at the latter locale in 1829, shortly after the owner’s demise, the facts seem to speak for themselves.


R. ‘Everestianum’

R. ‘Exbury Albatross’
discolor x ‘Loderi’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 June 9m x 6m

As explained in the R. ‘Albatross’ entry, the FCC-winning R. ‘Exbury Albatross’ was the product of a separate mating, Lionel de Rothschild reversing the pairing equation, with R. ‘Loderi’ now providing the pollen and *R. discolor* maturing the seed. Today, genetically, this is known to make a difference, as the organelles - the chloroplasts and mitochondria, for instance, which power the plant - are solely provided by the female parent. So even though outwardly the offspring from both pairings may look remarkably similar visually, scientific evidence has shown that at a cellular level, that will not to be the case.


R. ‘Exbury Albatross’

The ‘Fabia’ Pride

dichroanthum x *griersonianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 May-early June 2m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Exbury Fabia	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1942	before 1942
Fabia	Henry McLaren	1927	1934
Fabia High Beeches	Giles H. Loder	before 1937	1937
Fabia Tangerine	Henry McLaren	1927	1940
Fabia Tower Court	Roza Stevenson	before 1937	1937
Fabia Waterer	Waterer Nursery (?)	before 1988	1988
Minterne Apricot	Lord Edward Digby (Gardener - Mr. G. Smith)	before 1952	1952
Roman Pottery	J. J. Crosfield	before 1934	1934
Solveig	Royal Horticultural Society	before 1954	around 1954

A nonet of hybrids derived from the pollen of *R. griersonianum* placed onto the style of *R. dichroanthum* have been registered by an octet of gardens to date, though there are probably countless others still waiting to be tallied and included in the pride as the appeal of combining these two species is almost atavistic. Yet if the various offspring are appraised from a distance, they are all basically the same, though to quote W. J. Bean - writing in *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles* - ‘no two plants are exactly alike in colour even when raised from the same seed-pod’. A closer inspection will reveal that each of the entires in the table above differ from the other members of their guild in habit, leaf colour and shape, and in the number of corollas present within their inflorescence.

Henry McLaren, of Bodnant in North Wales, was the first hybridiser to make the pairing, directing the pollination in 1927, exhibiting ‘Fabia’ seven years later in 1934, and scooping an Award of Merit from the RHS in the process (the FCC would come half a century later, but the two award plants are ever so slightly different, as the photographs confirm). The premier introduction has a loose open truss composed of nine funnel-shaped corollas. Each is 6cm long and wide, with a large, colour-co-ordinated calyx whose lobes can extended to 3cm. Their pigmentation is officially described as yellowish-pink shaded orange in the throat, but the plant that received - and is commercially traded as the AM clone - has scarlet flowers shaded orange. Pale brown spotting will also be found on all of its lobes. The plant’s leaf shape is elliptic through oblanceolate, each blade up to 11cm long but just a third that in width, dark green in tone and matt above, with a suede-like fawn indumentum below.

‘Fabia’ is able to tolerate full sun even in southern gardens, though a site in dappled shade would be a better planting option, the habit remaining compact whichever choice is made even if the thin branches do become somewhat lax in time. Ultimate height varies, with some clones never straying above 1.2m, others ascending up to 2m, which again poses the question of just what was distributed by Bodnant back in the mid 1930s.

A second selection from that Lord Aberconway pairing was introduced in 1940, this also securing an AM from the awards committee, with many commentators considering ‘Fabia Tangerine’ the best clone. The flower colour on display is paler than that of its sister, with the base soft vermilion, the lobe margins shaded pinker, and the throat yellowish-pink. Exbury, High Beeches, Minterne, Tower Court and Wisley all introduced their own versions of the cross, with ‘Fabia Waterer’ also available, though its provenance is unknown.

‘Roman Pottery’ is J. J. Crosfield’s take on the hybrid, and even more of those doyenic voices consider its blooms superior to the plants distributed from Bodnant.

This pairing was made at Embley Park, Crosfield’s residence and garden near Romsey, in Hampshire, sometime before 1934, when the plant was introduced, which was the exact same year Henry McLaren unveiled his own *dichroanthum* x *griersonianum* selection. Which clearly threw a spanner in the works and caused the pale orange flowers of ‘Roman Pottery’ - brown spotted and with darker, coppery-hued lobe margins - to miss out on a floral award as a consequence. The leaves on the hybrid may sometimes be a touch wider than those found on ‘Fabia’ or ‘Fabia Tangerine’, but otherwise are the same, around 11cm long, elliptic through oblanceolate in shape, dark green above, with a thin, brown, abaxial indumentum below. Habit matches the medium-tall clones of ‘Fabia’, hitting around 1.5m in height and spreading out a metre or so further, with the bushes compact in form though often with drooping branches, especially when these are loaded down with bloom.



R. ‘Fabia’

R. ‘Fabia’ - AM 1934

R. ‘Fabia’ - FCC 1989


R. ‘Roman Pottery’


R. ‘Fabia’


R. ‘Fabia’

R. ‘Fargarb’

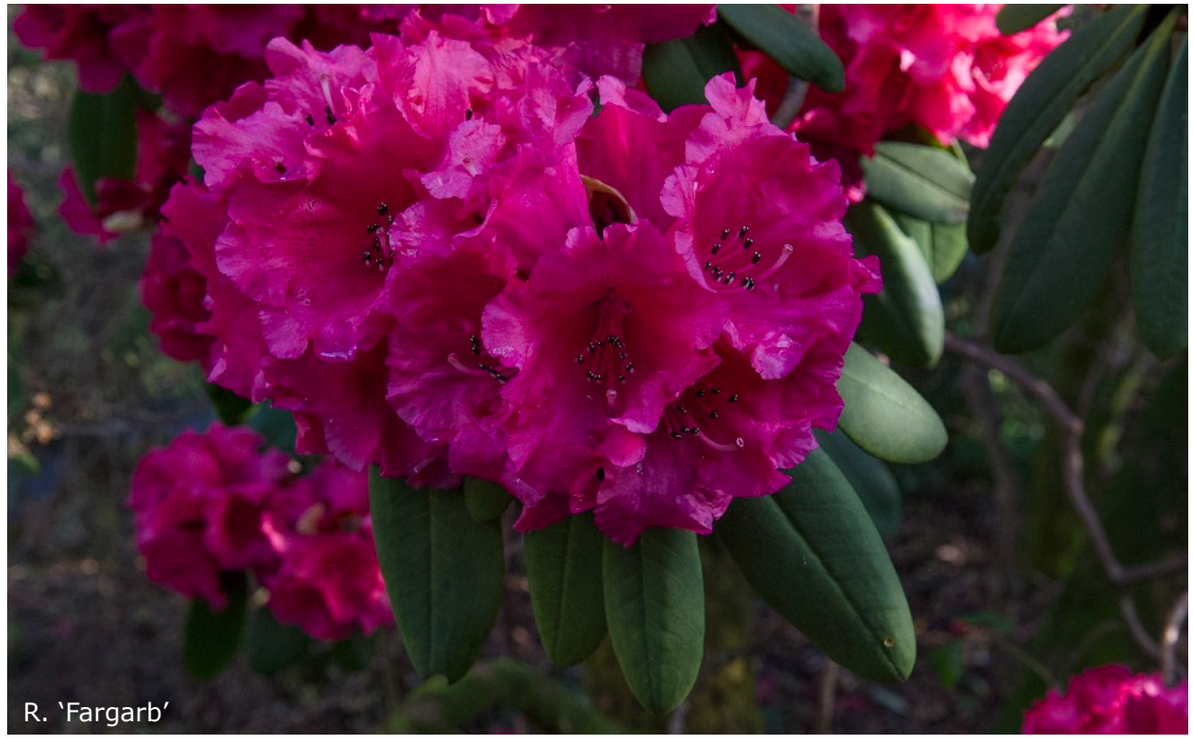
R. ‘Fargarb’
fargesii x *arboreum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 February-March 8m x 6m

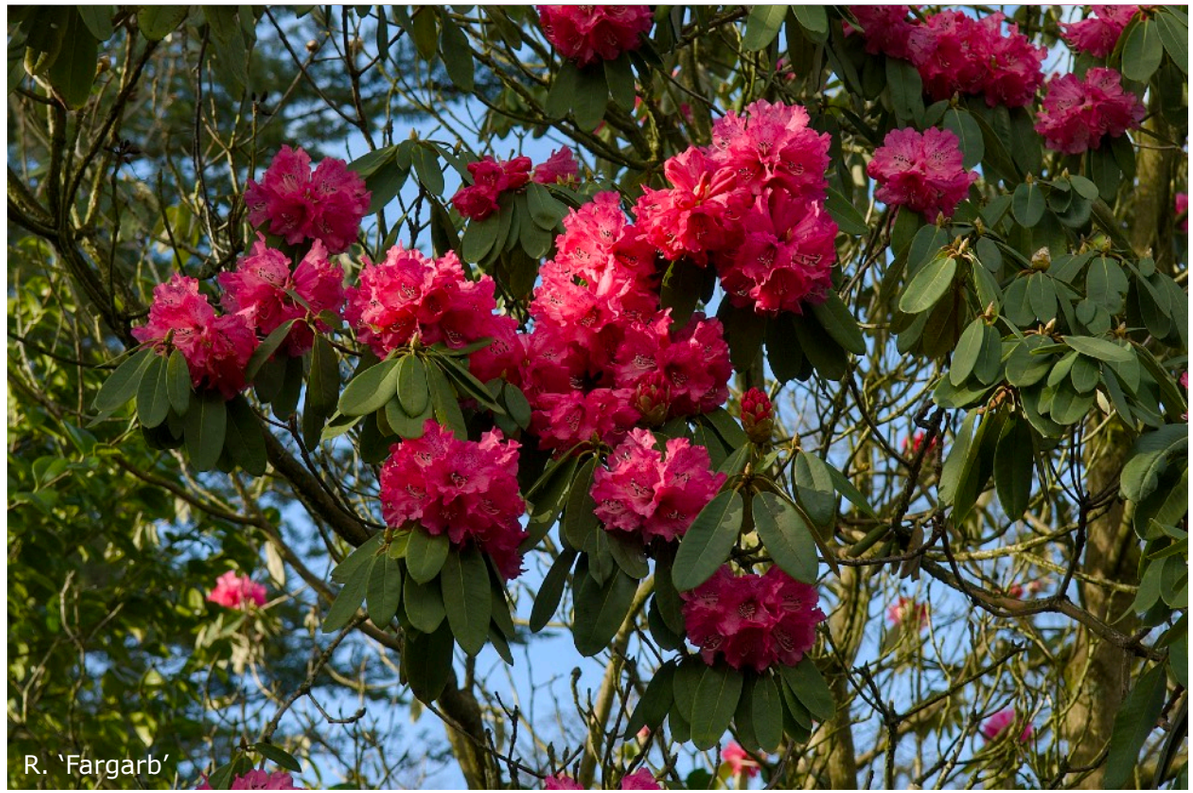
Amazingly, only one rhododendron hybridiser across the entire globe has registered a named cross that matched *R. oreodoxa* var. *fargesii* with *R. arboreum,* and that is Edward John Penberthy Magor, of Lamellen, St Tudy, in Cornwall. Paired in 1920, with the former variety taking on the role of seed parent, the choice of epithet again, sadly, leaves much to be desired despite it not being the worst tongue-twister to emerge from Isaac Bayley Balfour’s defective cut-and-combine formula, though a potential ‘Arbfarg’ combination has perhaps wisely been left bereft of an epithet and an *IRRC* registration in the Winter Garden at Exbury. This plant, just like ‘Fargarb’, produces a stunning floral display, most especially as the flowers light up the woodland at a time when most other rhododendrons are still dormant from their winter sabbatical. The Lamellen cross bloomed for the first time during the third week of February in 1931, though the register entry has it being introduced in 1928. However, E. J. P. Magor himself described the cross in Volume 3, Number 5, of *The Rhododendron Society Notes,* which was published in 1932, writing that the plant’s corollas were ‘violet-rose of the darkest shade’. He then goes on to describe those inflorescences opening to form:

> ‘A good full rounded truss, containing 20 bells, 6-lobed, openly campanulate, with many darker spots on the upper lobes, 2 x 2¼ inches [5cm x 5.5cm], filaments and style paler than the corolla, stigma cream, stamens 12-14 brown. A small growing plant with leaves rather like *R. fargesii,* but stouter, and showing the influence of *R. arboreum* in the brighter colour and better truss. Some of the hybrids should produce redder flowers.’

And indeed they did, as the seedlings planted at Muncaster Castle in Cumbria can visually attest. Here, in a favoured locale close to the Irish Sea coast, so benefitting from the Gulf Stream uplift, ‘Fargarb’ can sometimes be in full bloom just ten days into the year’s second month. Moreover, the genes of *R. arboreum* did not restrict their dominion to just the flower buds, for these Cumbrian shrubs are certainly not ‘small growing’, with most tree-like in habit. One specimen, sheltered, but growing in near full sun, is around 6m tall and domed shaped; those in the woodland atop the hill, umbrella-shaped; and the tallest specimen - drawn-up by the surrounding conifers - 10m or more. And they are a fabulous sight when bedecked in a host of backlit luminous globes, the display extending well into March if weather conditions remain favourable.

From a technical perspective, the photographs - featuring five of the ‘Fargarb’ clones in full bloom - clearly illustrate the genetic variation that will be seen when the progeny of a pairing are distributed instead of a vegetatively propagated named clone. Hybrids such as ‘Cornubia’ and ‘Lilianae’ - discussed earlier (on page 114) - would, if those seedlings could all be gathered back together again, feature exactly the same or an even wider range of morphological character differences. Which is why the practice has been abandoned today, unless the nursery concerned makes clear exactly what it is they are selling.


R. ‘Fargarb’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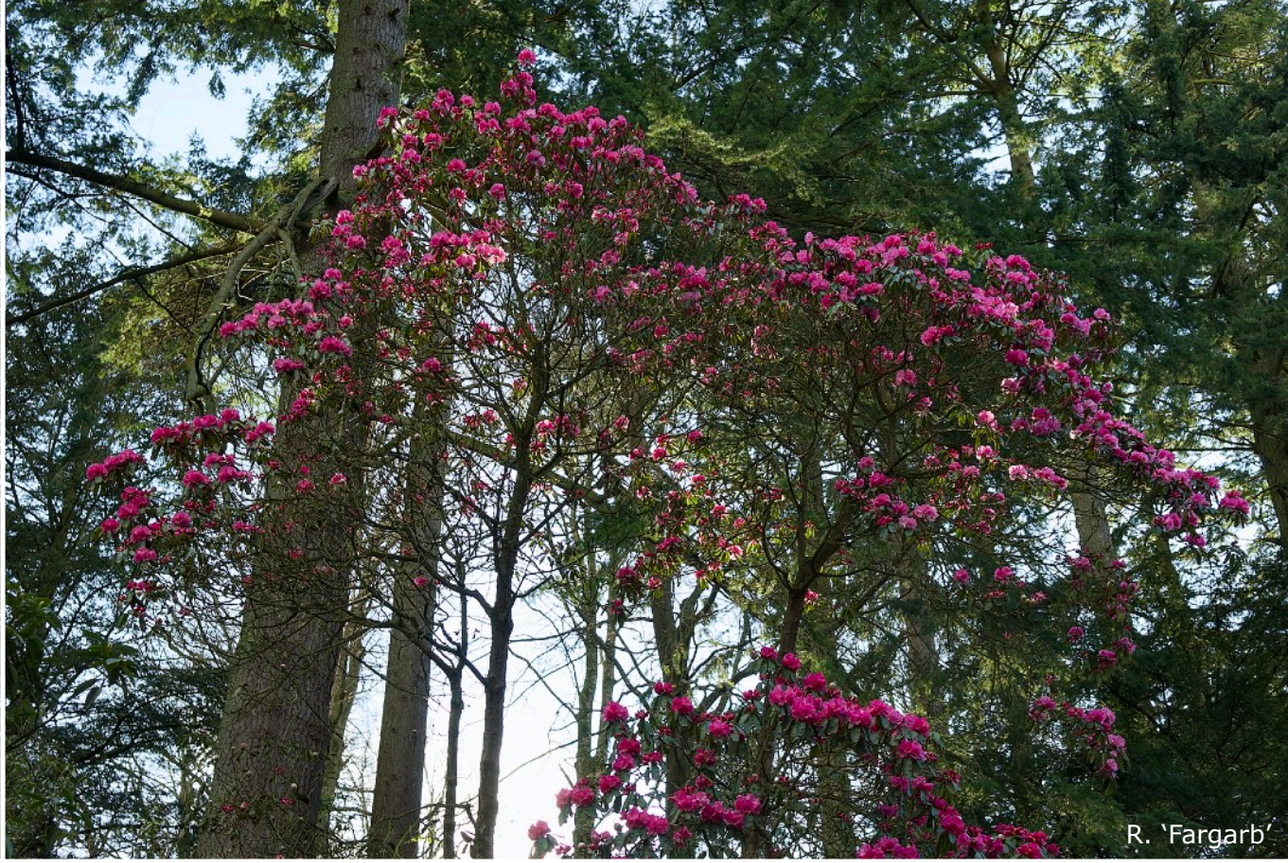
R. ‘Fargarb’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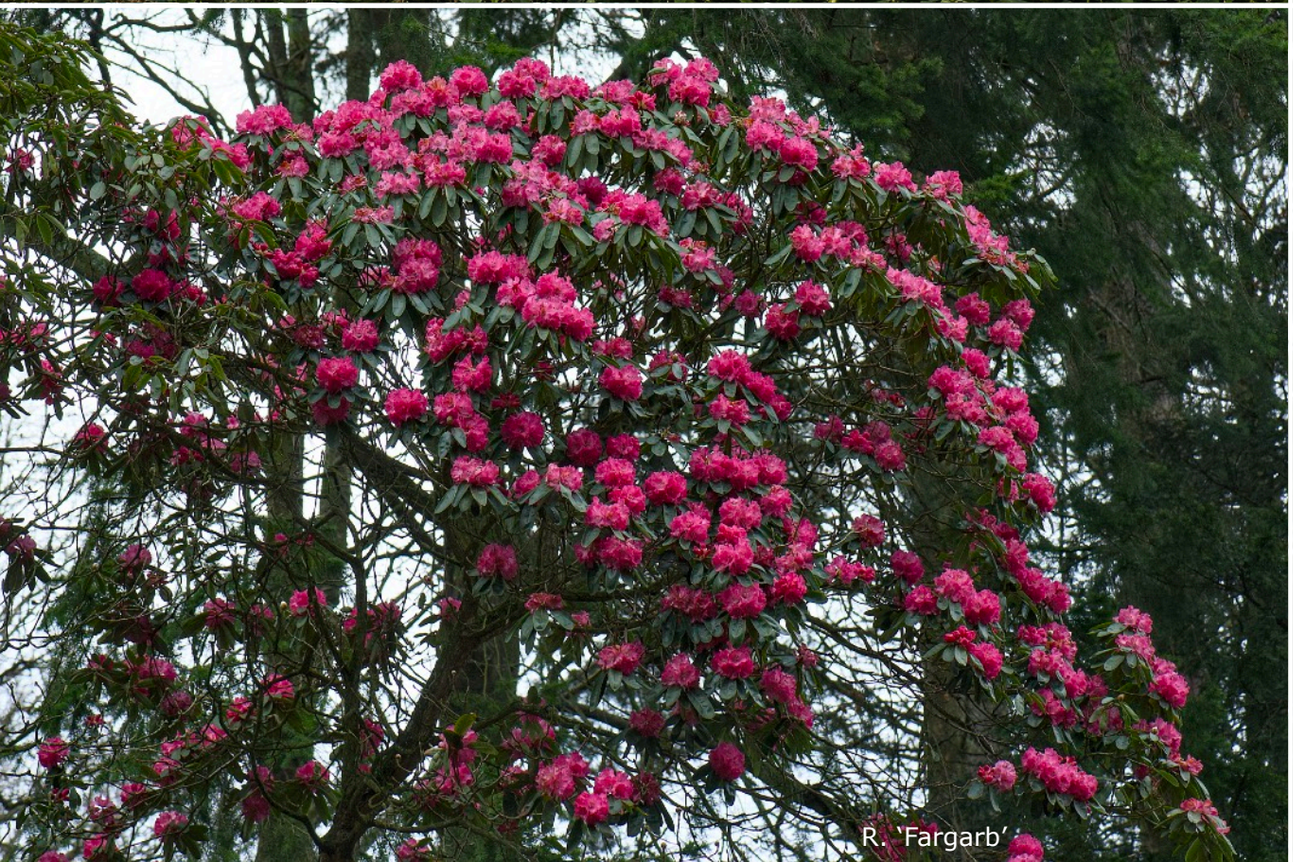
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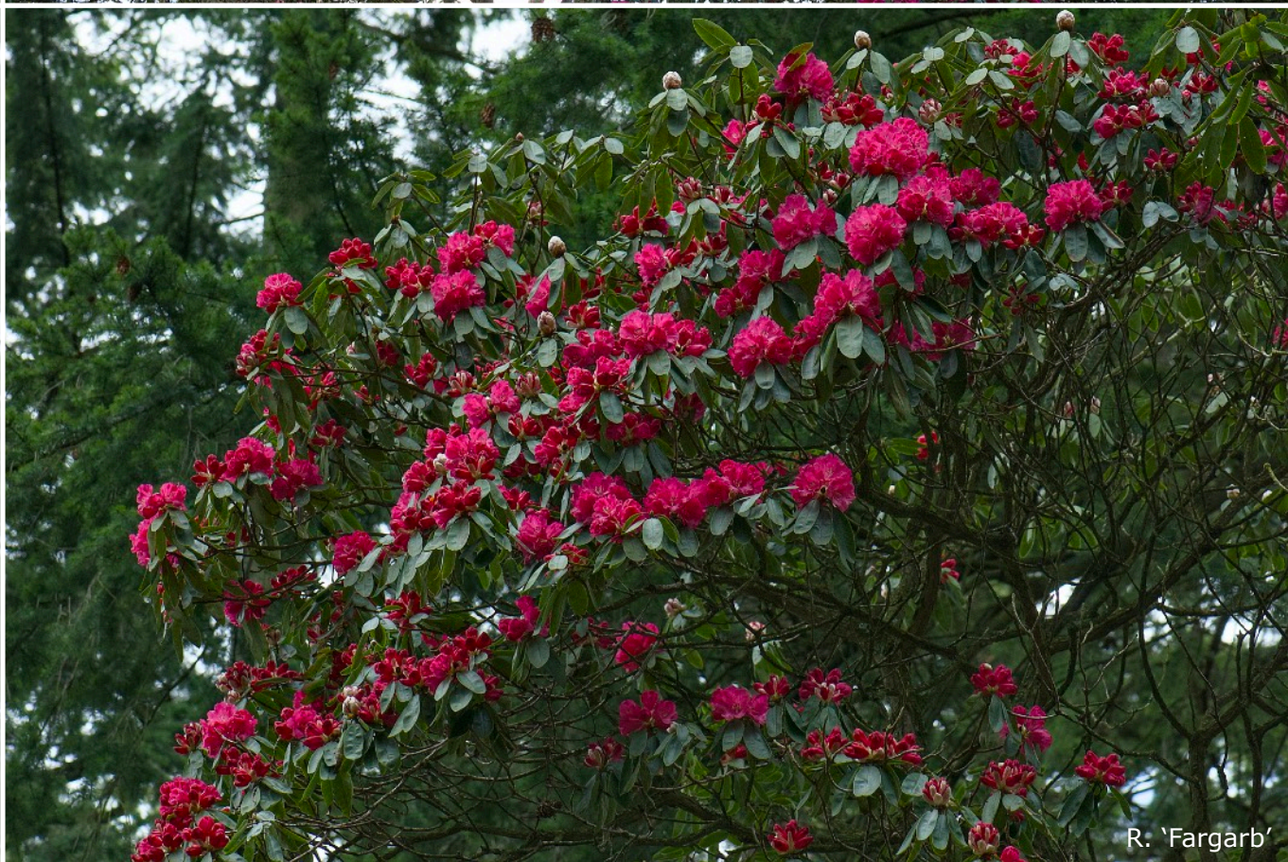

R. ‘Fargarb’

R. ‘Fargarb’

The ‘Fire Rim’ Pride

‘Nancy Evans’ x ‘Pink Petticoats’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Late April-May 1.6m x 2.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Dreamweaver	Jim Barlup	1989	1997
Fire Rim	Jim Barlup	1989	1995
Maddie Mae	Jim Barlup	1989	2011
Sweet Dreams	Jim Barlup	1989	1995

The gene pool sloshing around in a typical Jim Barlup hybrid could easily be described using terms such as extensive, substantial or vast, with 1989’s ‘Fire Rim’ possibly laying claim to being his most complicated cross to date in terms of its DNA strands. Technique-wise of course, the actual creation process was no different to any other mating - in this case pollen from the John Lofthouse hybrid ‘Pink Petticoats’ was applied to the style of Edwin Brockenbrough’s ‘Nancy Evans’ - but the choice of parents was clearly considered and the potential permutations that could appear amongst the seedlings that germinated would have required careful selection, though given the fact that before taking on the challenges of a rhododendron retail nursery business, Jim was an illustrator and professional photographer by trade, that past experience would certainly have helped him separate the wheat from the chaff.

‘Fire Rim’ is a low growing, but wide spreading shrub, never likely to be more than 1.6m tall, but extending out further. The leaves are elliptic in shape and concave in profile, close to 13cm long by 5cm across, olive to dark green in colour, but they are often twisted downward at the midpoint or the apex, and can appear decidedly unhealthy despite nothing really being wrong with them, failings inherited from the pollen provider. These are minor quibbles however, and of little account when in mid April the flower buds begin to swell: for the blooms are simply stunning.

The open-funnel-shaped and wavy-lobed corollas, each 4.5cm long and 7.5cm across, are carried in a tight, globular truss of 20. In bud their hue is strong red, this transforming to light yellow as the trumpets expand, with a wide band of purplish-red edging the margins and the same tone decorating most of the outer surface. Five distinct nectar pouches are gathered at the base of the throat, daubed in red, and a flare of reddish-purple spots extends halfway up the dorsal lobe. Style and stamen filaments are flushed red, the small stigma, yellow-green, while the calyx lobes, each up to 1.3cm long, stand proud of the corolla tube and are light yellow at the apex, purplish-red at the base.

Three other selections from the cross have been registered, but ‘Fire Rim’ is the star.



R. ‘Fire Rim’



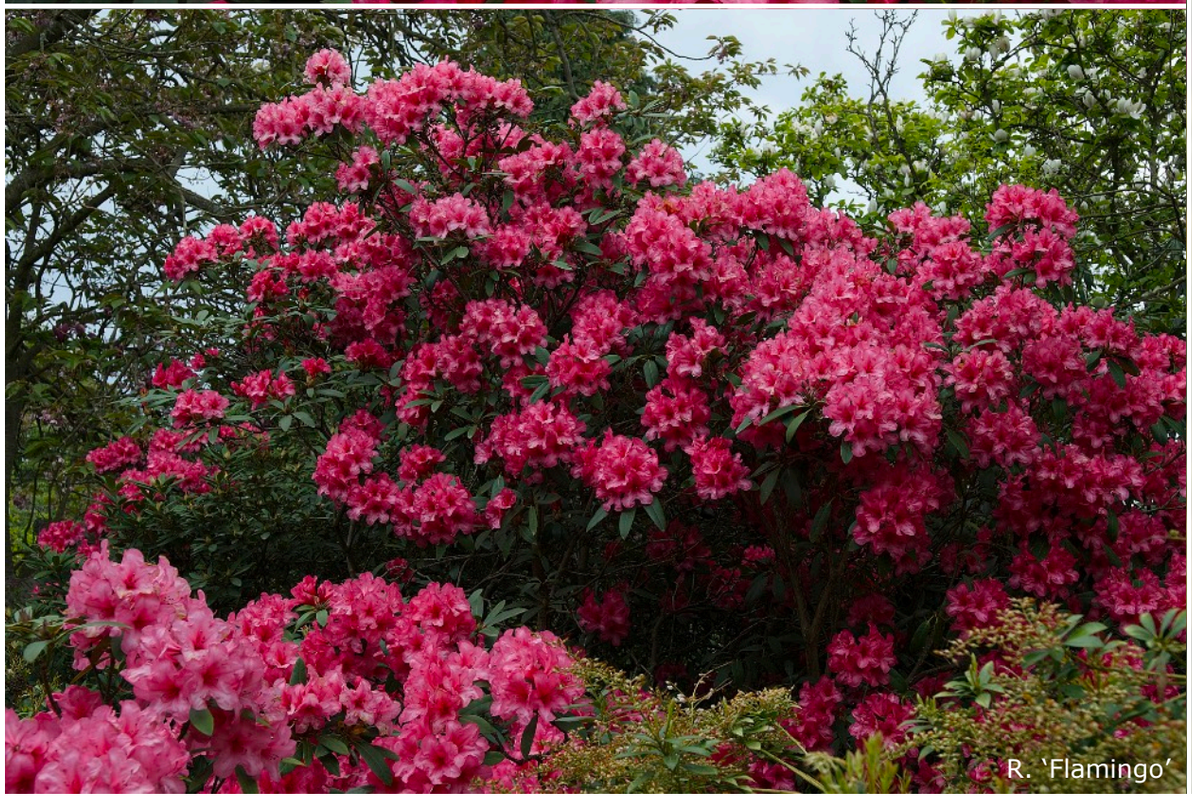
R. ‘Fire Rim’


R. ‘Flamingo’

R. ‘Flamingo’
‘Loder’s White’ x *griersonianum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 May-June 4m x 4m

‘Flamingo’ resulted from a ‘Loder’s White’ x *griersonianum* combination made by Sir James Horlick, likely in the early 1930s, which he introduced in 1941. The chosen epithet is perfect for the plant, with its wavy-edged crimson-rose flowers an exact colour match for the exuberantly plumaged long-legged waders who supplied the appellation. Flat-topped to rounded trusses of between 8 and 10 broadly funnel-shaped corollas open from mid-May onward, later in northern gardens, with the 4m-high dome of a mature specimen usually festooned from head to toe in bloom. Foliage follows the pollen parent in shape and size, the dark green elliptical leaves held for just one year, so giving the shrub an open, but not unattractive air. The hardiness rating requires that a sheltered position be provided in gardens along the east coast, though too much overhead shade will reduce flower bud production; dappled shade in the southern counties will prolong the corolla hue and keep the leaves from scorching without allowing the vigorous growth to become overly leggy.

Bafflingly, ‘Flamingo’ is rarely found in any of the major rhododendron collections open to the general public, despite its obvious visual appeal.


R. ‘Flamingo’


R. ‘Flamingo’

R. ‘Fleur de Roi’

R. ‘Fleur de Roi’
thomsonii x *campanulatum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Late March-April 6m x 4m

If the *IRRC* entry for ‘Fleur de Roi’ is taken as gospel, then the rhododendron featured in the photographs herein, growing at Benmore Botanic Garden for almost seventy years and propagated from cultivated material under the RBGE Accession Number 19568787, is not that hybrid, though it most definitely is a *thomsonii* x *campanulatum* cross. The official description commits itself to white corollas with wavy-edged lobes, the margins of which are broadly suffused blue, or sometimes pink, so most certainly not the magenta-red to purple-mauve blooms that are displayed at Benmore. Yet a glance at the calyx, pedicels and bark immediately confirm genetic input from *R. thomsonii,* while the leaf shape, the faint hint of a lanate tomentum on the underside of the blades, and an undertone tinge in the corolla pigmentation suggest an equal largesse from *R. campanulatum*.

Louis van Houtte, the esteemed Belgian nurseryman, made the cross at his Gentbrugge nursery sometime before 1861. As was the case with ‘Cornubia’, ‘Fargarb’ and ‘Lilianae’ - to mention but three - it is probable that seedlings germinated from the same capsule, which at the time would have been regarded as identical to any named selection, were distributed, such practice certainly explaining why ‘Fleur de Roi’ at Benmore, and (presumably) the source plant from which it was vegetatively reproduced, are both bereft of any white blooms.


R. ‘Fleur de Roi’


R. ‘Fleur de Roi’



R. ‘Fortune’

The ‘Fortune’ Pride

falconeri x *sinogrande*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4 April-May 8m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Annapolis Royal	Lionel de Rothschild	1922	1983
Charles	Lionel de Rothschild	1922	1983
Churchill	Lionel de Rothschild	1922	1971
Fortune	Lionel de Rothschild	1922	1938
Foetune Montreal	Lionel de Rothschild	1922	
Fortune Ottawa	Lionel de Rothschild	1922	
Fortune Sandringham	Lionel de Rothschild	1922	1988
Sir Jamie Darling	John Basford	1961	1983
Stanley	Lionel de Rothschild	1922	1982

May, 1922.

R. sinogrande has been flowering haphazardly in British gardens for a little more than three years and a plant in the woodland garden at Trewithen, George Johnstone’s home between Truro and St. Austell in Cornwall, is about to open its first bloom in cultivation.

Many admirers soon agree that it is the finest specimen yet seen and one of Johnstone’s friends in the Rhododendron Association, the merchant banker Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, who has motored from Hampshire to view the shrub, is allowed to collect pollen from the inflorescence.

Returning to Exbury, his 2,600-acre estate in Hampshire’s New Forest, the grains are applied to the stigma of one of the best clones of *R. falconeri* then available - for L de R is in the process of creating the world’s premier rhododendron garden and his financial resources are virtually unlimited.

In *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* - the 1967-published book authored by C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber that details the creation of the gardens and the various hybrid breeding programmes that resulted in the conception of many of the world’s finest Genus *Rhododendron* cultivars - Lionel’s wife, Marie Louise, recalls the occasion when the progeny from that *falconeri* x *sinogrande* pollination first flowered:

> ‘It was a lovely April day when Exbury had donned its Riviera look. As we walked into the woods we saw this magnificent plant holding up its glorious blooms to a deep blue sky. In the evening, Lionel gathered his family to a round-table conference to discuss the merits of the new seedling. There it stood in the largest vase available, looking most majestic. Not only was the flower outstanding, but its stance and bearing were bold and commanding. Its great leaves were disposed so as to remind me of the Discobolus, the Greek thrower of the discus with arm stretched out and poised for the throw.’

That was in the spring of 1938, some sixteen years after the pairing, and the same night, a name was chosen for the seedling - ‘Fortune’ - this selected not to honour the 19th century Scottish botanist and plant hunter, but as an acknowledgement that chance and good luck had combined to produce a masterpiece.

Such was formally acknowledged when Lionel's cross secured a First Class Certificate from the Royal Horticultural Society after being exhibited later that same month. Indeed, as Jane Brown writes in her 2004 book *Tales of the Rose Tree,* the plant 'was thought the finest hybrid produced by that date' and was 'the floral equivalent of a painting by Augustus John or Stanley Spencer, a plant of museum quality.'

At Exbury, the various named clones selected from the germination - for each and every seedling was grown on until it bloomed, this being Lionel's practice with every one of his crosses, although those found not to meet his exacting standards were ruthlessly culled and quickly made fuel for the bonfire - are today individually scattered throughout the grounds, apart from in the Winter Garden, where they are gathered together, in groups and guilds, tree-like and spectacular in bloom, drawing devotees from far and wide.

As Edmund de Rothschild, Lionel's eldest son, details in *The Living Garden,* an article he wrote for Volume 43, Number 4, of the *Journal American Rhododendron Society,* which was published in the autumn of 1989:

> 'We then come to the banks of Rhododendron 'Fortune', *R. falconeri* x *R. sinogrande*. These form huge trusses. It is not often that they all flower together but during the time I have been in charge at Exbury, which is really since 1947, they have only flowered superbly twice. The first time there was a frost and the second time it was a magnificent sight. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother has been many times to Exbury, so on May 1st, 1987 she came to lunch with us on a private visit as she was told about the fantastic flowering of these splendid rhododendrons. As she arrived she said, "Am I too early?" I was able to say, "No, Your Majesty, they are perfect;" and on May 10th, Her Majesty the Queen came on a similar visit and said "Am I too late?" I was able to say, "No, Your Majesty, they are as perfect as when Her Majesty your mother came 10 days ago!" She remarked that the public also in the garden on that day seemed so surprised at seeing her doing the same as them, namely sightseeing.'

And Jane Brown even admits to falling to her knees before the same stand on page 3 of *Tales of the Rose Tree,* with this author frozen in place and completely transfixed on my own very first encounter.

Because like all of the very best rhododendron hybrids created by enthusiasts over the years, 'Fortune' outshines both of its highly illustrious parents.

By an order of magnitude.

And so gives the middle finger to a certain FKW.

For its habit is magisterial, a single trunk or multiple stems reaching skyward for 8m or more, with the mature specimens found today in woodland gardens along the west coast enormous domes or towers thanks to the prodigious annual rainfall totals.

The leaves too are equally gargantuan, covered in a glaucous bloom when they first unfurl, becoming dark green and bullate above as in *R. sinogrande,* but with the felted, fawn-coloured indumentum of *R. falconeri* below. Obovate-elliptic in shape, 42cm in length on plants resident in southern gardens, with those blades extending out even more where elevated humidity levels allow and taking fully two years to mature.

And the flowers…

Wow.

An individual truss may attain 23cm in height and be composed of between 25 and 30 ventricose-campanulate bells.

The corollas of the FCC clone are pure primrose-yellow, each bearing a small crimson blotch at the very base of the throat.

Those of the AM-awarded 'Churchill' clone - introduced in 1971; its appellation a mark of respect for one of the greatest Englishmen ever to have lived - creamy-yellow with a deeper toned blotch.

Other named clones include:

'Annapolis Royal' - pale greenish-yellow, faintly striped purplish-red when newly open, this named for the once capital city of Nova Scotia.

'Charles' - an honorific for the King when he was Prince of Wales, pale greenish-yellow with a vivid purplish-red blotch.

And 'Stanley' - pale yellow-green, blotched purplish-red and with pink flushed lobe margins, the epithet borrowed from the capital of the Falkland Islands.

All three introduced in the early 1980s.

There are also several labelled and named, but so far unregistered clones, growing in the Exbury woodland - 'Fortune Montreal', 'Fortune Ottawa' and 'Fortune Sandringham', to list but three, the latter named by the late Queen Elizabeth on one of her many private visits to the gardens.

Once each of those plants reached the age where flower buds are first set, they soon adopted the three-year cycle common to all large-leaved rhododendrons: a welter of bloom displayed one year, followed by two lean seasons. This results from the shrub first focusing its resources into maturing any pollinated seed (so deadhead accordingly until your ladder is outgrown). Then building up its newly formed branchlets to support the next floral spectacular. Except occasionally, every so often, perhaps only once over a span of two decades as Mr Eddy indicates, when the perfect set of circumstances coalesce, mature specimens will offer up an almost wanton extravaganza of bloom, with huge, honey-golden globes bedecking the tips of each and every branch.

Switching to more mundane technicalities:

Hardiness matches that of the parents, with mature specimens of R. 'Fortune' able to cope with occasional, mid-winter overnight lows down to -15ºC, but succumbing if the temperature drops lower than that, especially if the cold snap is sustained over a prolonged period. This was vividly demonstrated in Kent, at Sandling Park, for instance, Alan Hardy's garden near Hythe, during the Continental cold spell the county and most of southeastern England experienced in 1984-85. And of course Jack needs to be kept well away from one of those once-in-a-lifetime flower bonanzas.

Shelter for the leaves is also essential, as their second-year development will be impaired if hit by more than a degree or two of frost. Equally, the petioles will snap if the blades are subjected to wildly gusting winds.

Prospective purchasers with gardens able to meet these environmental challenges, as well as offer sufficient space for their acquisition to grow away unrestrained for the next half century or so, will be delighted to learn that grafted plants are occasionally available from the specialist nurseries, though of course, and as would be expected, these command commensurately high prices. Selfed seedlings - even if hand pollinated - should be avoided like the plague, because they will never come true and the flowers will be a disappointment when a decade or more later the first one opens. Yet if the real deal can be obtained - a healthily fused scion from either the FCC or the 'Churchill' clone - with this ensconced in a snug haven in one of the southern counties or along the western seaboard, and given more than enough room to breath, in time, that colossus to be, will literally rock your world.

R. ‘Fortune’

R. ‘Fortune’



R. ‘Churchill’



R. ‘Fortune Stanley’

R. ‘Fortune’

R. ‘Fred Wynniatt’

The 'Fred Wynniatt' Pride

fortunei x 'Jalisco'

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 May-early June 5m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Bach Choir	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1988
Douggie Betteridge	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1986
Fred Wynniatt	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1963
Jerez	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1966
Joyful	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1966
Simita	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1966
Stanway	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1971
Trianon	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1966

Edmund de Rothschild likely made his *fortunei* x 'Jalisco' pairing in the mid 1950s, with the first of eight registered clones from the cross exhibited in 1963 and named for Exbury's then Head Gardener, Fred Wynniatt. Those stunningly beautiful flowers secured an immediate Award of Merit from the RHS, for their size and the pigmentation mix of maize-yellow flushed neyron-rose was instantly appealing.

The 'Fred Wynniatt' blooms are carried in a flat-topped truss of 10, the corollas widely-campanulate in shape, each 7.5cm long and 11.5cm across at the mouth. They have overlapping and wavy-edged lobe margins, plus a petaloid calyx that can be up to 2.5cm in length. And a 5m-tall mature shrub will yearly display hundreds of trusses.

The ascending branches form a dome not much wider than the shrub is tall, this host to quite large leaves around 16cm long by half that in width, these elliptic in shape. Mid-green in colour, those blades are unfortunately only held for one year, so mature specimens can appear quite sparsely cloaked when not covered in bloom. The plants are completely winter-hardy in the UK and tolerant of a position in full sun even in the southern counties, though the corollas will bleach and the foliage occasionally scorch in such locales unless a modicum of midday shade is provided. In more northerly climes, an open planting site is de rigueur if the fulsome flower bud production is to be maintained, though the leaves will require shelter from storm force Atlantic winds.

Exbury introduced a quartet of new clones from the pairing at the Royal Horticultural Society's 1966 Chelsea Flower Show: 'Jerez', 'Joyful', 'Simita' and 'Trianon'. 'Stanway' was exhibited in 1971 - the epithet borrowed from the village where Fred Wynniatt was born - and 'Douggie Betteridge' - named for Wynniatt's successor as head gardener at Exbury (an equally legendary plantsman, with a style all his own!) - was shown in 1986. Then finally, in 1988, the last and best selection from the pollination was introduced: 'Bach Choir'.

One or more of these hybrids might be the result of a repeat mating, as the *IRRC* indicates that although 'Fred Wynniatt' was conceived sometime prior to 1963, 'Bach Choir' was actually birthed in that year and 'Stanway' half a decade later in 1968. If correct, that would have allowed the latter just three years to develop into the AM-winning specimen unveiled in 1971, so the dates quoted probably need to be taken with sufficient salt to worry a dietician, and it is why they are not followed in the table above. Equally, the FCC-awarded specimen of 'Fred Wynniatt' is deeper toned than the AM plant, so it too should be treated as a separate clone, bringing the unofficial pride total to nine.

There is a further complication within the pages of the *IRRC* in that the parentage of both 'Simita' and 'Trianon' are listed as *R. fortunei* pollinated not by 'Jalisco', but by a 'Jalisco Group seedling'. This could indicate a different or unnamed clone of 'Jalisco' was involved or even that the pollen came from a plant with a 'Jalisco' x 'unknown' heritage. However, the veracity of these two entries is again open to challenge as the data conflicts with the information detailed in *The Rothschild Rhododendrons.* Its authors - C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber - had direct access to the Exbury stud book and recorded the pedigree as set out herein. Moreover, they make no mention of multiple pairings.

Equally mystifying is the negative opinion reached by a number of eminent doyens who believe the cross to be of 'limited merit', with oft chlorotic foliage and a leggy mien. This may indeed be the case with regard to the latter two quibbles, but the hybrids are usually grown without problem and in flower, are bona fide knockouts.



R. 'Fred Wynniatt'

R. ‘Fred Wynniatt’



R. ‘Jerez’



R. ‘Joyful’



R. ‘Stanway’



R. ‘Trianon’

R. ‘Bach Choir’

R. ‘Bach Choir’

R. ‘Fulgarb’

The ‘Fulgarb’ Pride
fulgens x *arboreum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4 Late February-March 6m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Felicity Magor	E. J. P. Magor	1928	before 1958
Fulgarb	E. J. P. Magor	1920	1930

If February stays mild along Cumbria’s Irish Sea coast, which is often the case, then Edward Magor’s superb *fulgens* x *arboreum* cross will be in full bloom in the woodland at Muncaster Castle ten whole days before pictorial calendar pages need to be turned, and suddenly catching sight of one of the mature specimens will be a scintillating experience: hundreds of backlit red globes, incandescent against a backdrop of sentinel conifers.

The ‘Fulgarb’ pairing was made in 1920 and the seedlings took ten years to flower, being named and introduced in 1930, though strangely, no mention of them is made in E. J. P. Magor’s *Notes from Lamellen* write-up, the annual contribution the hybridiser penned for *The Rhododendron Society Notes* (Volume 3, Number 5, the relevant edition). Held in dense globular or dome-shaped trusses each averaging 15 tubular-campanulate corollas, the blooms are rosy-crimson in hue, with darker spotting on the dorsal lobes, and have five nectar pouches, arrayed around the base of the throat, which concentrate the stamens and style into a tight central cluster.

The foliage is elliptic through oblanceolate in outline, flat or convex in profile, with recurved margins. Dark green and glossy above, the leaves show a thin indumentum below at first but this is not persistent. Each blade is between 12.5 and 15cm long, with the majority only held for one year, though a well-branched habit somewhat mitigates the consequent open aspect.

At Muncaster, the plants are dotted throughout the woodland, each of them slightly different from one another, the result again, of sister seedlings being distributed rather than grafted or layered plants. Those at the top of the hill have been drawn-up by the surrounding trees and are near double the 6m height figure quoted above. That is because that assessment applies only to the best specimen, which may be found growing in a more open locale on the left of the main drive when walking to the castle from the main entrance gate. All however, share a trait common to many rhododendrons, both species and hybrids: that every so often, when local environmental conditions coalesce to give the plant some extra oomph during the growing season, not only are more flower buds set, but the resulting blooms are larger, with their hue even more vibrant. And while a normal year will see a modest or even spectacular display, when ‘Fulgarb’ is fully charged, that pageant is literally effervescent.

Edward Magor apparently repeated the pairing in 1928 using a different form of *R. arboreum* - the original cross had transferred pollen from a blood red-flowering clone - with his son, Major Edward Walter Moyle Magor, then introducing ‘Felicity Magor’ in the 1950s, the epithet borrowed from E.J.P.’s granddaughter.


R. ‘Fulgarb’

R. ‘Fulgarb’

R. ‘Fulgarb’

R. ‘Galactic’

R. 'Galactic'
'Avalanche' x *lacteum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 March-April 6m x 4m

R. lacteum is known to be 'difficult' in cultivation, often preferring colder, dryer sites in dappled shade, as opposed to a coddled placement in a west coast woodland garden (where it often dies-off in stages over time). The species thrives, for instance, at Blackhills, near Elgin, on the northeastern coast of Scotland, and in the experimental mountainside plantings created by Sir John Stirling-Maxwell at Corrour Lodge, above Loch Ossian on the edge of Rannock Moor, where the rhododendrons are healthy and burgeoning despite residing between the 380 and 500m contours and taking on winter lows of -27ºC. So when hybridisers incorporate the species into their designs, they will have effectively been pre-warned about the potential genetic inheritance and that it will not just include the dazzling yellow flowers and fine foliage, but the downside irritations too.

In R. 'Galactic', Edmund de Rothschild used the species to pollinate one of his father's most highly regarded hybrids, the exquisite R. 'Avalanche', and the resulting selection from the seedlings he raised is graced with magnificent blooms that combine the best traits from both parents, though their officially reported yellow-green hue has somehow magically been metamorphosed into a milky-white tone for those plants physically encountered in a garden setting. Yet inevitably, some of the miffiness has been assimilated too.

Like both of its progenitors, 'Galactic' is a tall and upright grower, requiring the shelter and light shade of a wooded environment to fully prosper. It bears large, mid-green leaves on thick, sturdy branchlets, the whorl of blades only held for one year, but a well-grown shrub is usually adequately clothed nonetheless. Each leaf is up to 22cm in length, oblanceolate in shape, often with wavy margins, and close to 9cm wide approaching the apex. A thin plastered indumentum will be found on the underside. The corollas are carried in a tight, rounded truss of up to 22 individuals, each widely-campanulate bell 7.5cm long and 9cm across at the mouth, deep cream in tone with flecks of crimson gathered into two rays at the base of the dorsal lobe. Held on 5cm long, flushed-red pedicels, the blooms are slightly fragrant and their fleshy texture allows a degree or two of frost to be shrugged-off without damage, an important consideration given the March-April flowering season.

'Galactic' was conceived in the early 1950s and the seedlings took many years to begin flowering, but when the first bloom did burst forth in 1964, the hybrid immediately secured an Award of Merit from the RHS on its introduction and a First Class Certificate followed six years later. Grafted plants are occasionally available from one of the few UK specialist nurseries that remain in business, but prospective purchasers with deep pockets should note that 'Galactic' is regarded as a 'collector's plant' even when it is set on a far more amenable rootstock.


R. 'Galactic'


R. 'Galactic'

R. ‘George Haslam’

‘Polar Bear’ x ‘Romarez’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 Late June-July 7m x 5m

Extending the rhododendron flowering season into the middle of July was a goal of many hybridisers and to do so, their crosses invariably included *R. auriculatum* in the mix, which can open its blooms as late as early August. Most of the introduced selections from those combinations will therefore have large, funnel-shaped corollas, pure white in tone or flushed a washy shade of pink, held in a loose and open truss, set against large, oblong-lanceolate leaves, and ‘George Haslam’ is no exception. But in opting for an F2 pairing using two of the best late-flowering hybrids then available - ‘Polar Bear’ and ‘Romarez’ - Eric Harrison produced a stunner imbued with much deeper pigmentation than is usually the case. A susceptibility for the blooms of all these plants to spoil if hit by anything more than the gentlest shower of rain, is a fallacy common to virtually all the *auriculatum* hybrids, and while infuriating, even in gardens prone to summer Atlantic storm systems, mature plants can still put on a spectacular end of season display.

Habit is upright and well-branched, so despite the long internodal growth and single-year leaf retention, a quite bushy framework often results as each blade in the branch-tip whorl attains a length of up to 25cm and width of 8cm. The foliage is oblanceolate in shape with a pointed tip and a rounded or cordate base - the latter having two lobes that form a sinus, though these never approach being auriculate (where the projections are ear-like and often overlap) - matt green in colour and glabrous, for the brown abaxial indumentum gifted by the pollen parent has unfortunately been lost in the pairing. Regrettably, but mirroring another congenital fault inherited from *R. auriculatum,* as the flowers open, the leaves often begin to appear somewhat chlorotic, though this is merely the first sign that they will shortly be discarded as the new foliage begins to extend.

The blooms borne by ‘George Haslam’ are pinkish-red in the bud, but open deep pink through deep purplish-pink, with the depth of the pigmentation’s hue long-lasting. Each corolla is around 6cm long and wide, tubular-funnel-campanulate in shape, and held in a two-tiered, flat-topped and open truss of between 12 and 14 trumpets. Heavy rain or a stream of drips falling from a leaf or a branch above will result in discoloured patches on the tube or the lobes, or the complete collapse of the corolla, the remains - yellowy-brown and pulpy - appearing almost as if the victim of frost. Clearly this will mar the display, but the problem should be regarded fatalistically, part and parcel of extending the flowering season into July, and shrugged-off when it occurs.

However, far more than cosmetic damage will be inflicted if the shrub is subject to an early autumn Jack attack before the new growth has fully hardened. The winter hardiness rating already rules out prospective planting sites where temperatures might drop below -12ºC from December onwards, but the requirement for the woodland to remain frost-free until at least late October, effectively restricts these locales to the mildest gardens in the south and those along the western seaboard benefiting from the uplift provided by the North Atlantic Drift.

Both parent plants are hybrids bred by Roza Stevenson at Tower Court, Ascot, but while ‘Polar Bear’ needs no further introduction, the pollen provider is little-known, even amongst rhodophiles. It is however a fine *kyawii* x *griersonianum* pairing made in 1932, which received an Award of Merit from the RHS in 1953. How it came to Major-General Eric Harrison’s attention is simple: a decade after her husband’s sudden death in 1950, Roza remarried, tying the knot with another devotee of the genus, thus ‘Romarez’ was uprooted from its Berkshire home and moved to Tremeer shortly afterwards.



R. ‘George Haslam’



R. ‘George Haslam’

R. ‘George Haslam’



R. ‘Gertrude Schäle’



R. ‘Doktor Ernst Schäle’

The ‘Gertrude Schäle’ Pride

‘Prometheus’ x *forrestii* Repens Group

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 April-May 1m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Doktor Ernst Schäle	Dietrich Hobbie	1946	1966
Gertrud Schäle	Dietrich Hobbie	1946	1951

Despite only two selections from Dietrich Hobbie’s ‘Prometheus’ x *forrestii* Repens Group cross being officially registered and introduced - ‘Gertrud Schäle’ in 1951, and the paler, scarlet-flowered ‘Doktor Ernst Schäle in 1966 - rather more than two clones are in commerce, with these masqueraders decidedly second-rate.

The true ‘Gertrud Schäle’ is a compact, semi-dwarf plant with a spreading habit. It has fairly stiff, dark green and glossy leaves, elliptic in shape, which have an impressed midrib and veins, recurved margins, and are each around 7cm long. The flowers are waxy in substance, dark red in colour, tubular-funnel-shaped with five distinct nectar pouches at the tube base. Stamens and style are gathered into a tight central grouping with straight filaments, though the style may sometimes bend upwards at the tip. It is rarely declinate along its full length, which is a failing often found in some of shrub’s impersonators. The inflorescence is composed of between 4 and 6 bells, the corollas relatively large in relation to the leaves, so when a multitude of buds open across a mature specimen, the bush can often be turned into a single, incandescent sheet of flame.

It should be noted that those clones with 8 or sometimes as many as 12 individuals per truss are most certainly pretenders to the title.

Hardiness is exceptional, to -23ºC or below, which allows the cross to be grown anywhere in the UK where the soil is right for rhododendrons. It has also allowed ‘Gertrud Schäle’ to be used by North American and European hybridisers such as David Leach and Hans Hachmann to further develop their own range of low-growing red-flowering hybrids, giving them ironclad constitutions. However, while these introductions are more than able to cope with severe continental climates, they are less happy in a maritime environment, so will rarely be found planted in British gardens.

R. ‘Gertrude Schäle’

R. ‘Glenshant’

R. 'Glenshant'

grande x *macabeanum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 March 6m x 4m

'Glenshant' is one of the large-leaved species pairings made by John Basford at Brodick Castle on the Isle of Arran during his 33-year tenure as head gardener. Only five of his hybrids have been formally named and registered, but many more equally fine crosses will be found dotted throughout the wooded terraces that run down from the red-sandstone battlements of the James Gillespie Graham remodelled baronial castle to the beachside plantings established just metres from the sea. The collection of rhododendrons is world-renowned, the mild, but not wholly frost-free location, perfect for the Subsection *Falconera* and Subsection *Grandia* species and rhodophiles will be in nirvana when they visit, frozen in place by huge specimens of *R. protistum* and *R. magnificum* covered head to foot in football-sized trusses of bloom while the rest of the UK shivers through February and March, for the sight is quite simply spellbinding.

However, potential first-time and returning visitors to the garden should not postpone their arrival at the gates for too long given the current parlous state of the Greenland ice sheet and its likely prognosis vis-à-vis global warming. For although an advance warning to those planning on paying a call, it is given because the lowest rung of the woodland garden is established on what geologists describe as a raised beach, which is now no more than a metre or two above the high water mark. Such features are the result of tectonic coastal uplift combined with sea-level fluctuations caused by the 100,000-year cycle of previous Quaternary glaciations, so taking into account the unstoppable progression towards the climactic zenith of the current interglacial period in which humanity finds itself - despite this never being mentioned by the bevy of climate scientists daily clamouring-on about the dire circumstances about to hit us because of our greenhouse gas emissions, or its total lack of coverage in the news media (whose supposed investigative journalists have bought into the former's ill-informed hogwash lock, stock and smoking barrel) - that low-lying ring of sand and rock around the Isle of Arran, will shortly be returning beneath the waves.

On a happier note, the 'Glenshant' hybrid is named for the 400m peak that towers over the mouth of Glen Rosa, which of course, will still be standing proud above the Firth of Clyde later this century whilst mankind are rushing about in a sweat lower down the mountainside looking for pairs of wellies or aqualungs. A magnet for paragliders, the hill is the southern terminus of Goat Fell (874m), on whose slopes Brodick Castle stands.

'Glenshant' the rhododendron is a *grande* x *macabeanum* pairing fusing together the best specimens of those two species found growing in the garden, and the resulting selection is easily their better. For John Basford's cross has huge, oblong-elliptic leaves, dark green and glossy, 25cm long by 10cm in width, which have a plastered and persistent silvery indumentum brushed across their underside. Ventricose-campanulate corollas, creamy-white flushed pale yellow-green, with irregular, dark purple-crimson rays jetting from the seven nectar pouches at the base of the tube, emerge from each flower bud to form a flat-topped to rounded truss that holds 26 or more of those near 7cm long bells in a tight array. And hundreds of these globes will be garlanded across the tree-like framework of branches on a good year. Yet while 'Glenshant' would be the undoubted highlight of the season at most other UK rhododendron gardens, at Brodick, for now, until the tides do their work, it is not even first among equals.



John Basford (examining R. 'Fortune' at Brodick, May 1987)



R. 'Glenshant'

R. ‘Glory of Athlone’

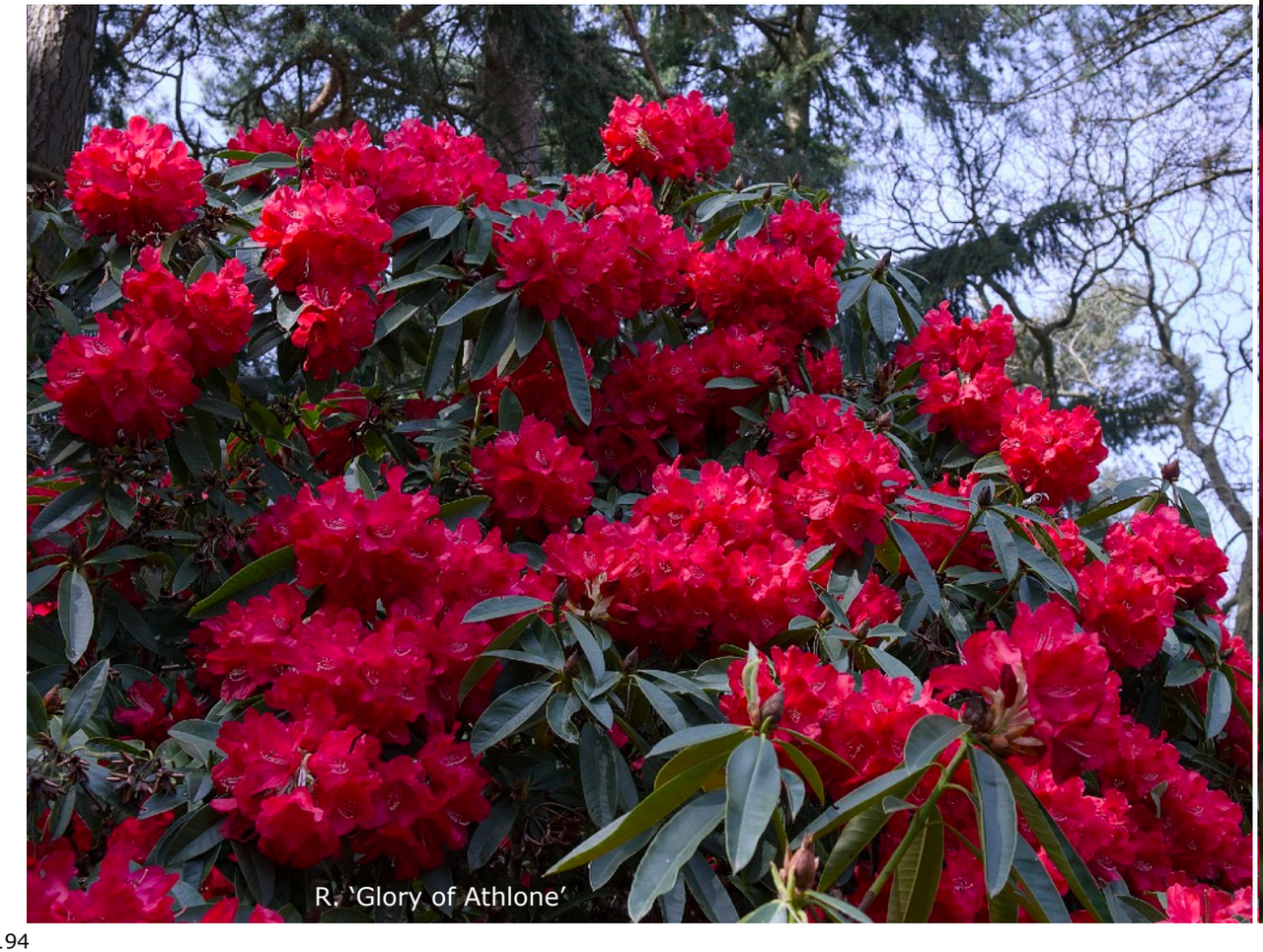
‘Earl of Athlone’ x ‘Glory of Leonardslee’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April-early May 4m x 4m

Little known, but much admired in the gardens that have mature specimens, the scarlet-red flowers of ‘Glory of Athlone’ have a luminosity that lights up the woodland even on overcast days. Introduced in 1954, so likely crossed shortly after Sir James Horlick moved from Sunningdale to the Isle of Gigha in 1944, this ‘Earl of Athlone’ x ‘Glory of Leonardslee’ cross pairs one of the C. B. van Nes & Sons FCC-awarded hybrids with a named seedling that was distributed from Richard Gill’s *arboreum* x *griffithianum* ‘Beauty of Tremough’ germinations, and the resulting conception surpasses both its parents in foliage and flower.

Glowing scarlet corollas open during early April: widely funnel-shaped, 5-lobed, the ring of small nectar pouches at the base of the tube gathering the stamens and style into a tight central cluster, they are carried in flat-topped to rounded trusses of 9 to 20 bells and set against the perfect foil. The foliage: medium-sized, deep green elliptic blades, V-shaped in profile, held for two years, so forming a dense dark cloak against which those globes can shine.



R. ‘Glory of Athlone’



R. ‘Glory of Athlone’

R. ‘Glory of Athlone’

R. ‘Golden Dream’

campylocarpum x ‘Naomi’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April-May 5m x 6m

R. ‘Golden Dream’ had long been considered a member of Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Carita’ pride, indeed its synonym is ‘Carita Golden Dream’, but then science intervened: for the plant is in fact the progeny of a c*ampylocarpum* x ‘Naomi’ pairing, which reversed the combination responsible for ‘Carita’, ‘Carita Charm’ and ‘Carita Inchmery’. In any number of books however - to name just three: *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* of 1967 vintage; *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* published in 1988; and 2004’s Second Edition of *The International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* - all four will be grouped together, as these texts do not take into account the fact that the organelles within each plant’s cells have their own intrinsic DNA. Nor, that those working away for *R. campylocarpum,* will be genetically different to the fleet carrying out those same tasks for R. ‘Naomi’. And that moreover, they are the sole gift of the female parent when pollination takes place.

Back in February 2015, a BBC News story under the heading ‘MPs say yes to three-person babies’ detailed and diagrammed this phenomenon, a bog-standard, normal part of the reproduction process that is identical for both a member of *Homo sapiens* and one from Kingdom *Plantae* (go to https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-31069173 to view the report).

Genetically then, despite any number of morphological similarities, *campylocarpum* x ‘Naomi’ is not the same as ‘Naomi’ x *campylocarpum,* because the former will have been gifted the organelles of *R. campylocarpum,* the latter - via ‘Kewense’, then ‘Aurora’, and finally ‘Naomi’ - those of *R. griffithianum.*

Now, as far as those outward appearances are concerned, ‘Golden Dream’ is very much akin to the other three ‘Carita’ clones, sharing, for instance, the upright, narrowly domed and open habit, as well as the medium-sized, elliptic-ovate foliage. The corolla shape too is a match, including the recurved lobe tips. But the flat-topped flower truss is a touch more open, with the rhachis and pedicels visible in the centre of the circle rather than masked, and the ring of those corollas less tightly packed. The fecundity of bloom is also just as resplendent, but the pigmentation subtly different: dusky pink in bud, opening to deep creamy yellow, flushed and shaded pink, the overall tone waning to ivory white with age. So if viewed from a distance when first engulfed, a mature specimen will appear to be draped in a cloak of golden-yellow.

Another trait shared with its three mirror-image doppelgängers is foliage burn from a strong sun on cloudless summer days, the solution also identical: a planting site set in light dappled shade from midday onwards.



R. ‘Golden Dream’



R. ‘Golden Dream’


R. 'Gordon Jones'


R. 'Gordon Jones'

The 'Gordon Jones' Pride
'Sappho' x *yakushimanum*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	May	1.5m x 2.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Gordon Jones	Richard Murcott	1975	1989
Tiana	Richard Murcott	1975	1986

Writing on the Murcott Garden website, rhodophile Richard Murcott, the Long Island horticultural venue's founder, recalled a conversation he had once had with one of his friends, Sidney V. Burns, the former President of the New York Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society:

> 'I was kidding Sid Burns one year about making rhododendron crosses and said the most obvious cross was to put *yakushimanum* onto 'Sappho' and I couldn't believe no one had done it. He had both plants and said that I should do it. So I did and gave some seed to Werner Brack.'

Brack, another ARS New York Chapter President (from 1992 to 1995), germinated the seed and registered two selections from the pairing, 'Tiana' in 1986, and the more widely distributed 'Gordon Jones' in 1989, the latter being named for the long-serving Director of the Planting Fields Arboretum at Oyster Bay, New York.

In 'Gordon Jones' that 'Sappho' x *yakushimanum* pairing has delivered a low-growing, bushy shrub with foliage distinctly biased towards the pollen provider, while the blooms are reflective of the seed parent. Barely topping 1m in height after a decade, the hybrid is unlikely to exceed 1.5m, but in time will spread a lot wider. The flowers are carried in domed trusses of 16 corollas, each a widely-funnel-shaped trumpet with wavy margins and 6 lobes, 5cm long and more than 6cm across when fully open. In bud, their hue is a strong purplish-pink, but as they expand this pales and ages to white. The blotch is dark red rather than purple-overlaid-black, but it is just as eye-catching as that of its parent. Glossy dark green leaves complete the picture, each oblong blade 15cm long by 5cm wide, with the convex profile of *R. yakushimanum,* but regrettably, lacking any abaxial indumentum, though the new growth is silvery.

Ken Cox has written of poor leaf-retention and problems with leaf spot in some Scottish gardens (*Rhododendron & Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* 2005), but the specimen of 'Gordon Jones' growing at Glendoick, which is planted in full sun on a fairly exposed part of the nursery - as you would expect given the locale - is in fine fettle.



R. ‘Grandezza’



R. ‘Grandezza’

R. ‘Grandezza’

‘Furnivall’s Daughter’ x ‘Roseum Elegans’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H7	Late May-June	1.6m x 2.5m

Rhododendron hybrids bred for Northern Germany have to be tough and ‘Grandezza’, one of Hans Hachmann’s creations introduced in 1985 but crossed way back in 1969 - so not released until it was comprehensively tested - is certainly that, able to survive mid-winter low temperatures of -26ºC or colder. The pairing combined ‘Furnivall’s Daughter’ with ‘Roseum Elegans’ and this has produced a plant with the blotched blooms of the seed parent that incorporates the ultra hardy physique of Anthony Waterer’s *catawbiense* hybrid, a cross from the 1850s known to have survived cold spells on the east coast of America that dropped down to as low as -32ºC. Yet it is often the case that plants with such ironclad constitutions perform poorly in milder climates. Luckily that is not the case here, as the specimen established in the balmy western-seaboard climes of Muncaster Castle proves.

The hybrid is vigorous, with a broadly upright habit, though never likely to get out of hand, with a height of 1.3m and spread of 1.8m the predictions for specimens approaching 15 years of age, although in a less hostile climatic surround those figures are likely to be exceeded. The leaves are elliptic in shape, up to 14cm long and 5 to 6cm wide, with distinctly recurved margins. They are glossy green in tone and carried for two years.

Each flower bud holds between 10 and 16 corollas, these widely-funnel-shaped with wavy lobe margins, the trumpets 5.5cm long and when fully expanded, almost 10cm across. Carried on pedicels flushed a deep blood red, the blooms are purplish-pink in colour, the hue deeper around the lobe edges, paler in the centre. Spread across the three dorsal lobes, is a dark purplish-red blotch, conspicuous and eye-catching, made even more striking by the total contrast of creamy-white stamens and style. That the purplish-pink blooms soon pale to white is immaterial thanks to that fan of speckles and spots, which retain their intensity and depth of colour until the corollas finally succumb to gravity.

R. ‘Grandezza’

R. ‘Grosclaude’

R. ‘Grosclaude’

haematodes x *facetum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Mid May-early June 3m x 4m

Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Grosclaude’ was genetically predestined to have red flowers from the get-go, as well as indumented foliage, for it resulted from a *haematodes* x *facetum* pairing. While superficially similar to the various ‘May Day’ clones, it flowers two to three weeks later than those Werrington Park and Bodnant *R. griersonianum* hybrids, with the blooms often extending their presence into early June. They are held in a loose, often slightly pendulous truss of between six and twelve tubular-campanulate corollas, each individually around 5.5cm in length, flaring at the mouth to 6.5cm wide. They have a fleshy texture, are a glossy, glowing blood red in tone, with petals moderately speckled brownish-black and lobe margins that are somewhat wavy. A large, irregular calyx, its lobes coloured to match the corolla and which are sometimes close to 3cm in length, completes the picture, clamping the blooms to their pedicels. Dark green obovate-lanceolate-shaped leaves provide the perfect foil and enhance the hue of the flowers.

Each leaf may be up to 11cm long and 4cm wide, with slightly recurved margins. Their lower surface is covered with a thick, brown tomentum that turns a darker, brownish-orange with age. Held on the bush for two years, the blades adequately cloak a young plant until it ascends beyond 1.5m or so in height, after which more and more of the supporting framework will be in evidence, but close to two decades will be required before this milestone is achieved unless set in too much shade. If left unchecked, a shrub around 3m high by 4m or so in width will be the ultimate result, across which a bevy of flower buds will open each year, but usually not in quantities sufficient enough to form an unbroken sheet of colour.

Regrettably, the plant’s hardiness is insufficient for many colder gardens along the east coast and inland despite the -15ºC winter rating, with the owners of Glendoick Gardens, for instance, whose woodland garden is located a few miles to the east of Perth in Scotland, reporting that ‘Grosclaude’ suffered from regular bark split due to late spring frosts (Peter and Kenneth Cox, *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988). The two authors also confirm that a number of clones are in circulation and that ‘some are hardier than others’.

‘Grosclaude’ was entry number 827 in Lionel de Rothschild’s Exbury stud book, with the hybrid introduced in 1941 and gifted an Award of Merit from the RHS in 1945.

As to the chosen epithet:

It is presumed to be an honorific, given the total lack of other hits from a Google search, with the likely contenders set to include the Swiss artist Louis-Amié Grosclaude (1784-1869), who was commissioned to paint a portrait of N. M. Rothschild (1777-1836), in the early 1800s. Or equally, a professor from Geneva, another L. A. Grosclaude, who in April 1900 formulated the Invariable Calendar. Also in the running - literally - would be Maurice Grosclaude, a middle-distance racer who competed for France in the 1924 Olympic Games. And so too Pierre Grosclaude, a writer and President of the Society of French Poets between 1946 and 1952, who later authored a highly-rated biography on Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes. Regrettably however, and despite a listing above that of a French centrifugal pump manufacturing concern, Gérald Grosclaude, an unmarried confectioner born in 1887, who drowned when the Titanic sank in 1912, is probably not being gifted botanic posterity, however deserving his case for such might be.

Other options are still being investigated…



R. ‘Grosclaude’



R. ‘Grosclaude’

Elepidote Hybrids
H-L

R. ‘Hampshire Belle’
unknown x unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 May 1.6m x 2.5m

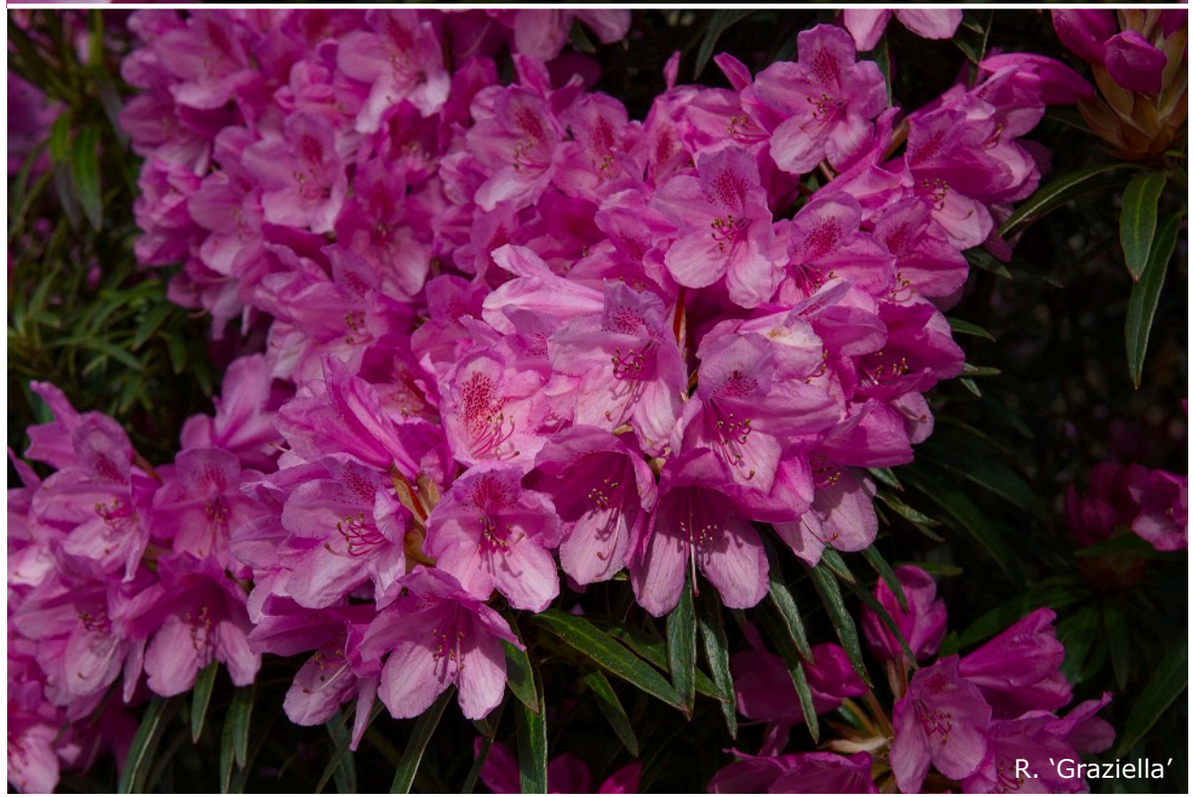
Bill George, the Head Gardener at the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens in Hampshire until his retirement in 2002, spotted a small seedling rhododendron happily growing away, unnoticed, in Brentry Woodland, in the early 1970s. The spikey foliage immediately caught his interest and the juvenile was gently lifted and grown-on in the nursery until big enough to be planted-out in the Peat Garden. For many years the shrub remained a tight, compact dome, densely filled with whorls of narrowly elliptic through linear leaves, each blade 8cm long by slightly less than 1cm in width, impressive and eye-catching all year round. And then the flowers appeared: deep purplish-pink, with a fan of red speckles and spots on the dorsal lobes; funnel-shaped, and though individually small, carried in a flat-topped truss of between 8 and 11 corollas; present, moreover, in such numbers, as to completely obscure the foliage.

Such a gem deserved to be named and introduced, Bill George choosing ‘Hampshire Belle’ for the epithet in 1990 when the hybrid was finally registered with the *IRRC*.

Thirty-plus-years on, and the cross is a focal point in the Himalayan Valley when in bloom, the dazzling display improving year on year, though the tight comportment of the shrub’s younger years has become a more open deportment, the branches spreading widely, but not yet - at least, when last visited - topping 2m. The cross moreover, whatever its parentage - *R. ponticum* and *R. roxieanum* top the suggestion list - has proved to be fully hardy, shrugging-off the recent hard winters with élan. Not only that, it is also easy to grow, and tolerant of a position in full sun or moderate shade.

Many rhodophiles have remarked on the fact that ‘Hampshire Belle’ looks very similar if not identical to a plant introduced by the German nurseryman Hans Hachmann in 1992: ‘Graziella’, as it is spelt in the *IRRC;* or ‘Graziela’, an alternative elucidation found online and elsewhere in print. This was grown and ‘selected’ by G. Eschrich of Recklinghausen, North Rhine-Westphalia, though whether after a possible visit to Hilliers with a pair of secateurs is not known. Yet the expected parentage equation is lacking from its registration entry, replaced by that ‘possibly a hybrid of *ponticum* and *roxieanum*’ suggestion. However, such potential nefariousness has been far more pointedly expressed in print by no less an authority than Ken Cox of Glendoick (*Rhododendrons & Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* 2005), who currently, I believe, has escaped any libel proceedings…


R. ‘Hampshire Belle’


R. ‘Graziella’

R. ‘Hampshire Belle’

R. ‘Crest’

The ‘Hawk’ Pride

wardii x ‘Lady Bessborough’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late April-May 5m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Amour	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	before 1942
Beaulieu	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	before 1958
Crest	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	1953
Hawk	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	1949
Hawk Buzzard	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	1989
Hawk Falcon	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	before 1970
Hawk Kestrel	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	before 1958
Hawk Merlin	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	before 1958
Jervis Bay	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	1951
Windsor Hawk	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	before 1958

The ‘Hawk’ pride of yellow-flowering rhododendron hybrids was once considered to be the finest proponents of this tone available in the genus and even though newer crosses have supplanted the purity and depth of the hue, for sheer beauty and poise, those flowers are still in a league of their own, especially when borne on the FCC-awarded ‘Crest’.

The pairing - *wardii* x ‘Lady Bessborough’ - was made twice by Lionel de Rothschild in the 1930s and it is first entered as LR 708 in the Exbury studbook, the duplicate pollination listed not quite ‘one hundred hybridisations later on, at 804’ (*Rhododendrons at Exbury,* an article written by Peter N. Barber, and published within *The Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book 1970*). The pollen provider was of course one of L de R’s own crosses, a *discolor* x *campylocarpum* combination that he - and subsequently many other hybridisers - used frequently in their complex machinations, while the clone of *R. wardii* that matured the first set of capsules was grown from seed collected near Muli, in southwest Sichuan, by Frank Kingdon-Ward during 1921 under the field number KW 4170. This plant had secured Lionel an Award of Merit from the RHS in May 1931 and it had bright yellow flowers, flushed green, with no blotch. Interestingly, that same year - indeed, on the very same day, May 19th - one of his other *wardii* specimens also secured its own AM.

Originally shown as *R. litiense,* which has now been made synonymous, and likely grown from seed collected by George Forrest, this plant too displayed unmarked yellow flowers. Moreover, given that pure colour was one of Lionel’s principal breeding goals and the only substantial difference between the two then-specific species was leaf shape - at the extremes, oblong for *R. litiense,* as opposed to broadly ovate or near orbicular for *R. wardii* - and a waxy glaucous underside to the foliage - of *R. litiense,* instead of simple pale green - dabbing both plants with ‘Lady Bessborough’ pollen would appear to have been a no-brainer.

Yet no entry in the Exbury studbook reflects such a match.

But even so, keep the possibility in mind.

Lionel died unexpectedly in January 1942, so may not have seen any of his *wardii* x ‘Lady Bessborough’ clones in flower. The revised edition of *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* published in 1979, indicates this to be the case for ‘Hawk’, which first bloomed in 1949, but W. J. Bean’s *Trees & Shrubs* reports that many of the juvenile plants began to flower around 1940. Equally, C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber - authors of *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* - muddy the waters more than a little, by telling us that once germination took place, Lionel:

> ‘required that every seedling should be grown on to flowering stage, however small or late. “Weeds grow fastest” he would say. Indeed, the celebrated ‘Hawk’ is said to have come from the smallest seedling in a pan of which he gave the rest away’.

This homily, appearing on page 29 of their work, is seemingly incompatible with the statement made just seven paragraphs later on page 30 that is reported above. Yet the two authors also record that Lionel gave ‘some clones of the celebrated Hawk grex’ to King George VI, ‘hybrids and seedlings, some of which subsequently won high awards under the skilful cultivation of Sir Eric Savill’ (*ibid.* page 19).

The ‘Hawk’ pride epithet was actually chosen by Lionel’s eldest son, Edmund, who had inherited the estate after his father’s death, and borrows one of the designations used by the Admiralty for Exbury House during World War II (the property had been commandeered to accommodate the naval planning staff responsible for organising the D-Day landings).

Exhibited from Windsor, the clone that may or may not have flowered for the first time in 1949, came from the initial *wardii* x ‘Lady Bessborough’ pairing. Technically ‘Exbury Hawk’, though now universally known as just ‘Hawk’ - with the former appellation relegated to synonymic status in the *IRRC* - its corollas are apricot in bud, opening to a pale greenish-yellow. Each is funnel-shaped, usually with 5 deeply emarginate lobes, and 5cm long by 6.5cm across. They are carried in a loose, flat-topped truss of around 10 blooms.

‘Hawk’ immediately scooped an Award of Merit for the Crown Estate Commissioners, however, it should be noted that the plants distributed under this epithet have a few small streaks of crimson at the base of the dorsal lobe, which can sometimes coalesce into a blotch, so according to Bean, they may not be the true award clone.

‘Jervis Bay’ was the next clone to bloom, its corollas more broadly funnel-shaped, a touch larger, and with slightly wavy lobe margins. They are primrose-yellow in hue and the crimson streaking is more pronounced, this sometimes a distinct blotch that separates-out into two rays. The epithet maintains the pride’s naval connection and the plant received an AM in 1951.

Next up, in 1953, was ‘Crest’, and this caused a sensation.

Because the corollas were widely-funnel-shaped, heavily textured and long lasting.

Had seven lobes rather than five or six, with these rounded at the apex.

Were carried in globular trusses of twelve, the placement of each shallow trumpet within the whole perfect.

And their hue was a clear primrose-yellow, shading deeper towards the centre, the corollas unmarked, except for the merest hint of streaking at the very base of the throat.

Members of the RHS floral committee, when their feet returned to the ground, instantly deemed the plant worthy of a First Class Certificate.

But some questioned if it really was a ‘Hawk’.

The Rothschild Rhododendrons, gives a partial answer:

> ‘It ensued from Lionel de Rothschild’s second cross, when perhaps he used a different *wardii.* This might account for the different floral style, build and quality.’

This of course matches with the account of ‘Crest’ given by Edmund de Rothschild in his “Five Favourite Rhododendrons” submission for a symposium collation published in *The Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book 1956:*

‘Perhaps the finest yellow so far raised, when this was shown at Vincent Square three years ago it was such an improvement on the other varieties of ‘Hawk’ that it was suggested by some members of the Rhododendron Committee that it was not a ‘Hawk’. In point of fact there was no doubt of it being a ‘Hawk’, but what was not generally known was that my father, the late Lionel de Rothschild, made the cross twice and it is thought that he used a different *R. wardii* on the second hybridization. This might account for the completely different make up of the flowers.’

Still holding on to that *R. litiense* thought?

Despite neither of the two quotes above mentioning such?

Or equally, Exbury never registering a cross with a *litiense* x ‘Lady Bessborough’ parentage? As would have been required, because the species still retained its specific status right through the 1950s, indeed all the way up until 1978 when the first of the Edinburgh Revision’s ‘Preliminary Synopsis’ papers was published (*Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh,* Volume 36).

So the question has to be: would Lionel *not* have considered making that second pairing with his other AM-awarded plant?

In the *Trees & Shrubs* entry for ‘Crest’, Kew’s preeminent curator - or rather the team of experts contracted to keep subsequent editions of his masterpiece up-to-date, for he died in 1947 having never seen the hybrid in flower - reports that in this case, the seed parent ‘has asserted itself over the other two parents: *R. campylocarpum* with its red eye, and *R. discolor,* which usually imparts a streaked throat to its offspring’.

Kingdon-Ward’s *R. wardii* had failed to do this with the first batch of seedlings, so perhaps the different clone used was actually not *R. wardii,* but *R. litiense* as theorised?

Documentary evidence is lacking, providing confirmation only that ‘Crest’ did indeed emerge from the second set of seedlings, and one suspects that even the geneticists might have a hard time delineating what was bred with what. One thing that is clear however: the seven lobes found on the ‘Crest’ corolla are part of the inheritance from *R. discolor*.

All ten members of the ‘Hawk’ pride are woodland rhododendrons, tree-like and with upright habits. Their foliage is retained for just one year, falling soon after the new growth begins to expand, so the framework of ascending branches found on a mature specimen can often be left bare, the shrub burdened with a decidedly sparse appearance when devoid of bloom. Morphology-wise, those transitory leaves are elliptic, oblong-elliptic or oblong-ovate in shape, and up to 11.5cm long by 6.5cm wide - the figures quoted being the maxima given for ‘Crest’ - and they may be dark green, and matt or shiny. ‘Hawk’ and ‘Jervis Bay’ have been rated hardy to -15ºC, ‘Crest’ down to -21ºC, with the latter Exbury resident ‘unaffected by frost or wind’ according to Messrs Barber and Phillips. Young plants require more cosseting, take quite a few years to begin budding-up, but then flower freely, unless grown in too much shade.

Commercial propagation via tissue culture has seen the ‘Crest’ clone being made widely available, with plants stocked by the larger garden centres and even some DIY warehouses. Sadly however, the initial batch of plantlets was grown from a shoot tip that did not come from the FCC plant, although this oversight has since been corrected. Many rhodophiles however, will still only purchase plants that have been produced traditionally from rooted cuttings, or scions grafted onto suitable understocks, as the perceived negatives associated with micro-propagated liners outweigh their lower cost. Peter Cox, in his 1993-published text *The Cultivation of Rhododendrons,* gives a full breakdown of the technique’s good and bad virtues, and this is still pertinent three decades later.


R. ‘Hawk’


R. ‘Hawk’

R. 'Hawk'


R. ‘Crest’


R. ‘Crest’


R. ‘Crest’



R. ‘Hawk Kestrel’



R. ‘Hawk Kestrel’



R. ‘Jervis Bay’

R. ‘High Sheriff’

The ‘High Sheriff’ Pride

decorum x *williamsianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April-early May 3m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
High Sheriff	F. Julian Williams	1960	2006
Tinner’s Blush	F. Julian Williams	1960	2006

A *decorum* x *williamsianum* combination would appear at first sight to be a no-brainer, indeed, so obvious a pairing that any number of hybridisers should have put pollen to style. But no. At least, not until Julian Williams of Caerhays Castle, Cornwall, the great-grandson of famed rhodophile J. C. Williams, made the match in 1960. Yet even more jaw-dropping, is the fact that the reverse combination has still to be attempted.

‘High Sheriff’ combines the best traits of both species into a dome-shaped, medium-tall shrub that is completely covered in bloom for much of April and often the first few days of May. Its flowers are funnel-campanulate bowls carried in loose, flat-topped trusses of 4 or 5 corollas, individually almost 6cm long by up to 8.5cm across at the mouth. They are 7-lobed, the margins slightly frilly, and begin life purplish-pink in the bud. Fully expanded, their hue has matured to white flushed pale purplish-pink, the tint lost with age. Small, dark purplish-pink spots are officially supposed to decorate the base of the dorsal lobe, but are barely visible. Like the flowers, the foliage is midway between the two parents, oblong-elliptic in shape, matt green in colour, and each leaf around 11.5cm long by 5cm wide. Twenty years of growth will see the shrub crossing the 2m-mark both vertically and laterally.

Introduced and registered in 2006, the epithet belatedly salutes Julian’s tenure as High Sheriff for Cornwall in 1968, while a second clone, ‘Tinner’s Blush’, with purplish-pink flowers that was unveiled at the same time, secured an Award of Merit in 2010.



R. ‘Tinner’s Blush’



R. ‘High Sheriff’

R. ‘Hotei’

‘Goldsworth Orange’ x (*souliei* x *wardii*)

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April-May 4m x 3m

In the Japanese language, the term ‘Hotei’ is the name that has been gifted to the god of happiness, his caricature, a smiling, Buddha-like figure carrying a cloth-sack bag, which in the Zen tradition is full of the sweets that he gives away to children.

Karl Sifferman probably wore much the same Cheshire cat grin across his face as those youngsters gifted their sugary treats when, for the first time, he contemplated the blooms on his new hybrid, for - to quote from the 1988 Peter and Kenneth Cox-penned *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids* - it is ‘one of the most important yellow hybrids ever raised’. And that assessment is applicable to ‘Hotei’ whether grown for its own sake, to beautify a garden, or when used as the progenitor of literally dozens of stunning offspring, the ranks of such including ‘Nancy Evans’, ‘Paprika Spiced’ and ‘Duchess of Rothesay’, to name just three from an extremely long list.

The 1953 pairing was straightforward, basically an F2 combination of four species: *R. dichroanthum* and *R. discolor,* via the Slocock Nursery’s ‘Goldsworth Orange’ hybrid; *R. souliei* and *R. wardii,* from an unnamed or unidentified cross. Yet the offspring germinated from that mating were the opposite of straightforward to grow, disliking full sun, prone to root rot and mildew, as well as to branch dieback, and unhappy if their drainage was anything but perfect. The 25% of ‘Hotei’ that is down to *R. souliei* can likely be thanked for all of these vexations, though propagation via grafting does cure the specific ills associated with the roots. However, remaining in a negative frame of mind, the hybrid also has a totally whimsical attitude to flowering: one year producing so many inflorescences that their weight bends down or twists over the branches; another, setting and opening so few buds as to be embarrassing on a mature, small-leaved rhododendron. And instead of shedding blooms long past their sell-by date, it retains them. On a positive note, even in shade, specimens will not require pinching to induce multiple vegetative bud break at each terminal node, though the resulting dense habit will lead to the loss of any lower limb that is completely shaded-out by the tight cloak of foliage above, even though individually, each narrowly elliptic, dark green leaf blade is just 12cm long by 4.5cm wide.

So why are the experts falling over themselves to praise this maleficent Raijin?

Aureolin yellow flowers.

The deepest to feature such a hue on any known rhododendron.

Of good substance, carried in balled trusses of 10 to 12 broadly campanulate corollas, each 5cm long by 6.5cm wide, and cupped by a large, irregular-lobed calyx, half the length of the bell and of the same hue, giving a near hose-in-hose effect.

And for such blooms, near anything can be forgiven or mitigated.



R. ‘Hotei’



R. ‘Hotei’


Arthur George

The 'Hydon Dawn' Pride

yakushimanum x 'Springbok'

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 May 2.5m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Hydon Ball	Arthur George	1961/1962	1968
Hydon Dawn	Arthur George	1961/1962	1968
Hydon Glow	Arthur George	1961/1962	1968
Hydon Hunter	Arthur George	1961/1962	1970
Morning Cloud	Arthur George	1961/1962	1971
Morning Magic	Arthur George	1961/1962	1971

'Hydon Dawn' is almost certainly the most well-known and widely planted hybrid that South African émigré Arthur George (1927-2010), created at his nursery near Godalming, in Surrey. It placed pollen from his very first cross 'Springbok', onto *R. yakushimanum,* in a pairing that would ultimately produce six named and registered selections, five being the recipients of an Award of Merit, two attaining RHS First Class Certificates. In an article for the 2007 Yearbook of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group, Anne George, Arthur's wife, writes of their creation:

> 'In those days - the early 1950s - courses in horticulture were few and far between and so the only way to acquire knowledge and gain experience was to work in a nursery. Slococks was nearby and they paid him the princely wage of 2/11d per hour but it was invaluable experience. It was not long before he bought his first rhododendron, the splendid *Rhododendron griersonianum* with its lovely geranium red flowers, but it was the desire to breed these magnificent shrubs that really attracted him and in no time he had hybridised *R. griersonianum* with a good form of *R. ponticum* growing in the garden. Not a very promising cross you would imagine and when it flowered after six or seven years we were not especially attracted to the vivid magenta-pink flowers, but it was a start and the plant was duly named 'Springbok' for obvious reasons!
>
> Well, 'Springbok' itself may not be a showstopper but it has a good close habit and very nice *griersonianum* type foliage; even so we would never have believed its potential as a parent. Crossed with the best form of the superb Japanese species *R. yakushimanum,* and after another long wait of six to seven years, the first plants flowered just before the Chelsea Flower Show of 1968.
>
> Never one to enthuse over his own efforts, Arthur simply dismissed these early attempts, but the ever loyal and enthusiastic Rodney Longhurst (Arthur's right-hand man for over forty years) and I took it upon ourselves to put the two plants, which we thought especially good, on the lorry to go up to Chelsea. Needless to say we were severely rapped over the knuckles but those two plants subsequently named 'Hydon Dawn' and 'Hydon Hunter' were each later awarded the AGM and 'Dawn' was immediately selected for trials at Wisley.
>
> The same cross rendered two more beautiful hybrids in 'Morning Cloud' (now also with an AGM), which was named after Sir Edward Heath's famous yacht and 'Morning Magic' AGM, which, when it first appeared at Chelsea, so attracted Lord Aberconway he called it 'Super Yak'!

R. ‘Hydon Dawn’



R. 'Hydon Dawn'



R. 'Hydon Dawn'

'All four have inherited the excellent compact habit and incredibly free flowering character of both parents. Not a year passes without them being covered in bloom. And, last year, 'Hydon Hunter' was the centre of the RHS Garden Wisley display at Chelsea.'

As the AM and FCC exhibition awards confirm, 'Hydon Dawn' is indeed a stunning rhododendron, but it is not the low-growing hybrid many authors describe, though it will usually take around a decade to first top 1m in height. Given space and sufficient light however, a mature specimen - those shown are well into their third, if not fourth decade - will develop into a classic dome shape, amply filled with foliage and covered each May in hundreds of blooms. The openly funnel-shaped corollas are carried in tight, globular trusses of up to 18 trumpets, each one 5cm long by 7.5cm across. They have slightly frilly lobe margins and when fully expanded are initially purplish-pink in tone, the hue paling around the edges, but deepening to purplish-red within the throat. A speckling of reddish-brown spots decorates the dorsal, but are barely noticeable even when the bloom colour begins to fade. And that bleaching, regrettably, is the genetic endowment 'Hydon Dawn' has inherited from its seed parent, where the deeper pink flushing of the newly opened blooms is also quickly lost, so mirroring *R. yakushimanum,* purplish-pink transforms to white, this change exacerbated if a shrub is planted in full sun, especially in the southern counties. A dappling of shade will be beneficial, though it will only marginally slow the progression, certainly not halt it, and too dense a patina will forfeit the tight, bushy habit.

The foliage on 'Hydon Dawn' is another joy, again inheriting the best characteristics of its seed parent, with the leaves narrowly elliptic in shape, gifted a pointed apex and slightly recurved margins, and a flat or sometimes convex profile. They are each up to 11cm long by around 4cm in width, dark green and glossy above, with a thin, pale brown indumentum below. Moreover, as the blades first extended from their buds, they are wrapped in a silvery-cream tomentum that persists for some weeks. And equally, the shrub's bushy mien is thanks to each of those leaves being held for at least two years, with some retained for three and a distinct minority for four.

Hardiness is more than adequate to allow 'Hydon Dawn' to succeed in any UK garden where the soil is suitable for rhododendrons and young plants will begin setting flower buds at an early age and continue doing so, year after year after year, in ever increasing numbers, with the best sited mature specimens, annually bedecked in bloom from head to foot.

Of the other clones, three deserve mention:

'Hydon Hunter' is slightly taller-growing than its sisters, with a more upright habit, and of the six named registrations, it has the deepest toned flowers, opening not white flushed light purplish-pink as detailed in the *IRRC,* but 'near spiraea red' as correctly stated in the 1988 Peter and Kenneth Cox-authored *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids*. The compact, dome-shaped trusses will inevitably fade out to white, but when first expanded are scintillating and they hold their darker toned pigmentation longer than the other clones.

'Morning Cloud' is one of the lesser-known member of the pride, the white-flushed-pink flowers carried in a full rounded truss of up to 18 openly funnel-shaped corollas that soon transform to cream. The foliage is narrowly elliptic in shape, dark glossy green in colour, with a distinct convex profile and a woolly matt of pale brown indumentum cloaking the underside.

'Morning Magic' holds 16 campanulate to moderately funnel-shaped corollas in each of its globular trusses, these coloured white with a pale pink flush at first, and spotted pale orange-yellow on the dorsal lobe.



R. ‘Hydon Hunter’





R. ‘Hydon Hunter’



R. ‘Hydon Hunter’



R. ‘Morning Cloud’



R. ‘Morning Magic’



R. ‘Morning Cloud’



R. ‘Morning Magic’

R. 'Idealist'
wardii x 'Exbury Naomi'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 Mid April-May 3m x 3m

The entry for R. 'Idealist' in *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* (C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber, 1967), not only describes the shrub as 'one of the most beautiful rhododendrons ever raised', but indicates that as herein, the authors were running out of novel adjectives to describe Lionel de Rothschild's bevy of hybrid masterpieces. Which, without a shadow of a doubt, 'Idealist' most certainly is. The corolla colour, while pale, is pure; the foliage, a perfect foil for the sublimely balanced flower truss; and the habit, dignified and assured, without a trace of flamboyance.

LR 903 in the stud book, 'Idealist' is a *wardii* x 'Exbury Naomi' pairing, the only registered rhododendron with such a parentage, as 'Falkner Allison' and 'Tosca' - made respectively and separately by Edmund de Rothschild and Francis Hanger - reverse the equation, while Knap Hill's 'Vienna' opts for the 'Naomi' clone. So despite numerous authors suggesting the cross was repeated at Exbury in the 1950s, or grouping 'Idealist' and the other three hybrids together, the geneticists will all shake their heads and go on to explain that the mitochondria and chloroplast cells are completely different, the exclusive gift of the female parent. And that they directly influence character differences in the four plants concerned. Peter and Kenneth Cox rightly describe 'Vienna' as an inferior clone in their 1988-published *Encyclopedia of Rhododendrons Hybrids*. It is. This partly because the mitochondria that power that hybrid's cells - as with the other two 'Exbury Naomi' x *wardii* pairings - are not as efficient as those held within 'Idealist'. This is because they are the gift of *R. griffithianum* - via 'Kewense', though 'Aurora', to 'Naomi' - and not the largesse of *R. wardii*. And as the oft-made comparison between 'Kewense' and 'Loderi' makes clear, they also come from a far poorer form of that species as well.

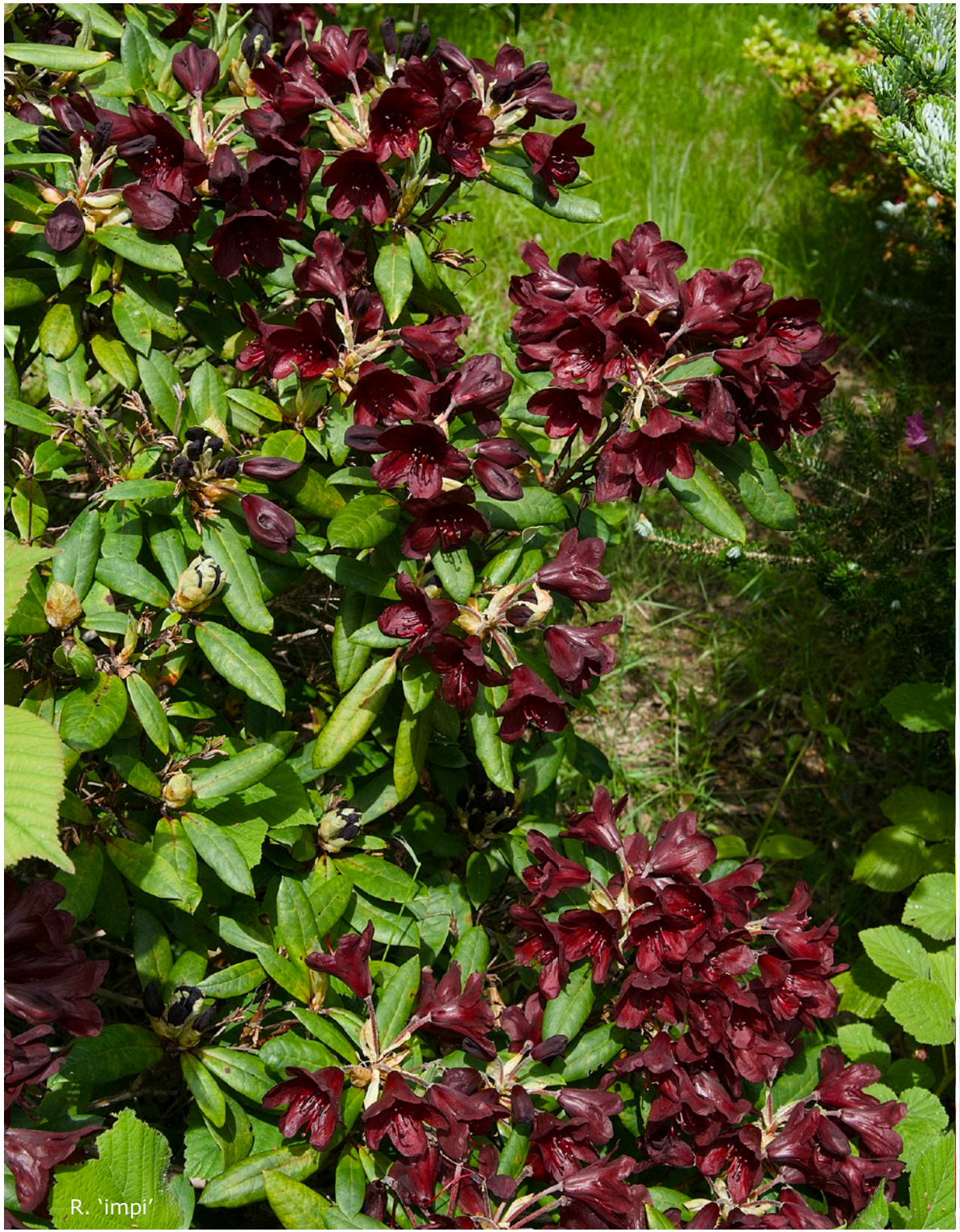
It was the greenish-yellow-flowering AM-winning form of *R. wardii* that provided the organelles for 'Idealist'. Lionel had grown the plant from Frank Kingdon-Ward's KW 4170 collection, made near Muli in southwestern Sichuan in 1921, and the inheritance is immediately apparent in the habit, as well as in the flowers. For the hybrid's constitution is vigorous, yet it rarely tops 3m in height and develops into a neat and impeccably proportioned dome formed from an upright-ascending framework of stout branches. The leaves are glossy green, oblong-elliptic in shape, to around 15cm in length, connected to the stems by purple petioles, a distant genetic echo from *R. fortunei*. The flowers are coral-pink in bud, this tone present as a distinct flush when the corollas first open, but soon completely submerged beneath a clear greenish-yellow, this hue then pristine across the bowl except for two small crimson rays at the base of the dorsal lobe. The corollas are widely-campanulate, reflective of *R. wardii,* held on long, erect pedicels, ten to twelve per each perfectly formed truss, individual funnels displaying five through seven lobes, an inconsistency apparent even within the same inflorescence.

'Idealist' is hardy down to -18ºC, so is sufficiently robust to cope with all but the UK's coldest, inland gardens. The blooms, produced in profusion on mature specimens, require a dappling of shade to avoid being bleached by the sun, though as they open from mid April onwards, there is also the added risk that they could be hit by a late spring frost if outwith the protection of a sheltered woodland.

Phillips and Barber declare 'Idealist' in full bloom to be an arresting and moving sight, so foregoing any one-upmanship in superlatives, the cross is simply one of the most outstanding creations in Lionel de Rothschild's legacy of rhododendron hybrids. And when covered in bloom, it will stop you in your tracks.


R. 'Idealist'


R. 'Idealist'



R. 'impi'

R. 'Impi'

didymum x 'Moser's Maroon'

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 June 1.6m x 2m

'Indian Lake' is the colour chart name for the pigmentation that flushes the corollas of R. 'Impi', a black-red tone that gives the shrub the darkest flowers of any rhododendron hybrid so far registered. When he made that *didymum* x 'Moser's Maroon' cross, Lionel de Rothschild could hardly have been unaware of the likely floral end result, but the combination has also delivered an upright, medium-sized, compact bush with fine foliage.

The hybrid has leaves that are narrowly oblong-elliptic in shape, deep green above and glabrous below, with a convex cross section. Held for two years, sometimes three, the branch structure is therefore well-clothed with foliage when bare of bloom, but a position in full sun will be needed in northern counties and Scottish gardens to achieve the best form, while elsewhere, light dappled shade will be a de rigueur imperative.

Flowering is usually profuse. Each truss a loose and open arrangement of between ten and twelve funnels, the corollas slightly frilly around the margins and up to 5.5cm across at the mouth when fully expanded. Those blooms open late in the season, usually towards the middle of June, but occasionally slightly earlier and gleam when backlit by the sun, the sprinkling of black spots across the dorsal lobes only then becoming apparent. Each long pedicel supporting one of the bells is coloured in a matching plum-red tone, as are the petioles, while the flower stalks also sport a coating of short, white, ciliate hairs.

The hybrid has but one fault: the first few corollas to open within each truss are often over and ready to be discarded just as the remainder have finally expanded fully.



R. 'impi'

R. ‘Iona Frost Pennington’

R. 'Iona Frost Pennington'

R. wardii hybrid

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

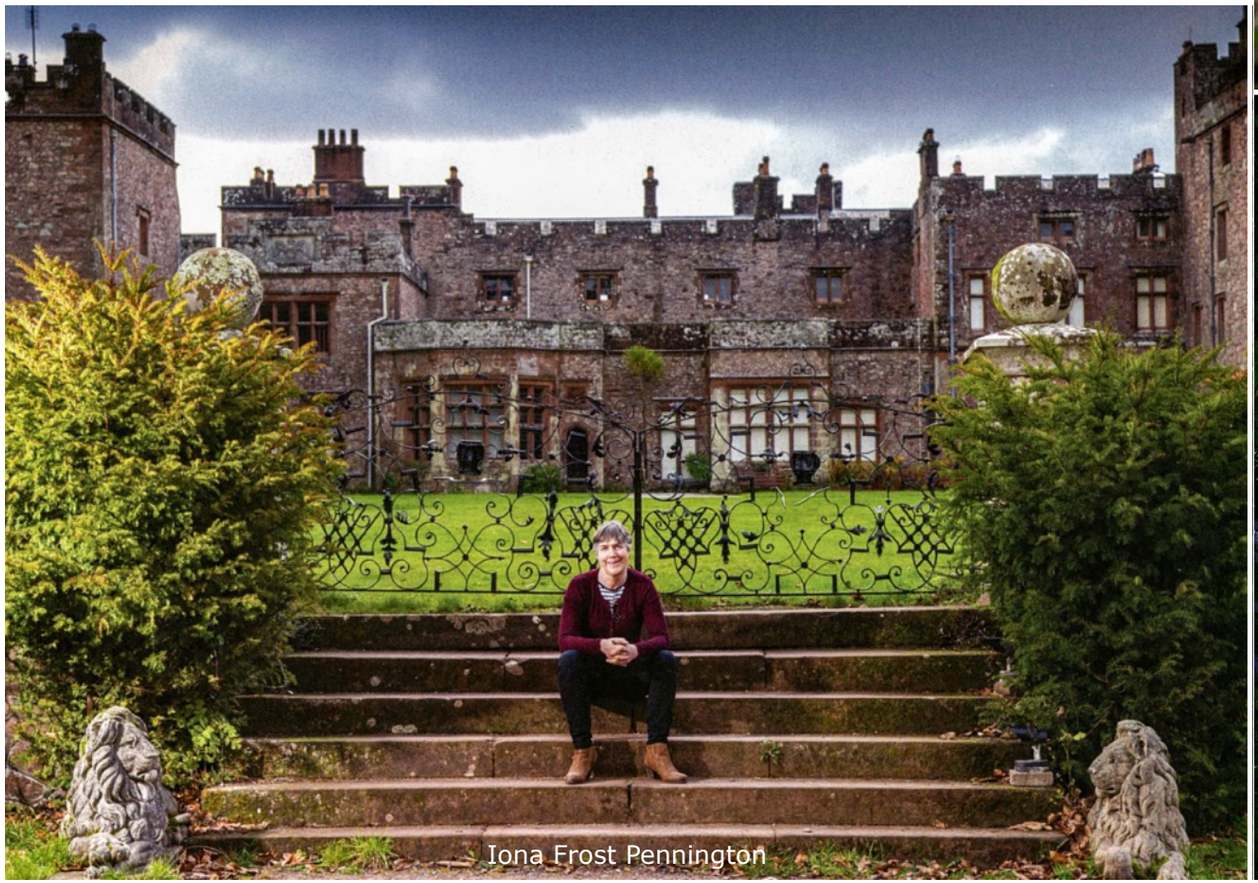
H5-6 Late April-May 5m x 4m

Named for the current châtelaine of Muncaster Castle by her grandfather, Sir William Pennington-Ramsden, R. 'Iona Frost Pennington' is one of the most beautiful crosses to be found growing in those gardens. Early May will find the shrub completely bedecked in a mantle of milky-yellow, the influence of *R. wardii* clear, not only in the flowers, but in the foliage and the carriage. Its partner in the pairing remains unknown, but the consensus view is a hybrid rather than another species.

The shrub is a medium-tall dome, a criss-cross of branches that retains a compact demeanour despite its height and spread, yet when devoid of bloom, is well clothed with dark green blades. Those leaves are ovate-elliptic through oblong in shape, often with a slightly concave profile, carried in a distinctive whorl of spear points at each branch tip, and they are held for up to two years, so fully cloak the framework. The flowers are creamy-yellow in bud, tinged pink at the tip, opening sulphur-yellow shading deeper towards the throat, with a small crimson-red blotch of speckles and spots at the very base of the dorsal lobe. Each seven-lobed funnel-shaped corolla has wavy lobe margins and is held in a flat-topped to rounded truss of seven to nine trumpets. The style too bears witness to its *R. wardii* inheritance, displaying red glandular hairs along its length.



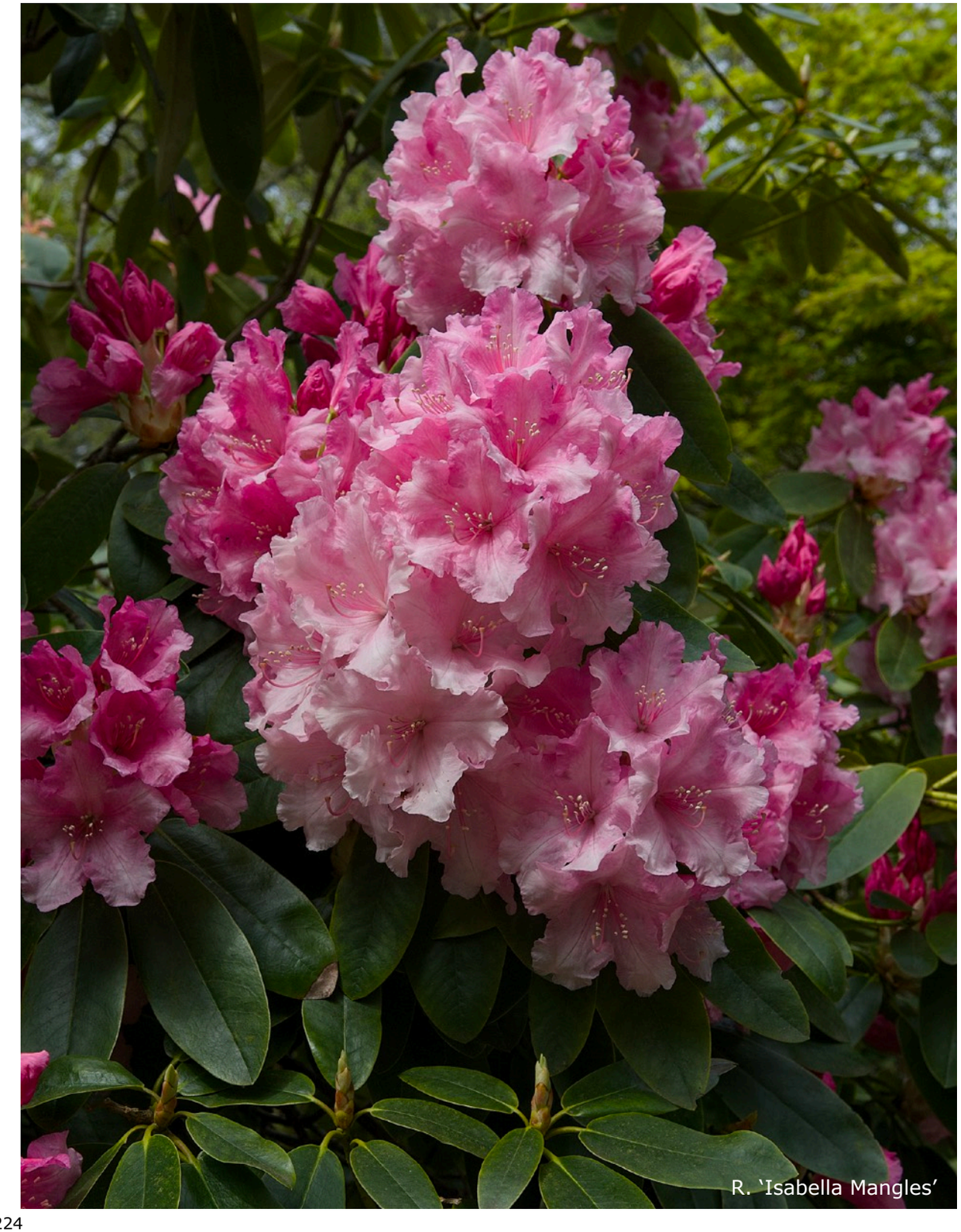
R. 'Iona Frost Pennington'



Iona Frost Pennington



R. 'Iona Frost Pennington'



R. ‘Isabella Mangles’

R. ‘Isabella Mangles’
R. griffithianum hybrid

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	Mid April-May	5m x 4m

‘Two years ago I had the pleasure of visiting the garden of Mr H. A. Mangles at Littleworth, Tongham, Surrey, where there is an exceptionally rich collection of Rhododendrons, among them being many hybrids raised by his brother, the late Mr J. H. Mangles, of Haslemere. There are many Griffithii crosses among them, and it is to be hoped that they may be multiplied and distributed. The finest of these hybrids, however, is still in the garden of Mrs J. H. Mangles, at Valewood, Haslemere, where it is represented by an enormous, well-furnished bush about 12 feet high, which, when I saw it in May two years ago, was truly magnificent, almost every branch bearing a large, well setup head, racemose, as all the Griffithii hybrids are, the flowers well-formed, and their colour a beautiful soft pink. It is named Isabella Mangles.’

William Watson, Curator of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, wrote those words in 1902 for an article on hybrid rhododendrons published in *The Gardeners’ Chronicle* (Series, 3, Volume 31, page 368). Another doyen of the genus, John Guille Millais, also waxed lyrical and rated the hybrid highly, yet ‘Isabella Mangles’ has to date not engendered such rapture in those members of the RHS Floral Committee responsible for either the Award of Merit or the First Class Certificate. To their enduring shame: for the cross is no less beautiful than ‘Alice’, ‘Betty Wormald’, ‘Countess of Derby’ or ‘Pink Pearl’, indeed, these four and the host of equally lesser confections upon which they have bestowed their munificence. It was also the hybrid that James Henry Mangles chose to name for his wife, Isabella Sarah Mangles (1838-1909), and the significance of that choice speaks volumes.

The shrub is a well-branched, perfectly proportioned dome, filled with shiny, dark green leaves. Each blade is oblong through elliptic in shape, up to 23cm long and 8cm wide, glabrous above, but with a thin cloak of hairs below, and held for two years, with a few leaves extending their tenure into a third season. The flower truss is flat-topped or rounded, composed of between ten and twelve widely funnel-campanulate bells, each around 6cm long by 8cm across, five-lobed, the rounded margins of which are slightly frilly. They are vivid purplish-red in the bud, the tone lightening to rosy-pink as the corollas fully expand, the hue darker on the outside. A creamy-white mottling then begins to spread across the whole, restricted at first to the edges of the dorsal lobe and along the veins, but in time transcendent, the blooms almost completely milky just before they are discarded and fall. Yet throughout the colour transformation, the stamen filaments and style remain flushed with pink, the anthers ivory-white.

Another Kew alumnus, W. J. Bean, confirms the hybrid’s status as ‘one of the finest creations of James Henry Mangles’, suggesting that the shrub is ‘the result of crossing *R. griffithianum* with some hardy hybrid’ (*Trees & Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles,* online edition), and this would certainly account for the widely assigned -20ºC hardiness rating.

In their 1988 *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* Peter and Kenneth Cox write that there has been much improvement in the hybrids available since ‘Isabella Mangles’ was first introduced, and while that is undoubtedly true, 5m-tall mature specimens of this *griffithianum* hybrid do not invert their flower trusses through 180º or slew them across the ground in a tangled melee because the branchlets are not strong enough to bear their weight. As a certain AM and FCC-awarded commercial standard is wont to do?

R. ‘Isabella Mangles’

R. ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’

The ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’ Pride

arboreum x *ponticum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Late April-May 6m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Comte de Rambuteau	Paillet	before 1843	1843
Comtesse de Vogue	Paillet	before 1843	1843
Duc de Crussol	Paillet	before 1843	1843
Elysianum	Paillet	before 1843	1843
Gabriele Liebig	Ludwig Leopold Liebig	before 1863	1863
Ivery’s Scarlet	James Ivery & Son	before 1872	1872
Louis-Philipee	Bertin	around 1842	1842
Rendall’s Scarlet	Rendall	before 1912	1912
Smithii Album	Trillon	before 1843	1843

Mature specimens of R. ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’, identified by the fine red flower trusses that turn the shrub into a blaze of fire from late April into May rather than a label, will be found in most of the UK’s long-established rhododendron gardens. That said, rarely will the shrub be found in commerce, despite the obvious visual appeal, with even the specialist nurseries devoid of stock. Yet outwith the British Isles, the plant emporia of Australia, New Zealand and the west coast of North America regularly propagate the hybrid, so highly is it rated by the cognoscenti of those countries.

James Ivery & Son, nurserymen, seedsmen and florists, of Dorking and Reigate, were responsible for putting pollen to style sometime during the 1850s, and a blood-red clone of *R. arboreum* is known to have been the seed parent. *R. ponticum* is the presumed other half of the equation - by dint of doyen consensus; the increased hardiness; an undertone of mauve apparent in the flowers - and it completes the officially sanctioned parental equation in the *IRRC*. James Ivery was a ‘highly respected’ nurseryman, with close to thirty evergreen azalea registrations to his name - ‘the choicest collection of ‘Azalias Indica’ in the kingdom’ according to *The Gardeners’ Chronicle* - and an expert on British and other hardy ferns. He was also ‘a remarkably quiet, unassuming man’ according to the obituary the journal published on August 10th, 1872, and from which the quotes are taken, noting that his death just eight days before, was at the age of just 48.

‘Noblemen, Gentlemen, & others engaged in planting’ were encouraged by the Ivery nursery advertisements to visit and view the stock - Sundays excepted, of course - so amongst the purchases of roses, evergreen and deciduous flowering shrubs that rolled out through the gates, filling the carriages of the landed gentry, so too went their new, scarlet-flowering rhododendron. Yet J. G. Millais reports in the 1917 first volume of *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* that this first local distribution was not without problem, as:

> ‘The plant does not seem to have been perfectly hardy or it may have been grafted on unsuitable stock, for the whole of the plants issued, except one, died in a severe winter about the year 1860. This one fortunate survivor flourished in the garden of Kitlands belonging to Sir L. Heath, but the exceptional beauty of this plant remained in obscurity until Sir Edmund Loder happened to see it in flower one day about the year 1890, and at once appreciated its merits. He obtained a layer and in time issued it to his friends in various parts of England’.

‘Ivery’s Scarlet’ is a tall growing shrub, ultimately forming a small upright tree, but with a more slender girth than many of its fellows. The leaves are long and narrow, 14cm in length by just 3.5cm wide, oblong-elliptic through elliptic-oblanceolate in shape, tapered at both ends, often with a V-shaped cross-section, dark green above, paler below, with the thinnest wash of indumentum across the underside. Held for a year, until the new leaves are fully unfurled, but rarely longer, the blades usually hang downwards from the stem tips, the ensemble adequately cloaking the top half of an aged geriatric specimen, but leaving the lower branches and trunk exposed and bare.

The flower trusses are dense and compact, tight balls annually produced in profusion and holding between 12 and 14 broadly campanulate bells, each one 4cm long by up to 6.5cm across at the mouth, crimson-scarlet in colour, with dark brown speckles on the three dorsal lobes and a quintet of black-crimson nectar pouches at the base of the throat.

When brightly illuminated, the corollas of ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’ glow, showing no tonal hint of their *ponticum* inheritance, but in shade, that tinge becomes more obvious. Equally, although fortified by Iberian or Turkish blood, mature specimens still require the shelter of a woodland glade to thrive, especially along the east coast, despite the fact that they are tolerant of full sun and even high wind, as an exposed-to-the-Atlantic-gales senior citizen set on the hillside at Arduaine Gardens on the west coast of Scotland vividly demonstrates. Yet they will succumb if temperatures drop much below -15°C.



R. ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’


R. ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’


R. ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’


R. ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’

R. ‘Ivery’s Scarlet’

R. ‘Jalisco Eclipse’

The ‘Jalisco’ Pride

‘Lady Bessborough’ x ‘Dido’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Late May-June 3m x 3.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Jalisco	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1942
Jalisco Eclipse	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1948
Jalisco Elect	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1948
Jalisco Emblem	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1948
Jalisco Goshawk	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1954
Jalisco Janet	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1948
Jalisco Orange	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1960
Jubilant	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1957
Lindberg	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1954

Like many of the rhododendron hybrid prides described herein, officially, there is no actual plant that can be associated with the ‘Jalisco’ epithet despite the entry in the table above, for the appellation is a coverall for a set of eight award-winning selections from a ‘Lady Bessborough’ x ‘Dido’ cross that was made by Lionel de Rothschild at Exbury in the late 1930s. That a whole troop of hybridisers have made their own pairings with this non-existent taxon - including many famous names who really should have known better - is testament to how flawed the grex-group concept really was once exposed to basic human nature. And even the registered clones flaunt the rules: ‘Jalisco Jubilant’ and ‘Jalisco Lindberg’ respectively made synonyms of ‘Jubilant’ and ‘Lindberg’ in the *IRRC* instead of the reverse, though the registrar’s hands are decidedly tied by the whims of history.

Of course, the plants themselves are cracking and among Lionel de Rothschild’s finest creations, the pairing recorded as LR 833 in the Exbury studbook.

Basically dome-like in habit, from 2.5 to 3m high and a little more in width, the upright-ascending branches form a fairly open structure despite the whorl of quite large, matt green leaves at each tip. Actual foliage shape and size varies between the selections: 16.5cm long by 6.5cm wide and narrowly elliptic for ‘Jalisco Eclipse’; obovate and 15cm by 5cm for ‘Jalisco Elect’; ellipses just 12.5 by 5cm for ‘Jubilant’. The trusses average between 7 and 10 blooms each, are flat-topped and open, sometimes pendulous, with only ‘Jubilant’ clustering 12 to 14 corollas into a more tightly packed globe. Their profile is funnel-campanulate, sometimes widely so, or tubular-funnel-shaped, with seven lobes, between 6.5 and 9.5cm across when fully expanded, though the acknowledged star of the group, the FCC-awarded ‘Jalisco Goshawk’, has blooms that stretch to 12cm between opposite lobe tips. Of waxy substance, the trumpets vary between primrose and buttercup-yellow, some clones showing tints of pink, their dorsal lobes often spotted or speckled crimson, with a similarly hued blotch at the base of the tube. Red-flushed pedicels support the flowers of two of the named selections.

King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (later, The Queen Mother), along with their two daughters, were frequent visitors to Exbury in the 1930s and they would often depart with gifts of hybrids or seedlings. A tray of ‘Jalisco’ juveniles thus arrived at Windsor and was placed into the care of Sir Eric Savill and later overseen by Hope Findlay, amongst these the clones that would later be named and introduced as ‘Eclipse’, ‘Elect’ and ‘Goshawk’.

Cultivation is usually without problem despite a couple of the selections being prone to powdery mildew infection. Hardiness is sufficient for the mildest sites along the east coast, although some mature specimens in Kent are known to have succumbed in the hard winter of 1984-85 and replacement plants may have suffered a similar fate in more recent times. A modicum of shade in southern gardens will preserve the depth of flower colour, though too much will adversely effect that usually compact habit. A sheltered position in full sun will assure prodigious flower bud production in northwestern locales, evidenced by specimens domiciled in Cumbria and Argyll.

As to the pride’s epithet:

It appears to have been borrowed from the Mexican state on that country’s west-central Pacific-coast, as despite 54,100,000 possible results being available in just 0.6 seconds at the click of a mouse, the multitude of restaurants boasting authentic refried cuisine that were displayed, along with a newly-formed drugs cartel, have been discounted.



R. ‘Jalisco Eclipse’



R. ‘Jalisco Elect’



R. ‘Jalisco Goshawk’



R. ‘Jalisco Janet’



R. ‘Jubilant’

R. ‘Jubilant’

R. 'John Basford'

R. ‘John Basford’
campanulatum x *falconeri*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 April 6m x 8m

Glance down the alphabetical list of registered hybrids in the *IRRC,* along with its many supplements, and you will be shaking your head, somewhat puzzled. As in between ‘John Barr Stevenson’ and ‘John Bennett Poe’, missing will be an entry for R. ‘John Basford’. Nor will you come across a *campanulatum x falconeri* pairing, as no one has registered a cross with this parentage. But wander around the woodland garden at Brodick Castle on the Isle of Arran in April and several such mastodons will stop you in your tracks with their simply ravishing display of flowers and outstanding foliage.

Those blades are mid-green in hue, elliptically shaped, quite large in size, fairly stiff, with a thin fawn to pale brown indumentum underneath. The campanulate corollas set above them are white, with a small but distinctive purple-black blotch at the tube base on each lobe, the clusters arranged in flat-topped or globular trusses of 18 to 20 or more funnels per inflorescence. Mature specimens of the cross vary between 6 and 8m tall, with the largest having a domed habit and spread of 8m or more. And every couple of years, those trees become almost overladen with bloom, as illustrated.

That they are the result of a directed pollination carried out by John Basford during his 33-year tenure as head gardener at Brodick is not in doubt, nor their parentage, which is engraved on labels affixed to their branches. The only thing missing is an appropriate epithet. And so herein, a liberty has been taken: a perfect exemplar provided.


R. ‘John Basford’


R. ‘John Basford’


R. ‘John Basford’

R. ‘Karkov’

R. ‘Karkov’

griersonianum x ‘Red Admiral’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H4-5	April	4m x 3m

The registered colour of R. ‘Karkov’ is carmine-rose, but as the photographs confirm, there is much more red in the tone than the official description implies, a not surprising state of affairs given that two out of the three species that comprise its lineage - *R. arboreum, R. griersonianum* and *R. thomsonii* - are somewhat noted for their crimson-hued blooms, and this despite the pair each only making up 25% of the gene pool.

Lionel de Rothschild’s hybrid was introduced in 1947 to critical acclaim and the globular trusses of sixteen large, funnel-shaped corollas, immediately scored an Award of Merit from the RHS. Individually, the five lobes of each flower are liberally spotted darker, but the wash of speckles is muted, never becoming a distraction. Taller-growing than many texts report, often topping 3m in time, with a few specimens now approaching 4m in height, the shrubs are generally well-cloaked by their mid-green-hued, narrowly-elliptic leaves, each blade around 15cm long with a thinly-plastered fawn indumentum below, though this is often shed by maturity.

Two negatives should be highlighted however:

Leaf spot can sometimes disfigure the foliage, any detriment basically visual and often negligible, while hardiness levels have been inherited from the seed parent, so ‘Karkov’ will only succeed long-term when sited in gardens along the west coast or in sheltered woodland establishments in the south.

The ‘Karkov’ epithet is borrowed from a city in eastern Ukraine that today is more usually spelt Kharkiv. It was virtually raised to the ground over the course of four battles in the Second World War between Nazi and Soviet forces, and if that wasn’t enough, the second-largest city in Ukraine has returned to the headlines first due to Russian-sponsored unrest in 2014 - the regional administration buildings were temporarily taken over by President Putrid’s stooges, for instance, who of course, loudly proclaimed themselves to be locals, though as they had first mistakenly stormed an opera and ballet theatre, knowledge of their immediate neighbourhood was clearly lacking - and again when the full Russian assault and invasion of the country began in February 2022.

Two-hundred-and-fifty miles to the west of Kharkiv lies the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, and it provided the appellation for another Rothschild cross - though again with the old spelling, so ‘Kiev’ - this plant possibly having the darkest red flowers found on any rhododendron hybrid, while a dormant volcano three-thousand-six-hundred miles directly south, namely Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the highest mountain in Africa, supplied the moniker for another. Both are mentioned here because individual entries are absent - this despite glowing accolades and each winning a slew of awards, plus regularly featuring in the breeding experiments of other hybridisers - for the degree of black sooty spotting on their flowers - an inheritance from *R. elliottii* - is not only excessive, it is visually diverting. So while from a distance their blooms are an undoubted marvel - huge blood-red globes, luminous when backlit by the sun - viewed up-close, that pox across the corollas is near Merrickian in the former, and unprepossessing at the very least, in the latter.

Habit too is a factor for their non-inclusion: ‘Kiev’ leggy and lank; ‘Kilimanjaro’ poorly branched in addition. ‘Karkov’, while upright and open, is usually more compact and bushier, producing better, rounded specimens, and this critique is echoed by the authors of *The Rothschild Rhododendrons*. The flower buds of ‘Kilimanjaro’ are also erratic, the Herculean trusses that carried-off an FCC in 1947 only duplicated when the previous season’s growth cycle has benefited from absolutely perfect climatic conditions.



R. ‘Karkov’



R. ‘Karkov’

R. ‘Kluis Sensation’

R. 'Kluis Sensation'

'Britannia' x unknown

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late May-June 2m x 3m

Few rhododendrons with self-serving superlatives in their epithets actually match those definitions when in bloom in our gardens: the 'Triumphs' are rarely consistent year on year; the 'Sensations' anything but; with many 'Souvenirs' an outright embarrassment to their honorees today. One 'Sensation' that does lives up to its name however, is the R. 'Britannia' hybrid introduced by Anthony Kluis in the early 1940s. This opens its flowers in late May, and they are fabulous: scarlet-red globes of eighteen funnels, spotted brownish-black on the dorsal, with wavy lobe margins. The matt green leaves providing the foil for those blooms are oblanceolate in shape, concave in profile and up to 12.5cm long and 5cm wide. Moreover, they remain on the bush for two years or more and are sun and heat tolerant, which with the high H6 hardiness rating allows the hybrid to be planted in locales where most other red-flowering rhododendrons would quickly give up the ghost.

'Kluis Sensation' is therefore justly popular with the buying public and quite widely available from the specialist nurseries and some garden centres, yet it lacks either of the formal RHS exhibition awards despite these being gifted to the much less impressive 'Kluis Triumph', which really isn't. Peter and Ken Cox make the point in their 1988 *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* writing that 'it is odd that 'Triumph' has received all the awards, while the easier, far better grower 'Sensation' has none, surely a sign of the failure of the UK award system to take account of performance'. Perhaps the members of the RHS's floral committee took notice of those words, because in 1993, they bestowed a revived Award of Garden Merit on 'Kluis Sensation', which it also retained following the 2013 review, though that is no guarantee for its longterm future status.

Anthony Kluis (1880-1964), was a Dutch nurseryman, based in Boskoop, who emigrated to the United States in the early 1950s and there began a new business in Marlboro, New Jersey. Reporting his death at the age of 83 in the American Rhododendron Society Journal, his son Rudolph writes that it was during the First World War that the breeding programme to produce red-flowered rhododendrons suitable for the Dutch and English climates began. And the results of that initiative speak for themselves: 'El Alamein', 'General D. Eisenhower', 'Kluis Sensation', 'Kluis Triumph', 'Spitfire' and 'Winston Churchill' – all named and introduced at the end of the Second World War and highly rated (the 'Triumph' clone excepted). Indeed, as Frederick Street writes in his 1965-published book *Rhododendrons,* 'Kluis Sensation' is 'probably the best red hardy hybrid' and 'General Eisenhower', the 'best growing tall red'. Yet despite its cultivation difficulties, 'Kluis Triumph' is credited as being 'comparable to no other red'. One can only hope that such was a typically British referral to its slew of negatives.

Street was in fact the first nurseryman to import the hybrids into the UK during 1947 and questioned Anthony Kluis on their parentage, reporting on their conversation in 1954's *Hardy Rhododendrons:*

> 'He would only tell me that they originate from 'Mrs R. S. Holford'. Now that I know them well I can say that this original parentage is a long way back - there are many missing links'.

With regard to 'Kluis Sensation', the author adds that:

> 'It is only in this variety that I have been able to see a trace of Mr Kluis's suggested parentage' and that only in 'the way the truss expands – the bud swells, the colour shows, a flower or two expands at the base of the bud and it seems as if the complete truss will develop piecemeal – but in a few days all the flowers are open forming an effective whole'.

Alternative stabs at the lineage include the *IRRC* combination given opposite, along with an 'unnamed griffithianum hybrid' augmentation as the pollen provider, which is often offered by other sources.



R. 'Kluis Sensation'


R. ‘Kokardia’

The ‘Kokardia’ Pride

‘Humboldt’ x ‘Direktor E. Hjelm’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 Late May-June 2m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Hachmann’s Ornament	Hans Hachmann	1957	1978
Kokardia	Hans Hachmann	1957	1978

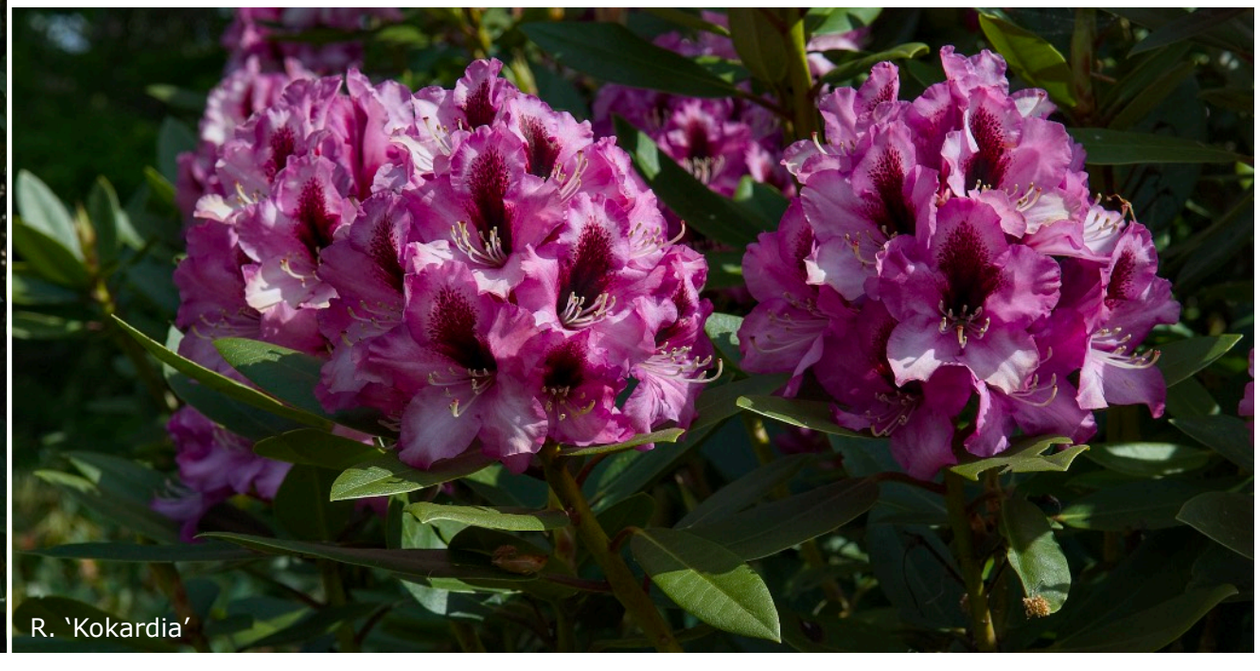
Only one word is needed to describe the flowers of ‘Kokardia’ - brazen.

A selection from Hans Hachmann’s 1957 ‘Humboldt’ x ‘Direktor E. Hjelm’ pairing, which also gave the far more restrained ‘Hachmann’s Ornament’, ‘Kokardia’ was apparently one of the German nurseryman’s favourite creations, even if it does throw any shred of visual subtlety to the winds.

The blooms are carried in tight, rounded to conical trusses of 12 to 17 widely-flared funnels, each corolla up to 4.5cm long and near 6cm across. Their colour is a strong reddish-purple when first open, strikingly blotched reddish-black. Of course with age, beginning on the ventral lobes margins, the hue fades through pink to near white, but for two weeks or more ‘Kokardia’ will be an out-and-out attention grabber.

The foliage is elliptic-ovate in shape, pointed at the apex and tapering at the base, dark matt green above, paler below and with a faint trace of indumentum. Moreover, the leaves remain attached for three years or more, giving the shrub a quite dense and bushy mien, though if placed in anything but very light shade in northern gardens, long internodal growth will result, which will open up the framework. Perfectly sited, the tallest upright branch on a mature specimen will graze the 2m mark, with the spread extending to 3m, or perhaps a touch more.

Leaf spot appears to be the only minor negative.


R. ‘Kokardia’

R. ‘Kokardia’



Halfdan Lem

R. 'Lem's Cameo'
'Dido' x 'Anna'

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5-6	May	3m x 4m

"The Cadillac of the Rhododendron Industry".
"Queen of Rhododendrons".
"The plant Rhodoholics would kill for".

Three oft-used quotes to illustrate the view held by most rhodophiles: that 'Lem's Cameo' is the ultimate rhododendron hybrid, perfect in form, foliage and flower.

The ovule that would generate so much press began life in a seed capsule matured on a bush of R. 'Dido', the Eustace Wilding *dichroanthum* x *decorum* pairing of 1934 vintage. This had been pollinated by granules from 'Anna', a plant Halfdan Lem himself had raised from seed that had been sent to him in 1939 by Fred Rose, then the head gardener at Townhill Park, who had been in regular contact with Lem since the early 1930s (both were members of the Rhododendron Association). At the start of World War II, when Great Britain's survival seemed at its most precarious, Rose decided to cover his bases.

Speaking at the RHS Rhododendron Conference held a decade later in 1949, Townhill's head gardener reported that:

> 'In 1939 we made a considerable number of carefully thought out crosses from which we expected good results. Then came the Second World War. We did sow the 1939 seeds and the plants were put into nursery beds, but they received no further attention and as a result, we lost many of these crosses. Townhill has since been sold and very many of the plants I prized so much are distributed over the country. It is interesting to record however, that I sent seed of most of the 1939 crosses to a correspondent in Seattle, Washington.'

One of those crosses arose from a 'Norman Gill' x 'The Honourable Jean Marie de Montague' pairing, and the sole selected seedling from the germination was the plant Halfdan Lem named for his wife, Anna (1895-1995). And despite going off at a tangent, there is a fine story to recount on how that came about:

A visitor to the Lem nursery was waxing lyrical on the qualities of 'Diana', the yellow-flowering Koster hybrid that is actually named 'Diane'. Lem's patience soon wore thin as the eulogy continued, so breaking-in to the flow he said, " 'Diana' is nice but you should see my 'Anna'! ", and then guided his customer to the rose-pink blooms of the seedling he had grown from Townhill. Learning of the christening came as a complete surprise to Anna Lem, who, to the end of her life, remained unsure if her husband had planned all along to name the hybrid for her, or the choice was just a spur of the moment decision taken to end the bothersome verbal blather.

Back on subject, the *IRRC* entry for 'Lem's Cameo' shows that the 'Dido' x 'Anna' pairing was made in 1956.

Just four seedlings from those that germinated were grown-on to maturity, with three of these proving inferior to the fourth clone when they bloomed, so they were discarded. Edwin Brockenbrough reports that the soon-to-be-named 'Lem's Cameo' first flowered in 1959, which might indicate a slightly earlier pollination date than that given despite the fact that hybrid is now known to bloom well as a youngster. Or alternatively, just like John Standish a century earlier, Halfdan had been top-grafting. It should also be noted that the flowers on juvenile plants are smaller in size than the trusses borne on mature specimens, with the branch framework needing to top the 1m-height mark before those inflorescence dimensions are maximised.

Between seventeen and twenty widely funnel-campanulate corollas are gathered into every domed truss or - should other reports prove to be more accurate than the *IRRC* registration text - as many as twenty-two through twenty-five. Each is around 5cm long by 9cm across and has six to seven wavy-edged lobes. In bud, their hue is deep purplish-pink, which remains the colour flushing the outer surface, but inside they open with the top of the throat stained pale yellowish-pink, the pigments darkening as they spread out across the lobes, becoming creamy-pink at the margins. A small blotch of vivid red or crimson-red emerges from the short and narrow tube at the base of the dorsal lobes, a scattering of similarly toned spots climbing higher. Over time as they age, those initial corolla colours fade, pale yellowish-pink becoming creamy-white.

The foliage too has its own colour progression:

First emerging from the bud a glossy mahogany-bronze, the leaves then transform as they mature into a dark matt green, the tonal change an inheritance from the 'Dido' side of the parental equation. Their shape too follows that hybrid's pollen donor - *R. decorum* - being elliptic though oblong, near 13cm long and 5.5cm across where widest. Yet the blades, regrettably, harbour the cultivar's only fault: they are inclined to become chlorotic with age unless a regular dollop of fertiliser is applied to the roots.

The gene pool has additionally gifted 'Lem's Cameo' fairly stout and rigid branches, which easily cope with the added weight of a bevy of flowers without thought of bending, the framework as a whole decidedly upright, only spreading more widely when mature.

Until the mid to late 1990s, Halfdan Lem's crowning glory was only available as a grafted plant and then in quantities nowhere near sufficient to meet demand, so even if a plant could be had, premium prices were charged, the nurseries knowing that few would baulk at shelling out such sums to obtain their dream rhododendron. Disappointingly, success rates with rooted cuttings were poor, with Lem himself only succeeding most years with eight out of each twenty-four cuttings, and he was apparently a green-fingered master propagator cut from the same cloth as the late Alan Clark. Tissue culture has now solved that supply shortage, but most rhodophiles would still opt for an original scion grafted onto a *R. decorum* rootstock, rightly believing that a better specimen will result.

As to the epithet:

Lem himself is on record stating a preference for just 'Cameo', the name chosen by his wife. Unfortunately, a Gable azalea from the 1940s beat him and Anna to the draw and is the reason for the possessive compromise, to which he never liked to resort.

'Lem's Cameo' received the Superior Plant Award from the American Rhododendron Society in 1971, at that time, becoming only the second hybrid to be gifted such. An Award of Merit came from the RHS in 1987 and a First Class Certificate four years later, while Lem himself had received the highest award the ARS can bestow on one of its members when it presented the nurseryman with the organisation's Gold Medal in 1963.



R. 'Lem's Cameo'

R. ‘Lem’s Cameo’

R. ‘Lem’s Cameo’

R. ‘Lem’s Cameo’

R. ‘Lem’s Cameo’

R. ‘Lerigau’

‘Duke of York’ x *williamsianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

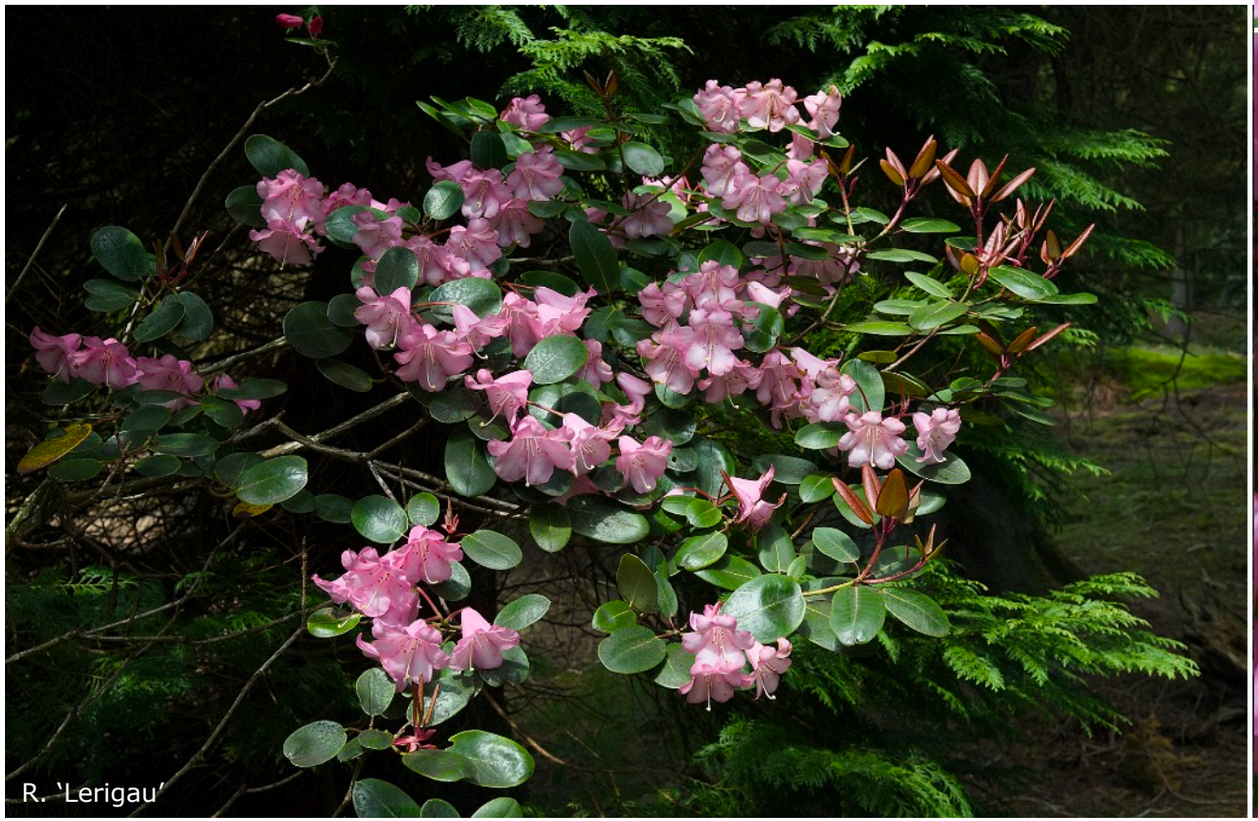
H6 Mid May 2.5m x 2.5m

‘Lerigau’ is a Dietrich Hobbie cross that should be far more widely planted in the UK than it currently is. In the hybridiser’s own words:

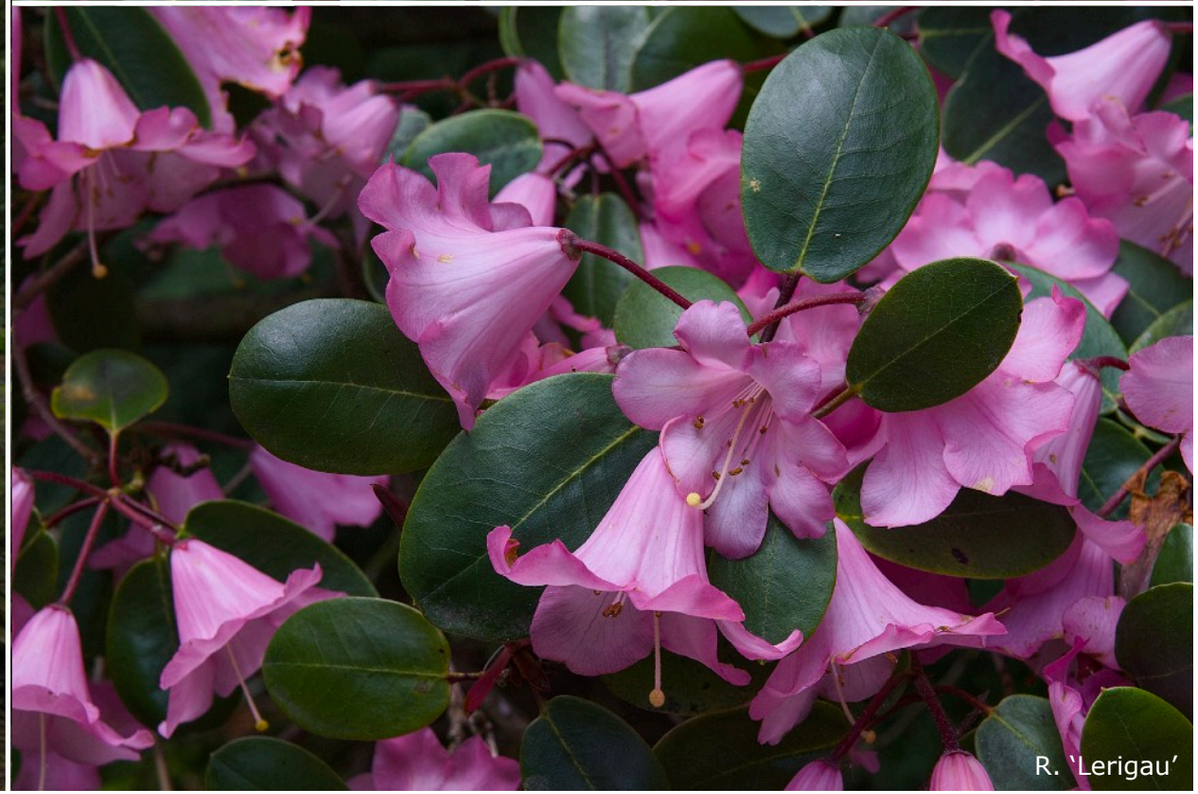
> ‘In 1944, again using *R. williamsianum* as pollen parent, crosses were made on R. ‘Duke of York’, ‘Hassan’, and ‘Homer’. The hybrids derived from R. ‘Duke of York’ had bronzy-coloured new growth, very pretty old rose flowers, and a dense compact habit of growth. Some of their flowers have seven petals.’

To that account can be added glossy, deep green, rounded foliage when fully mature; tubular-campanulate corollas carried in loose, open trusses of six to ten bells; a yellow stigma punctuating the end of each style; and a hardiness rating easily sufficient to cope with the ups and downs of the British maritime climate. Dappled shade in the south will preserve the corolla colours for longer, but northern gardeners should opt for a placement in full sun to maintain the compact habit.

The Hobbie quote above comes from an article the German nurseryman wrote for the American Rhododendron Society in 1957 - *Rhododendron Breeding at Linswege* - which was published in Volume 11, Number 2, of what was then the *Quarterly Bulletin*. The hybrid’s epithet is taken from the name of a district in medieval Saxony, documented as early as 947, now subsumed within Oldenburg where the Hobbie nursery was located.


R. ‘Lerigau’


R. ‘Lerigau’


R. ‘Lerigau’


R. ‘Lillian Hodgson’


R. ‘Lillian Hodgson’

R. ‘Lillian Hodgson’
‘Solent Queen’ x ‘Old Copper’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Early June 4m x 6m

‘Lillian Hodgson’, the 1979-registered selection from a ‘Solent Queen’ x ‘Old Copper’ pairing made by the Canadian hybridizer Robert Rhodes, could easily be mistaken for a member of Edmund de Rothschild’s ‘Fred Wynniatt’ pride, though the mix of genes is completely different. The cross does have a similar habit - tall and wide-spreading; similar leaves - large, long, dark green and somewhat susceptible to chlorosis; and very similar flowers - widely campanulate with wavy-edged margins in a large, flat-topped or globular truss. And the two-toned colour scheme flushing those corollas is very much the same too, with pale orange-yellow extending out from the throat, this bordered by yellowish-pink. Up-close however, several short, crimson-red narrow rays will be found at the base of the dorsal lobes, with fans of dark greenish-yellow spots spreading out beyond.

The epithet Rhodes selected honours one of the founder members of the Vancouver Chapter of the ARS, who as secretary, virtually ran the branch single-handed in the decade following its 1955 conception. The highest award an ARS Chapter can gift to one of its members is the Bronze Medal and it was Rhodes himself who presented such to Lillian Hodgson in 1977.

Clive Justice, who wrote the ARS *Journal* ‘In Memoriam’ appreciation for Lillian after her death in 2003, never knew if she liked the hybrid Rhodes had named for her or not, but those blooms, ‘sweet and pink on the outside, fire inside’ were ‘a heritage to fit the grande dame of the VRS’. Alan Campbell however, author of *The Work of Bob Rhodes* - part of a heritage assessment of the Vancouver Island rhododendron hybrids, written for the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society - reports that she was ‘ecstatic upon seeing the plant’s truss for the first time’. No doubt mirroring the reaction of many other rhodophiles.


R. ‘Lillian Hodgson’

R. ‘Lionel’s Triumph’

The ‘Lionel’s Triumph’ Pride
lacteum x ‘Naomi’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 April-early May 4m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Halton	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	1967
Lionel’s Triumph	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1940	1954

The epithet above could well be applied as a coverall to the entire rhododendron breeding programme Lionel de Rothschild carried out at Exbury, for as the many entries in this volume show, a master craftsman of directed pollination was at work during those first four decades of the previous century. Fortune once again smiled on those endeavours at the beginning of May 1954, when one of Lionel’s crosses made in the closing years of the 1930s, opened its flowers for the very first time. C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber, the authors of *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* report that the plant had been growing at the back of the estate yard, overlooked, for fourteen or more years, when it revealed ‘huge trusses of deep, rich cream, enlivened by the ruddy eye of *R. lacteum* - for all the world as though a bumble bee were sitting in it’. Just two days later those flowers were displayed at the RHS Rhododendron Show, and they scooped an immediate Award of Merit, with the hybrid named ‘Lionel’s Triumph’ to honour its creator, for the blooms ‘were at once seen to be of the highest floral quality’. An FCC would be gifted exactly twenty years later

Given space, mature specimens of this *lacteum* x ‘Naomi’ combination will develop into a tall dome easily 4m high and spreading as widely. The branchlets are sturdy and they bear a whorl of large, oblanceolate-shaped leaves at their tips, each of which is some 20cm long by almost half that across. The blooms that emerge from each of the terminal inflorescences are rose-pink in the bud, transforming to a rich and deep hue of Cornish cream when fully expanded. They have an opaline-pink flush around the lobe margins and a blotch of crimson streaks and flashes at the base of the dorsal. Each and every truss is populated by 18 campanulate bells, the corollas of good substance, 7.5cm long by 10cm across at the mouth. Given the retarding influence of the seed parent, young grafted plants take seven or more years to begin flowering, and then, a good few more seasons before the display can claim to be anywhere near profuse. Equally, the attendant frustration that mature shrubs will often only bloom well every other year is another bugbear prospective purchasers will have to tolerate. But on the positive side of the scales, ‘Lionel’s Triumph’ is one of the easiest *lacteum* hybrids to grow, being fully hardy and suitable for any UK garden where rhododendrons thrive, although the leaves and the flowers will be at their very best when sited in open woodland under light dappled shade. But again, beware, as too dense an overhead canopy, will draw-up the already leggy habit even more.

In 1967 a second clone from the pairing was introduced, Edmund de Rothschild, Lionel’s eldest son, naming it ‘Halton’, after another Rothschild property, this located in the Chilterns. The selection has 13 to 16 slightly smaller, widely funnel-shaped corollas in its domed truss, their hue cream tinted green, but minus the pink flush or blotch. It too has secured an AM from the RHS.

A third clone, midway between the two named forms, lacking the crimson blotch but retaining the pink tint around the margins, has also confusingly been distributed under the ‘Halton’ epithet.


Lionel de Rothschild

R. ‘Lionel’s Triumph’



R. ‘Halton’


Sir Edmund Loder

The ‘Loderi’ Pride

fortunei x *griffithianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late April-May 10m x 8m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Christopher Loder	Mike robinson	2002	2006
Loderi	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	1911
Loderi Cream	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Dairymaid	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Diamond	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	1914
Loderi Fairy Queen	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Fairyland	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Game Chick	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Helen	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi King George	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Maximus	Unknown	before 1958	before 1958
Loderi Millais Pink	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Patience	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Pink Coral	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Pink Diamond	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	1914
Loderi Pink Glamour	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Pink Satin	Unknown	before 1953	1953
Loderi Pink Topaz	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Pretty Polly	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Queen Mary	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Sir Edmund	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	1930
Loderi Stag’s Head	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi Superlative	Unknown	before 1958	before 1958
Loderi Titan	G. Reuthe Ltd	before 1958	before 1958
Loderi Venus	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958
Loderi White Diamond	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	1914
Millais Pink	Sir Edmund Loder	1901	before 1958

R. ‘Loderi’

Within the fraternity of rhododendron hybrids and hybridisers, a few names have achieved almost mythic status. Rothschild and Waterer are prime examples, Loder another. Yet while most acolytes of the genus could chant a long litany of the plants introduced from Exbury, Bagshot or Knaphill, they would quickly fall silent after two or three pairings from Leonardslee, if indeed they could actually link that garden to the crosses they know so well: the 'Loderi' family and 'Loder's White'. They might also be genuinely surprised to learn that the latter was not even crossed by Sir Edmund, and that the former resulted from a pairing made only to establish the true parentage of 'Kewense', rather than create another new hybrid (William Watson, *The Gardeners' Chronicle,* Volume 50, 1911).

At that time, 'Kewense' was believed to be a *griffithianum* x *hookeri* cross, but Loder and many others were convinced that the pollen had actually come from *R. fortunei*. So in the spring of 1901, he made three pairings at Leonardslee, his garden in West Sussex: two matings were *fortunei* x *griffithianum;* one, *griffithianum* x *fortunei.* Some 700 seedlings were raised, and of these, 80 to 100 could be classified as 'Loderi' - those with 'enormous flowers in a big truss and very large leaves' (J. G. Millais, *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* 1917). But when making those three unions, Sir Edmund did something other hybridisers of the time rarely did - he sought out 'the very best material for the intended cross' (Sir Giles Loder, *The Rhododendron Yearbook,* 1950). That article continues:

> 'In this case, he selected a particularly sweetly scented and large-flowered *R. fortunei* amongst the several he had, as the seed parent. But as he did not consider as good enough any of the *R. griffithianum,* which he had, Colonel Fred Godman kindly allowed him to use the pollen from a particularly fine plant of that species which was then growing in the cold house at South Lodge'.

The first seedlings started flowering in 1907, but they had small flowers and foliage, so switching back to J. G. Millais:

> 'The influence of the sire on the size of the flowers is apparent when it is seen that about 60 to 70% of the seedlings of *R. griffithianum* are large, whilst only 12% are exceptional when the pollen of *R. fortunei* was used. In fact a large proportion of the latter turned out very like *R. fortunei,* with only a very few indistinguishable from the best forms of the reverse cross'.

When William Watson, accompanied by Sir Frederick Moore, curator of Glasnevin, the National Botanic Garden of Ireland, saw some of the young plants in bloom at Leonardslee in June 1911, he wrote:

> 'We agreed in the opinion that they were most valuable additions to garden Rhododendrons, probably the most valuable of all the direct hybrids so far raised directly from *R. griffithianum*. Sir Edmund had named the best of them in compliment to various people, but it was clear that they must all be brought under one family name. It was decided to call them R. Loderi'.

Three were exhibited in 1914 - 'Loderi Diamond', 'Loderi Pink Diamond' and 'Loderi White Diamond' - and the fact that each was gifted a First Class Certificate by the RHS is an indication of the commotion that they generated. For those fragrant flowers were carried in a tall, somewhat open truss of nine to twelve funnel-campanulate through tubular funnel-shaped corollas, each of which was up to 9cm long and often 15cm across. Six or seven-lobed, all were pink in the bud, but they then opened white, blush or soft pink, or more rarely deep pink, with some clones displaying a small blotch, others with subtle greenish or brownish speckles in the throat. Their leaves are elliptic through oblong-lanceolate in shape, 20 to 30cm long, medium green in tone, and they are held on usually purple-flushed petioles.

Returning to Sir Giles Loder's 1950 account:

> 'In favourable surroundings 'Loderi' grows to a large size, and indeed the original plants are still growing well. In some cases they have reached a height of around 8m and some have a circumference of 24m, being well "clothed" down to the ground. The amount of flower that these plants carry is staggering, the buds first standing up like pink candles on a Christmas tree. Then as they gradually open, the trusses obliterate all sign of the foliage beneath. The number of trusses on a large plant runs into several thousand, so that the weight of this crop of flowers runs into a matter of hundredweights'.

For individuals unfamiliar with non-metric weights and measurements systems - our post Imperial generations - one hundredweight equals almost fifty-one kilograms.

The genetic heritage of all the 'Loderi' clones makes them creatures of a woodland environment, where the surrounding trees will shelter the leaves from any strong winds, dappled shade will prolong the deeper pigmentation in the flowers and the risks from a late spring frost - climate change foibles notwithstanding - are mitigated, even though a Jack attack at that time - when the buds begin to break, with damage to either the blooms or the new growth - is probably a once-in-a-decade-if-that occurrence. However, the timing of the latter bud break is one of the few adverse characteristics associated with the hybrid, as the young leaves and their long, bright crimson bracts, appear at the same time as the corolla trusses, so may tarnish the display. Leaf spot might prove to be a disfigurement too, as can a proclivity for the leaves to become chlorotic between the main veins, but otherwise, the plants usually grow without problem.

Back in the day, and through until quite recently, when the discovery was made that mitochondria and chloroplast cells - technically classified as 'organelles' - were the exclusive gift of the female parent, *fortunei* x *griffithianum* pairings were considered the same as *griffithianum* x *fortunei* crosses, which meant there was no need to differentiate between the offspring. For this reason the clones of 'Kewense' and the clones of 'Loderi' were consolidated into one big grex-group. Technically, this should have been the Kewense Group, which had the nomenclatural priority, having been bred at Kew by W. Binder in the 1870s, however, to quote from the *IRRC* Loderi Group entry:

> 'In view of some degree of uncertainty about the origin of 'Kewense' and the almost universal use of 'Loderi', in June 1986, the latter was sanctioned by the International Registration Authority as the collective name for plants derived from crosses between *fortunei* and *griffithianum*'.

Science has now shown that the two mirror-image pairings are genetically not the same, with those progeny matured within the chambers of a *R. griffithianum* seedpod having mitochondria - responsible for supplying energy to a cell - and chloroplasts - central to the process of photosynthesis - unique to *R. griffithianum,* while those youngsters that originated from a *R. fortunei* capsule, will have organelles unique to that species.

Whose efficiency in carrying out their tasks is different.

As the Millais percentage figures unintentionally demonstrate.

For with all else constant, *R. fortunei* produced 60 to 70% of seedlings that were considered florally 'large' when it nurtured the seed, whereas *R. griffithianum* only hit 12% when it took on that task.

Because the genetic makeup of their organelles is disparate.

And that means that the two sets of clones can no longer be grouped together.

Moreover, to avoid confusion with what has gone before, as well as with the Royal Horticultural Society's choice to use the term 'Group' for forms of species otherwise lost to synonymy - *R. forrestii* Repens Group, the obvious example - the choice was made herein to go with a new delineator for such associations: a 'pride'. This rearrangement means that clones from a *griffithianum* x *fortunei* mating will be gathered under the 'Kewense' Pride banner, while those grown from the reverse *fortunei* x *griffithianum* pairing, are members of the 'Loderi' Pride.

So, with the DNA box ticked and those niggling genetic issues put to bed, another hornets' nest can be stirred.

Most commentators would agree that too much of a good thing is bad; the corollary of this in rhododendron circles, specific to this pairing, is that too many 'Loderi' clones have been introduced. Both from the original cross. From later sibling matchmaking. Even from selfed seedpods. There are also individuals traditionally included within the old grex-group that have absolutely no business in being there: 'Loderi Sir Joseph Hooker', the result of a *griffithianum* x 'Lady Digby' cross, albeit made by Sir Edmund at Leonardslee, but using a pollen provider derived from a *facetum* x *strigillosum* mating; 'Loderi Julie', an F2 pairing from Townhill Park using potentially genetically different clones from the old 'Loderi Group', or something else entirely, given the sulphur-yellow hue that suffuses the white base tone; and 'Loderi May Pink', another Sir Edmund creation - at least, according to its *IRRC* entry - the child of a 'Cornish Loderi' x 'Loderi Sir Edmund' cross, whose seed parent is actually the progeny of a *griffithianum* x *discolor* dalliance, while the given pollen parent - according to most sources - only opened its very first blooms a number of years after Sir Edmund's death in 1920, which technically equates to the hybridiser reaching out from beyond the grave to effect the pollination (credence thereby placing this feat alongside the physical existence of the being said to be responsible for creating the entire universe, who is also mistakenly proclaimed to be the source of all moral authority on Earth); oh, and that same parental opprobrium is equally applicable to 'Loderi Georgette', 'Loderi Pearly Queen' and 'Loderi Princess Marina', though without any of the mysticism.

Setting such negatives aside, especially those without a shred of even circumstantial evidence to bolster their claims, if space in the garden is no problem, seek out one of the better clones, 'Helen', the AM and FCC-awarded 'King George', 'Pink Diamond', 'Pink Topaz' or 'Venus', and then leave them alone to do their business. Alternatively, if space is limited yet the cultivation conditions are just right, stick one in anyway, and when it gets too big, cut it back or cut it down. Because nine times out of ten the shrub will sprout from the base during the same or the following season, and thereafter, soon resume flowering.

Sir Giles Loder - the hybridiser's grandson - reports in his 1950 RHS *Rhododendron Yearbook* article that Sir Edmund only 'turned his versatile brain to gardening when he found his eye and body could no longer follow the more active pursuits in which he excelled'. A full and detailed account of that life - *Edmund Loder, naturalist, horticulturist, traveller and sportsman: a memoir* - written by Alfred Pease, with additional chapters on his marksmanship (contributed by Lord Cottesloe), and his gardening activities (penned by none other than J. G. Millais), can be read online at the Internet Archive.

A last point: like many of the hybrids already detailed - as well as others to follow - R. 'Loderi' does not exist as a specific, living and breathing entity. Rather, it is the coverall family name for those other twenty-six listed clones in the doppelgängers table. Except once again, it too has been registered as a parent in the directed combinations of other hybridisers, and shrubs bearing a 'Loderi' name tag label with nothing else following that proclamation, will be found in most UK rhododendron gardens open to the public.


R. 'Loderi'


R. 'Loderi'

R. ‘Loderi Game Chick’

R. ‘Loderi Helen’

R. ‘Loderi King George’

R. ‘Loderi King George’



R. ‘Loderi Patience’



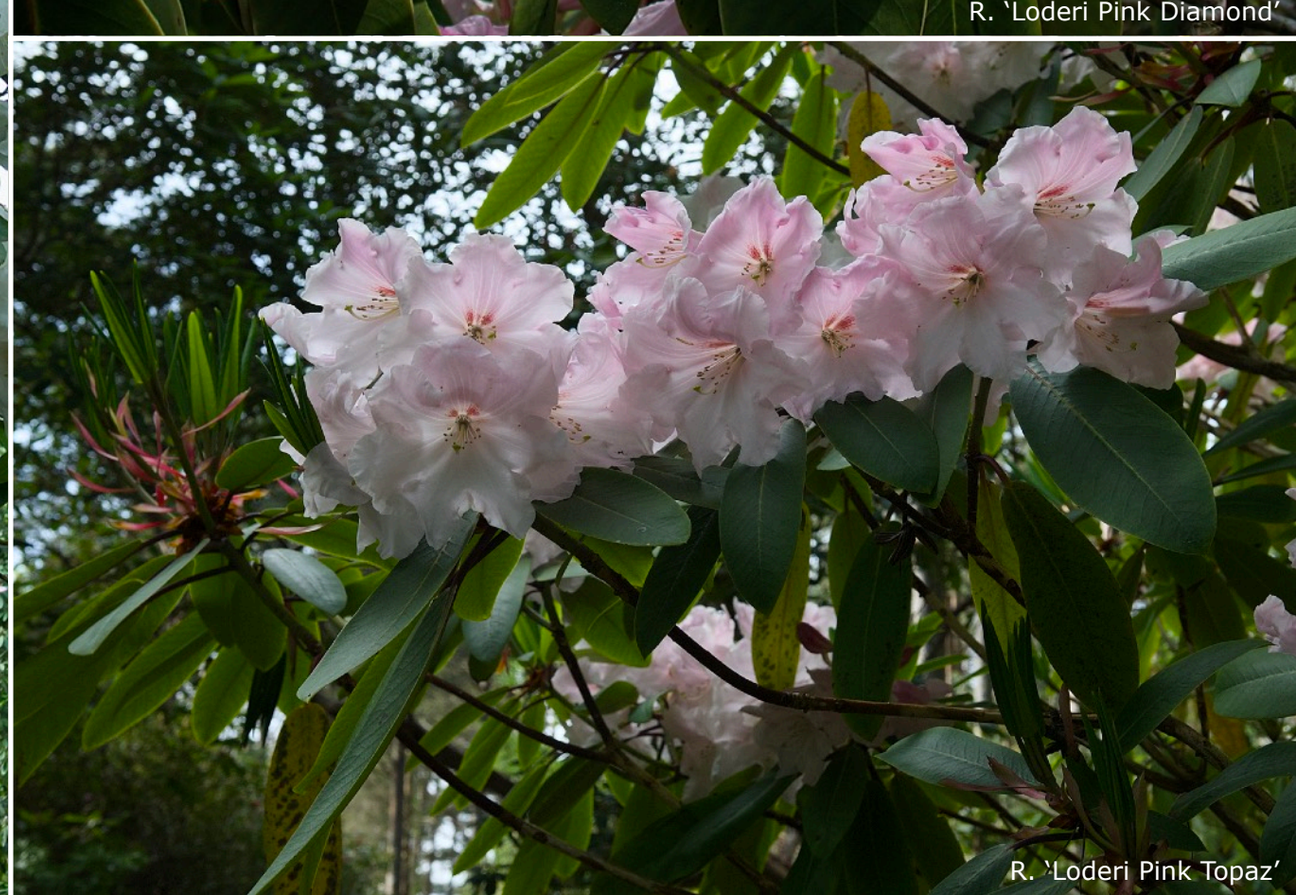
R. ‘Loderi Pink Coral’



R. ‘Loderi Pink Diamond’



R. ‘Loderi Pink Diamond’



R. ‘Loderi Pink Topaz’

R. ‘Loderi Sir Edmund’

R. ‘Loderi Sir Edmund’

R. ‘Loderi Venus’

R. ‘Loderi White Diamond’

R. ‘Loder’s White’

The ‘Loder’s White’ Pride
cinnamomeum x *griffithianum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 May 6m x 12m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Artemis	E. J. P. Msagor	1921	before 1958
Loder’s White	James Mangles	before 1884	before 1958
Otto Forster	Unknown	before 1894	1894

Mystery, doubt and confusion surrounds the history and origin of R. ‘Loder’s White’, more so perhaps than any other hybrid within the genus. Equally, its parentage is most definitely not the F1 equation that is officially documented in the pages of the *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* - *cinnamomeum* x *griffithianum* - although just that combination is repeated herein, mirroring its reluctant acceptance in numerous other online or published sources. If the cross were a no-hoper, few would care, but ‘Loder’s White’ remains one of the finest rhododendron hybrids created by the hand of man.

As John Guille Millais so eloquently confirmed a century ago:

> ‘No one who loves beautiful flowering shrubs can pass a plant of ‘Loder’s White’ in flower without halting to admire it, for there is a quality about the exquisite flowers, set off so superbly by the dark foliage, that places it quite in the first rank of good things. Moreover, it is perfectly hardy and sets its young growth after flowering, and when frosts are usually a thing of the past’.

The quote comes from the first tome of *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* 550 copies of which were printed in 1917 by Longmans, Green and Co., and which today, are exchanged for absolutely silly prices - and that’s just the postage charge! - for the two volumes are weighty publications in both senses of the word. A few more excerpts from the books feature in the paragraphs below, however, setting the swipe at Sir Edmund Loder’s other fabled hybrid aside, the author accurately sets ‘Loder’s White’ on a pedestal that is only fractionally below that of the mocked ‘Loderi’.

As the shrub’s morphological facts and figures are long established, they can be repeated here without controversy, before the conundrums and enigmas are explored:

R. ‘Loder’s White’ is hardy and vigorous. It can be grown in full sun or dappled shade and attains 6m in height with a spread approaching double that figure if left unchecked. The domed framework of branches is densely covered from head to foot in dark green leaves, these blades elliptic through elliptic-ovate in shape, with somewhat recurved margins, their dimensions at maximum 20cm long by 7.5cm wide. Both the adaxial and abaxial leaf surfaces are glabrous.

Flower buds begin swelling in early May, sometimes a touch before, with the trusses first tall, tightly-packed ellipses of mauvish-pink before the corollas open pure white, edged pink at first, the dorsal lobe dotted with a few crimson spots. In shade, or when the weather has been heavily overcast, the primary hue remains to suffuse the funnels for several days, though eventually it does recede. Twelve corollas on average are carried in each conical truss, widely flared trumpets 6cm in length and up to 10cm across at the mouth. They have frilly lobe margins, the tube of their style and the stamen filaments are white, with the anthers brown and the stigma reddish-brown in contrast, and up-close, one’s olfactory organ might even detect a bouquet of sweet perfume.


R. ‘Loder’s White’

R. ‘Loder’s White’

Juvenile plants become free-flowering at five years of age, with mature specimens producing so much bloom the foliage is near completely obscured. Equally, the corollas are very long-lasting, though they can bruise in heavy rain or if knocked against twig, leaf or each other by strong gusts of wind. Hardiness is sufficient to allow the shrub to be planted anywhere in the UK where rhododendrons succeed, although the leaves will be lost if temperatures plunge below -18ºC - they will soon be replaced once winter turns into spring. Adult specimens - mellow through old to even centennial individuals - are rarely killed outright by one of Jack's worst onslaughts and few will prove unable to grow from the stump if a once-in-a-lifetime cyclical climatic disaster does strike out of the blue, though two or three in a row might prove challenging.

That faculty of being able to grow from the stump suggests 'Loder's White' is not in fact a first generation *R. griffithianum* hybrid, just as the lack of any leaf blade abaxial indumentum questions whether *R. arboreum* ssp. *cinnamomeum* var. *cinnamomeum* was also directly involved in the procreation, though both species are likely present within the plant's genetic mix,. Moreover, the mauve-pink tone of the swelling flower buds hints at input from *R. ponticum,* and indeed, Frederick Street, author of many books on the genus, when writing in his 1965 tome *Rhododendrons,* makes the suggestion that 'it seems much more likely that it could be another seedling from the 'Alice Mangles' cross', which was a *griffithianum* x *ponticum* hybrid that James Henry Mangles introduced during 1882. However, Street then reports the leaf as having a 'definite resemblance' to that of the *catawbiense* hybrid 'Album Elegans', this a plant of pre-1847 vintage that originated from the Waterer nursery at Knap Hill, but which might also be a straight selection from the species.

William Watson, curator at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and author of 1911's *Rhododendrons and Azaleas,* believes 'Album Elegans' was paired with *R. griffithianum* to produce 'Manglesii', which history records as being raised by J. Veitch & Sons, although it could have been crossed by either Veitch or Mangles. Watson's book goes on to state that 'forms of R. Manglesii are now known under such names as White Pearl, Princess Juliana, Gauntlettii and Loder's White'. Yet a quick consult of the *IRRC* entries for those five hybrids will show not one, but a quintet of combinations:

'Manglesii', a *griffithianum* x *catawbiense* hybrid, with 'Album Elegans' one of the possibilities for pollen provider.

'White Pearl', which of course is now known to be a synonym of 'Halopeanum' and so a *griffithianum* x *maximum* cross.

'Princess Juliana', an Otto Schulz creation made at the Royal Porcelain Factory in Berlin, the given parentage being *griffithianum* x Unknown Hardy Hybrid.

'Gauntlettii', *griffithianum* x *arboreum,* but an F1 pairing so already discounted.

And 'Loder's White', its parental equation as detailed above, which to again quote Frederick Street, is basically 'the official guess', with *Bean's Trees & Shrubs* describing that assumption as 'a bad one at that'.

As you would expect, J. G. Millais also has a view on the matter:

> 'Wandering through Miss Mangles' garden at Littleworth Cross one day, I came on a *griffithianum* hybrid named 'Agnes Beaufort'. It is nearly identical with 'Loder's White' and probably a seedling of the same strain'.

The morphologically mirrored characteristics are a 12-flowered truss with open-campanulate, 5-lobed, white corollas, at first flushed deep purplish-pink around the edges and on the mid-veins of the lobes. Unfortunately for the hypothesis, the dorsal spotting is green to yellowish-green, and the leaves are bigger, oblong in shape, glossy above, and with a scattering of brown hairs below. So as a seedy private investigator in a Shane Black buddy noir might mumble: close, but no cigar.

Another stab at the parentage was made by Peter and Kenneth Cox within their 1988-published book *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* the Scottish doyens opting for ('Album Elegans' x *griffithianum*) x 'White Pearl'. No exposition was offered on how this coalescence had been reached and the standard combination was also given as an alternative possibility.

Compositionally then, the parental coals are still heating in the fire, where they will likely remain until the geneticists get involved, but as well, the hybrid's point of origin is also a moveable feast, despite the epithet's declaration for Leonardslee as the locale and Sir Edmund Loder as the hybridiser.

Yet in fact, possessively, the plant is not Loder's white.

Step forward Mr Millais:

> 'Shortly before his death, Mr Mangles sent his friend Frederick DuCane Godman a waggon load of plants of his own and Mr Luscombe's raising. These included a small plant of what is now known as 'Loder's White'. Mr Godman, thinking the plant tender, placed it in the cool greenhouse, where it grew and flowered abundantly until it became too large for this position. Mr Godman then gave branches to Sir Edmund Loder, who made numerous grafted plants, some of which he placed in the open garden at Leonardslee, where he found it to be perfectly hardy. Subsequently, Sir Edmund gave plants to his friends in Cornwall, and they, thinking he had raised it, christened it 'Loder's White'. This magnificent Rhododendron is without doubt the chief triumph achieved by Mr J. H. Mangles, and it seems hard that a man, who devoted the latter part of his life to urging the claims of *R. griffithianum,* its hybrids and other Himalayan species, should not have lived long enough to see it in all its glorious beauty'.

James Henry Mangles, the 'High Priest of the Rhododendron Cult', needs no further introduction, whereas Mr Luscombe does, he in fact being John Luscombe of Coombe Royal, Kingsbridge, Devon, whose hybrids include 'Devoniense', 'Luscombei', 'Luscombei Splendens', 'Luscombe's Sanguineum' and 'Luscombe's Scarlet', which were all derived from a single *fortunei* x *thomsonii* cross. It is known that he made other pairings beside this one, from plants grown from the seed he received from Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker's expedition to Sikkim in the early 1850s, but the details of such have been lost over time and no other registrations will be found under his name in the *IRRC* except for one - 'Coombe Royal', a pink-flowering, AM-awarded plant introduced by the Exeter branch of the Veitch Nursery in 1900. This resulted from *R. griffithianum* being crossed with what Millais describes as a 'garden variety' rhododendron. He goes on to report that 'it is much finer than 'Manglesii', having better flowers, truss and foliage'. Which John Luscombe might well have paired with another rhododendron to produce the F2 combination needed to achieve that -18ºC hardiness rating assigned from observation and trial to 'Loder's White'. And such a match would also have been responsible for the shrub's innate ability to send out new shoots from a stump post a severe Jack attack.

So even though James Mangles is officially given the hybridiser credit in the *IRRC* and elsewhere, it is quite possible that the 'Loder's White' seedling-to-be on that packed waggon travelling from Valewood to South Lodge, might have been a John Luscombe creation and thus have deeper West Country roots than its given name. Regrettably, the mode of transport too - horse-drawn or petrol-driven - is yet another fact now inevitably obscured by the mists of time.

R. ‘Loder’s White’



R. ‘Loder’s White’

R. ‘Louis Pasteur’

‘Mrs Tritton’ x ‘Viscount Powerscourt’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H7	May	5m x 4m

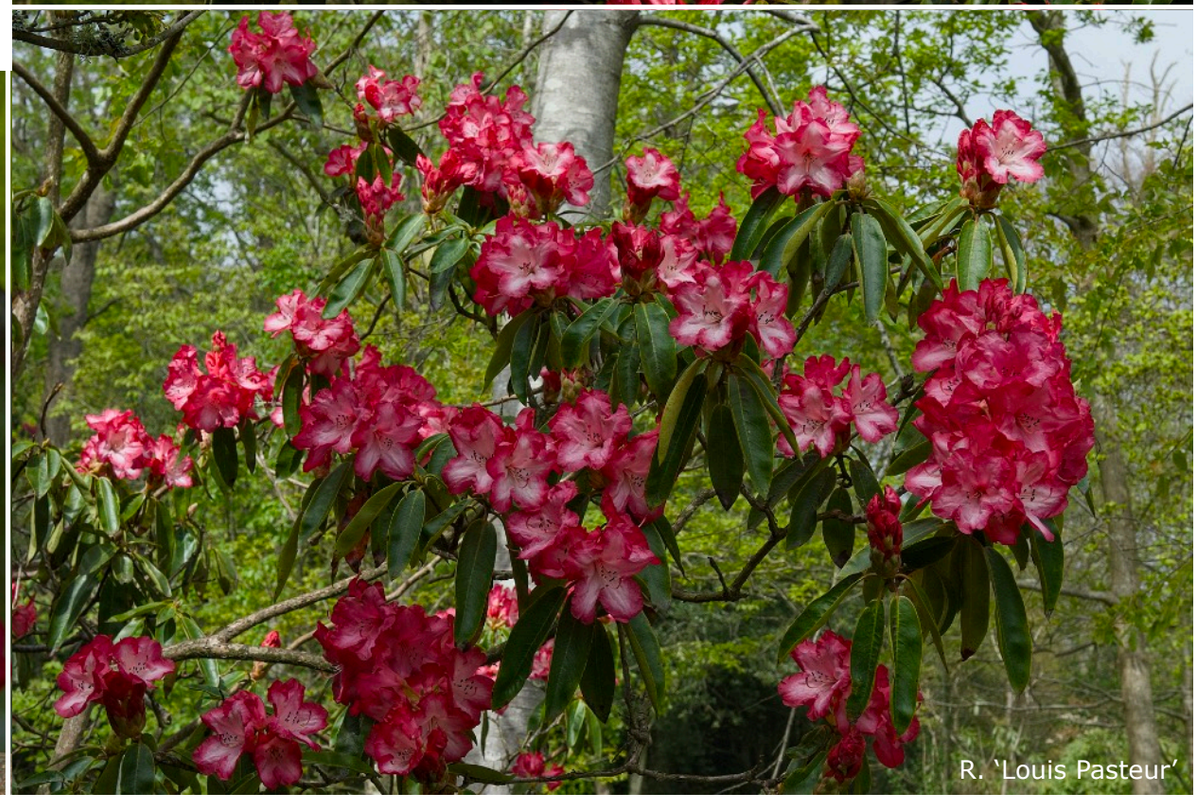
Introduced in 1923 by the Dutch nursery firm of L. J. Endtz & Co., the chosen epithet reference should be a no-brainer, for it honours the French microbiologist who pioneered research on human vaccination, as well as on microbial fermentation and pasteurisation. But while the blooms are worthy of that eminent gentleman’s name, the deportment of ‘Louis Pasteur’ is rather less than stellar.

The flowers are two-toned, white edged crimson, broadly funnel-shaped, 6cm long by 9cm across, with the corollas gathered together into flat-topped or conical trusses. And there are lots of trusses from an early age. When backlit, two narrow rays of darker spots will be noticed, one on each side of the dorsal lobe, but these are often not apparent, even up close. The foliage is just about tolerable: dark green above, elliptic-lanceolate in shape and quite thick, usually with a concave longitudinal profile that reveals the pale green underside. However, some of the blades are twisted near the apex, others display somewhat wavy margins, and a few are hopelessly crinkled. Densely cloaking a tight and compact framework they would be overlooked within the shroud, but here, held aloft on a gawky and gangly structure of upright branches, they are, frankly, somewhat of an embarrassment. And no amount of pruning or pinching will improve matters, for the habit is simply ghastly, even when the shrub is grown in full sun.

Placement is fundamentally the cure, for the flowers are too good to simply reject the plant out of hand. ‘Louis Pasteur’ should therefore be set back from the front of the border and given a position where the blooms can still be admired, but the leggy skeleton that supports them can be masked by more appealing fare.



R. ‘Louis Pasteur’



R. ‘Louis Pasteur’



R. ‘Louis Pasteur’



R. 'Luscombei'

The 'Luscombei' Pride

fortunei x *thomsonii*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Mid April-May 5m x 10m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Betty	Sir Edmund Loder	before 1920	1927
Devoniense	John Luscombe	before 1880	around 1881
H. T. Gill	Richard Gill & Sons	before 1921	1921
Hullaballoo	Sir Edmund Loder	before 1920	1974
Luscombei	John Luscombe	before 1880	1892
Luscombei Splendens	John Luscombe	before 1880	around 1892
Luscombe's Sanguineum	John Luscombe	before 1880	around 1892
Luscombe's Scarlet	John Luscombe	before 1880	around 1892
Pride of Leonardslee	Sir Edmund Loder	before 1920	before 1958
Richard Gill	Richard Gill & Sons	before 1920	1920

John Luscombe (1831-1888), was not the only hybridiser to make a *fortunei* x *thomsonii* pairing, but he was the first, with James Henry Mangles then repeating the cross - although no hybrids linked to him have been registered under that parentage - after which, Sir Edmund Loder and Richard Gill introduced their own clones around 1920. Most authors, as well as all of the *IRRC* entries, refer to a Thomas Luscombe of Coombe Royal, Kingsbridge, Devon, being the chap responsible for the match, but they should update their researches by checking an issue of *The London Gazette,* published on 21 February 1890, then the Lower Coombe Royal Holiday Accommodation website under its 'Garden History' tab, and finally the Devon Gardens Trust article *A Valley of Delight*.

Writing in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* of March 19th, 1881, Mangles informs us that:

> 'Mr Luscombe has bloomed several seedlings of a cross between *R. thomsonii* and *R. fortunei,* the fame of which has reached German science, and one of which at least is, in my humble opinion, truly splendid, although inclining to the paler tints. I have some plants of this strain which I hope to bloom, under glass, in a week or two. Meanwhile, Mr Luscombe (than whom there has been no more enthusiastic Rhododendron grower) informs me that "his first flowering plant disappointed him sadly, but three really good ones, out of twelve or fourteen, have quite satisfied him." One seedling, named 'Devoniense', has been presented to Mr Harry Veitch, and Mr Luscombe has some hundreds still to bloom. It remains to be seen whether these plants will prove hardy under our skies'.

They did, and along with a fourth selection were introduced as 'Luscombei', 'Luscombei Splendens', 'Luscombe's Sanguineum' and 'Luscombe's Scarlet', the pride receiving its name from William Watson, then Assistant Curator of Kew Gardens, where one of the original seedlings had been established in 1892.

Hardiness-wise, 'Luscombei' has weathered winter lows down to -20ºC without lasting damage, loosing its foliage, but bouncing back when temperatures warmed later in the year. The shrub is vigorous, has a dense, dome-shaped habit that can top 5m in height and spread out to 10m if left unchecked, and it can be planted in full sun or dappled shade.

The leaves are broadly elliptic through obovate in shape, being between 11 and 17cm long, and around half that in width, the blades glossy green above with a distinctive yellow midrib, and paler green underneath. The flowers are carried in a loose, flat-topped truss containing up to twelve trumpets, the five to seven lobed corollas technically funnel-shaped with a wide tube, each one 7.5cm long and near 11cm across when fully expanded. Their hue is deep rose or rosy-pink, the nectar pouches a touch darker, and a short ray of crimson spots and speckles decorates the base of the dorsal. Stamen filaments and the style tube are a contrasting white, the stigma greenish-yellow and the anthers black. Mature specimens will annually festoon themselves in bloom, but youngsters take a good few years before they begin to set any flower buds.

In a woodland environment, where the depth of colour in the corollas is preserved the longest, the hybrid is simply spectacular. Up close, the flowers are equally charming, though this appears not to have been carried through to the show bench, as none of the Luscombe clones have received an award, unlike those from Gill or Loder, probably because superior clones of the species were used in the later pairings. Of those also-ran contenders, the standout is R. 'Richard Gill'.

This has flat-topped trusses of bloom that open in profusion on mature specimens, each comprising thirteen funnel-shaped corollas that are individually 7.5cm long by as much as 9cm across at the mouth. They are five-lobed and a clear deep pink in tone, unblemished by spot or speckle, with a ring of five small crimson nectaries at the base of the throat. Stamens and style are held in a circular central cluster.

Dark green, oblong-obovate leaf blades, 12cm long by 6cm wide, complement the flowers at each branch tip, but do little to mask the supporting framework as they are only held for one year. The shrub's habit is of course tree-like, the limbs upward-ascending, most often forming a multi-stemmed open dome, and it was gifted an AM by the RHS in 1920.

A second selection from the Tremough-raised pairing was introduced in 1921 and christened 'H. T. Gill', and it has also been suggested that 'Aurora' - sold as an unnamed seedling to Exbury, but later baptised by Lionel de Rothschild following its Award of Merit win in 1922 - may also have arisen from this pollination and not be the result of a 'Kewense' x *thomsonii* combination. This has been suggested by some doyens because it turns out that Richard Gill…

> 'was not very methodical in recording his crosses; indeed, the importance of this was probably not recognised when he first started his work, and undoubtedly the parentage of some of his named varieties can only be guessed.'
> *The Late Mr Richard Gill and his Rhododendron Hybrids,*
> Henry McLaren, *The Rhododendron Society Notes,* Volume 3, Part 3, 1927.

Lord Aberconway then reports that Gill 'began his career in the garden and acquired his knowledge of plants by handling them rather than from books', and so became a 'skilful gardener' in the process. The author concludes his text by stating that 'Richard Gill had a real love of his plants, and was a most excellent judge of the merits of a flower. A keen man of business, one always felt in going round his nursery with him that one was talking to a gardener rather than to a nurseryman. Horticulture suffers a severe loss in his death'.


R. 'Luscombei'


R. 'Luscombei'



R. ‘Luscombei Splendens’



R. ‘Luscombe’s Scarlet’



R. ‘Richard Gill’

Elepidote Hybrids
M-R

R. ‘Madame Masson’

The ‘Madame Masson’ Pride

catawbiense x *ponticum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 May-early June 3 to 5m x 5 to 7m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Fastuosum Flore Pleno	Francoisi Brothers	before 1846	around 1846
Gjengsto	Halvor Svinvik	1960s	1960s
Madame Masson	Pierre Bertin	before 1849	1849

Selected from a *catawbiense* x *ponticum* directed pollination and introduced in 1849, ‘Madame Masson’ is still widely cultivated today and is probably French nurseryman Pierre Bertin’s most well known hybrid. Historical references to Bertin are usually limited to one-line peripheral citations in publications such as *The Gardener’s Magazine* - “There is now to be seen at M. Bertin’s, nurseryman at Versailles, a cytisus which has these three species at once on the same root.” - the quote taken from Volume 17 of said journal, published in 1841 and edited by J. C. Loudon. And while the readership of the time may have been fully briefed-in on Monsieur Bertin’s circumstances, precious little information exists to enlighten us today. However, a few golden nuggets can be pieced together from the online search engines to reveal that:

In 1829, following the death of Félix Delahaye, Pierre Bertin took over the nursery his father-in-law had established at Montreuil, then a rural hamlet a dozen or so miles to the southwest of Paris, but close to Versailles (both are now subsumed within the suburbs of the French capital). Delahaye, a trained gardener at the Jardin des Plantes, had been the botanist on the Bruni d’Entrecasteaux expedition of 1791, which explored the coast of Australia and Tasmania, and later visited Tonga and New Caledonia. On his return to France in 1787 he was employed as head gardener at Petit Trianon, taking on the same role at the Château de Malmaison in 1805. The latter estate was owned by Joséphine de Beauharnais, Empress of Napoléon Bonaparte, and such a prestigious position allowed him to establish and develop the premier plant emporium in Versailles, and by extension, the whole of France, the Iron Duke’s subsequent depredations of 1815 notwithstanding. When his son-in-law took charge, Bertin switched the nursery’s main focus from roses to rhododendrons, so that by 1848 over 10,000 seedlings from his own crosses were being raised. Bertin’s son Émile later inherited the business but in 1872 sold the nursery to Jean-Jacques Moser who, at the turn of the century, passed it on to his own son, Marcel, of maroon fame.

History satiated, ‘Madame Masson’ is also known as ‘Mademoiselle Masson’ and is fully hardy across the UK and able to be grown in gardens wherever the soil is conducive to rhododendrons. Ultimately, the plant will develop into a wide-spreading, densely cloaked dome between 2 and 3m tall - while extending out to 5m or more - and each year in May cloak itself from head to foot in big conical trusses of white blooms that open from lilac-flushed buds. Classically star-shaped when fully unfurled, each corolla bears an eye-catching mustard-yellow blotch of spots and speckles on the dorsal lobe.

The foliage is typical of a *R. ponticum* cross: glossy and dark green; narrowly elliptic in shape; nothing to write home about, but retained on the bush for around three years, so even mature specimens are fully clothed rather than bare legged monstrosities.

Whether the Francoisi Brothers at their nursery in Melle, Ghent, beat Pierre Bertin across the line when pairing the two species is open to debate, but their chosen selection from this Belgian-based matchmaking was being offered for sale to the general public around 1846, this the date when ‘Fastuosum Flore Pleno’ was introduced by the far larger firm owned by the renowned Louis van Houtte, and it remains just as popular today.

That continued commerciality is no doubt due to the unevenly petaloid stamens, most transforming into additional petals or staminodes, so giving an almost semi-double effect to the flowers. Of course, the long-lasting, rich mauve through pale lavender corolla colour more than assists its marketability, as does a populous truss of 15 to 17 funnel-shaped trumpets that the genetic combination of species has modified from a tight candelabroid formation into a much more lax and open arrangement. So too the fact that those blooms emerge to enthral onlookers from late May into June, and have a captivating flare of golden-brown spots decorating their dorsal lobe.

Out of flower however, ‘Fastuosum Flore Pleno’ is sadly no great shakes, for the foliage - dull green, oblong-obovate, the flat to convex blades around 12cm long by 5cm wide - and the form - dense, bushy and compact - are boringly bland. Mature specimens will typically be large domes easily topping 4m and spreading further, so a typical urban plot will soon be under challenge from a spur-of-the-moment garden centre purchase unless the secateurs are brought to bear on a regular basis, though vigour is not in the Triffid class. Hardiness however, most definitely is, along with a robust disposition able to shrug-off full sun in the south and Atlantic gales up north. Documented as having survived temperatures as low as -32ºC, ‘Fastuosum Flore Pleno’ could even be planted halfway up a Scottish Munro should one wish, and likely thrive.



R. ‘Fastuosum Flore Pleno’

R. ‘Madame Masson’

R. ‘Fastuosum Flore Pleno’



R. ‘Mairi Sawyer’

R. ‘Mairi Sawyer’

eximium x *hodgsonii*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4 April 8m x 8m

Like many gardens along Scotland’s west coast, Inverewe in Wester Ross relies on the Gulf Stream to moderate its climate and an efficient shelterbelt of trees to mitigate the wild Atlantic gales that regularly hit the shores of Loch Ewe. Domiciled within this microclimate, despite being on the same high northern latitude as St. Petersburg in Russia, the large-leaved rhododendrons of Subsection *Falconera* and Subsection *Grandia* more than thrive, they luxuriate. As equally do the many hybrids between those species that the garden is justly famous for, and one of these, an officially unnamed cross between *R. falconeri* ssp. *eximium* and *R. hodgsonii,* which bears the garden tag number 2229, has been christened herein R. ‘Mairi Sawyer’.

Inverewe Garden was begun in 1862, the creation of Osgood Mackenzie, son of the laird of Gairloch. Captivated by the newly-arrived botanic treasures of Sikkim and the Himalaya, he was convinced that they could be grown outdoors along the coastal fringes of northwestern Scotland if the violent storm-force winds could be filtered and kept at bay.

Mackenzie died in 1922, before the garden was finished or his shelterbelt had fully matured, so the final stages of the planting were overseen by his daughter, Mairi Sawyer, who in 1952 gifted the estate to the National Trust for Scotland, along with an endowment for its future upkeep. Their life’s work is now a rhododendron nirvana; a haven that will enthral anyone with a passion for the genus and engender just such in many a visitor, even those on an off-day from the nearby sandstone sentinels of Torridon, as it did for yours truly over four decades ago. Yet neither father, nor daughter, have been gifted an honorific epithet within the genus, something that can easily be corrected herein and will hopefully be picked up by the registrar and the NTS.

Cultivated forms of both species used as parents in the mating can have a somewhat jarring corolla pigmentation that often fades out to a very wishy-washy tone and combining the two has not entirely solved this problem, though the primary hue of the blooms is more subdued - one could argue strident, rather than psychedelic - and the refined tone is also perfectly complimented by the stigma’s large yellow disc.

In other respects, the cross has acquired the best features of each shrub and bettered them, while also upping the production of flower buds, for the habit is a tall multi-stemmed small tree with stunning bark; the leaves huge, dark green and decidedly rugose; and those flower trusses are more than football-sized, crammed with up to 30 individual corollas and present at the tip of virtually every branch, though as with all the large-leaved rhododendrons, the following two seasons will be lacklustre in comparison, while the plant builds itself back up for the next triumphal flourish.

But catch R. ‘Mairi Sawyer’ on one of those momentous years, when the flowers have just fully opened and their hue is undimmed, and you will be rooted to the spot, blown over by the exuberance on display, breathless in wonder, as a page turn will confirm…



R. ‘Mairi Sawyer’

R. ‘Mairi Sawyer’

R. ‘Mairi Sawyer’

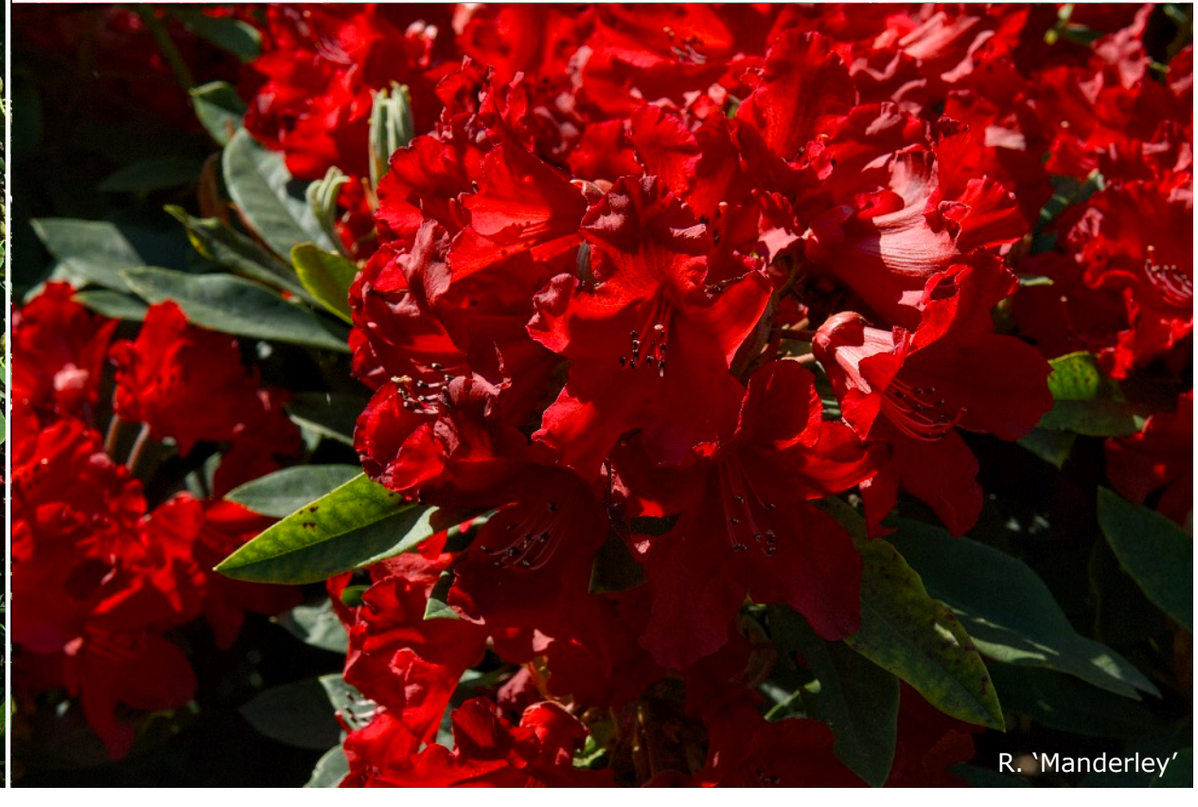
R. 'Manderley'
'Scandinavia' x 'Fabia'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Mid May 1.5m x 2.5m

G. H. Slootjes, a Boskoop nurseryman, placed pollen from Henry McLaren's 'Fabia' onto the style of the Koster hybrid 'Scandinavia' and in 1968, registered 'Manderley' with the *IRRC*. Clearly a Daphne du Maurier fan, for the epithet is taken from her 1938 novel *Rebecca* - the name given to Maxim de Winter's fictional Cornish estate, which was based on the author's own property near Fowey, Menabilly - while the flower colour - a stunningly brilliant cardinal red - presumably symbolises the manor house going up in flames at the story's conclusion. Young and mature shrubs alike will be completely covered in fiery bloom during May, each domed truss holding up to 13 openly funnel-campanulate corollas, these slightly spotted darker on the dorsal lobe. The leaf blades are bronze coloured when they first extend, becoming dark green at maturity, and they are held for two or three years, so the compact framework of branches is well clothed. Habit is upright and spreading, though not widely so.

'Manderley' will tolerate a near full sun position even in the southern counties, though the depth of the flower colour pigmentation will be preserved the longest if the shrub is given a modicum of shade. The leaves however, are regrettably prone to insect damage and leaf spot, and they may also, sometimes, appear a touch chlorotic.


R. 'Manderley'


R. 'Manderley'


R. 'Manderley'



R. ‘Manor Hill’



R. ‘Manor Hill’

The ‘Manor Hill’ Pride

‘Dido’ x (‘Jalisco’ x *yakushimanum*)

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Mid May 2m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Manor Hill	Hope Findlay	1958	1974
Windles	Hope Findlay	1958	1974

‘Manor Hill’ is one of Hope Findlay’s little known gems, which was bred in 1958 and then named and introduced in 1974 after it gained an Award of Merit from the RHS. The epithet is borrowed from an area near the old South Gate of Windsor Great Park, betwixt the two western arms of Virginia Water, where ‘The King’s Houses in the Park of Windsor’ once stood.

The few specialist nurseries that sometimes propagate the shrub, in tandem with its *IRRC* entry, declare it to be ‘very dwarf and compact’, and while the latter contention is certainly true, the former applies only for the first twenty years or so, as the mounded dome will continue to build-up over time and eventually reach a height of 1.5 or 2m, with a corresponding spread near double that figure. The leaves are dark green in tone, narrowly obovate in shape, with recurved margins, and up to 9cm in length by 4cm in width. A thin, fawn-coloured indumentum cloaks their underside at first, but is usually lost by maturity. Unfortunately, the blades are only held for two years, which can leave the lower limbs of older specimens open to view, especially if encroachment from taller-growing neighbours consigns a plant to too much shade, a state of affairs that will also reduce the freedom of flowering and draw-up the branches.

Those blooms open in May and unlike many rhododendrons, they actually get better as they age.

Held in a loose, open-topped truss of eight or nine widely campanulate corollas, each around 4cm long, the flowers emerge orange-yellow from the bud, transforming their hue into a butter yellow tone when fully open, this slightly darker in the throat. There is also some brownish-crimson speckling to be found at the base of the dorsal lobe, while the stamen filaments and style are flushed to match the lobes. At least, until the lobe margins begin to pale into white, this occurring as the yellow tone recedes down towards the mouth of the tube, becoming a more deeper, mustardy-yellow. At the same time, the darker hue within, at the base of the throat, strengthens and expands around the tube.

Meanwhile, on the outside of the corolla, an irregular-lobed calyx - with arms that are almost 3cm long and held erect or even reflexed, as well as being deeply divided from each other - goes through the very same colour transformation. And if that were not enough, the two upper lobes of each of those calyxes are also spotted brownish-crimson.

So on reflection, the gift of a mere AM might appear somewhat churlish.

A second selection from the cross - ‘Windles’ - introduced at the same time, has yellow-orange flowers, but is otherwise identical.

R. ‘Margaret Findlay’
wardii x *griersonianum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Late May-June 4m x 6m

From the early 1930s until January 1st, 1943, which was when he began working at Windsor Great Park, Thomas Hope Findlay (1910-1994), had been head gardener at Little Paddocks, Sir James Horlick’s home on the Titness Park Estate near Sunningdale. He likely had a hand therefore in raising seedlings of the *wardii* x *griersonianum* pairing his employer had made in 1933 and which, barely a decade later in 1942, the only selection ever to be introduced from that matchmaking - despite its *IRRC* entry being given ‘group’ status - would be named for Hope’s wife, Margaret Grace née Howse. They had married in May 1935, and in 2013, Margaret celebrated her centenary, which included a party at the garden her husband had helped design with Sir Eric Savill (1895-1980), the man who had headhunted him midway through World War II.

The rhododendron named for this illustrious lady sports open-topped trusses of white flowers, these heavily flushed reddish-pink at first. A dollop of wine-red pigmentation will be found at the base of the throat, along with a similar toned blotch of streaks and spots extending halfway up the dorsal lobe. That hue also colours the upper portion of the style. Around seven tubular-funnel-shaped corollas emerge from each inflorescence, flesh-pink or pinkish-red in the bud, these loosely held on quite long pedicels. Medium-sized olive green elliptic leaves are retained for between two and three years, the dense habit therefore well-cloaked in foliage. Over time, the shrub will build-up into a large dome, between 3 and 4m tall, spreading wider, and from late May into June, cover itself in an ever-increasing mantle of simply mouthwatering bloom year after year after year.


R. ‘Margaret Findlay’


R. ‘Margaret Findlay’

R. ‘Margaret Findlay’


R. ‘Marietta’

R. ‘Marietta’
‘Tosca’ x *yakushimanum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 Mid May-early June 1m x 2m

A stunner from the German hybridiser Hans Hachmann and a *R. yakushimanum* F1 cross moreover that gets around the usual pigmentation fading issue.

Selected from a 1968 mating where the species was used to pollinate Francis Hanger’s hybrid ‘Tosca’ - this an ‘Exbury Naomi’ x *wardii* pairing - ‘Marietta’ has a low, compact habit, the bush filled with dark glossy green ovate through ovate-elliptic leaves up to 9cm long by 4.5cm in width. These have a slightly convex profile, with an obtuse rather than pointed tip, the base of the leaf also rounded, and an underside thinly cloaked with a brownish indumentum, thus the blades are different from the cabbagey norm and certainly attractive when the shrub is devoid of bloom. Those flowers, opening from initially flesh-pink buds, are a creamy greenish-yellow with hints of pink when first fully expanded. Of course, the hue then fades, but in doing so, transforms into a still attractive yellowy-green. The corolla lobe margins are frilly, the dorsal decorated with a ray of reddish-brown spots and speckles, and the tight trusses are populated by up to fourteen campanulate bells, each 4cm long by 5.5cm across at the mouth. And the plant’s flower-bud-set from a young age is decidedly generous, so a well grown specimen will usually be buried under a sheet of bloom from mid May into early June, with barely a leaf visible.

Bred for northern European gardens, hardiness-wise, ‘Marietta’ will easily cope with the ups and downs of the British maritime climate, but a planting position in dappled shade will benefit the flowers and prevent leaf burn in the southern counties.


R. ‘Marietta’

The 'Mariloo' Pride
'Doctor Stocker' x *lacteum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 April 6m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Mariloo	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1941
Mariloo Eugenie	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1948
Mariloo Gilbury	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	1943

On October 8th, 1912, when she married the man who would become Great Britain's foremost rhododendron hybridiser - in an age, no less, when competition for that title was unsurpassed - Marie Louise Eugénie Beer (1892–1975), became Mrs Lionel Nathan de Rothschild. It then took her husband almost three decades before he produced a cross that he considered worthy enough to be named for his partner, the woman he loved: 'Mariloo'.

The hybrid was birthed from one of the most beautiful yet notoriously difficult species to cultivate, *R. lacteum,* with its pollen placed onto the style of 'Doctor Stocker', the white-flowering *caucasicum* x *griffithianum* pairing made at Avery Hill, Eltham, in the 1890s. And amazingly, unlike virtually every other cross involving that Delavay-discovered species, the genetic combination resulted in vigorous seedlings that proved easy to grow. The reason for this was unknown at the time, but it is, no doubt - at least partially, if not wholly - due to the chloroplasts and mitochondria 'Mariloo' and her two later-introduced sisters inherited from the female parent, these gifted in that 19th century pollination by *R. caucasicum.*

The trio selected from those young plants ultimately develop into tall growing shrubs with thick branchlets and matt green, deeply veined leaves, these reflecting the pollen provider in that they are broadly elliptic in shape, 8cm wide and close to 22cm in length. Detractors will say that the hybrids are leggy, for the leaves are only held for one year and when situated within the sheltered surrounds of a woodland garden, the internodal growth is quite long, especially if the depth of shade becomes anything more than dappled. But such a planting site is required, for the new growth is vulnerable to cold winds and as the hardiness rating confirms, the cross will only cope with a mid-winter low down to -15ºC. Indeed, mature shrubs were killed in Kent during the severe winter of 1984-85.

Any worrisome negatives will quickly be dispelled in April when the flower buds begin to expand - unless an unseasonal frost strikes the blooms - because as Francis Hanger, once head gardener at Exbury reports, 'the extra large and perfect trusses outshine most other rhododendrons I know for quality and size' (*The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* 1967). On 'Mariloo', some fifteen to twenty corollas will emerge from each inflorescence, held on red pedicels. Tubular-campanulate in shape at first, the mouth of the bowl continues to expand until each is a broadly campanulate bell 10cm wide, these graced with slightly wavy lobe margins. Their hue is a soft lemon-yellow, initially flushed with green, this tint vanishing before the blooms have fully developed, leaving the whole unmarred by spot, speckle or any other blemish: the cardinal goal of Lionel de Rothschild's rhododendron breeding programme.

'Mariloo Gilbury' has flowers that are slightly wider at the mouth, creamy-pink in tone, with a crimson-pink stripe down the centre of each lobe on the outside, while 'Mariloo Eugenie' boasts pale cream corollas, darker on the three dorsal lobes inside, on occasion these tinged crimson on the outside, with the base of the throat stained crimson and above this, a scattering of small crimson spots.


Marie Louise de Rothschild, *c.* 1912.


R. 'Mariloo'


R. ‘Mariloo’


R. ‘Mariloo’


R. ‘Mariloo’

R. ‘Mariloo’

R. ‘Maya’

R. ‘Maya’
sutchuenense x *ririe*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 Late February-March 6m x 4m

The directed pollination of *R. sutchuenense* by *R. ririei* has produced a group of plants that today, have developed into small, umbrella-shaped trees with medium-sized oblong-lanceolate-shaped leaves that are midway between the two species. The cross was made by Edward Magor of Lamellen, Cornwall, in 1919, and it was named ‘Maya’ and introduced in 1933. The display of pale, mauve-purple flowers, which open very early in the season, received an Award of Merit in 1940, and can eternally be grateful for not having germinated out of the seed pod that matured the reverse cross - also made in 1919 - for then, they would have been saddled with the ‘Sutchrir’ appellation even though technically, such a *ririei* x *sutchuenense* combination should have been christened ‘Ririsutch’.

The plants featured, growing at Muncaster Castle, all have *R. sutchuenense* as their seed parent, with ‘Maya’ likely amongst their number, though regrettably, beyond the parentage equation, the plants are otherwise unlabelled. Equally, within the group, subtle differences will be apparent distinguishing one plant from another, which means they likely arrived in one of the mixed despatches of pollen, seed, seedlings and scions that were regularly sent out from Lamellen between 1922 and the onset of the Second World War, when of course Adolf Hitler’s shenanigans rather disrupted postal services. Regardless, the trees themselves exhibit a quiet, demure beauty when adorned in their mantle of mauve, though unfortunately, few visitors to the gardens will see them in bloom, as if the weather is mild, those flowers begin opening during the second half of February.


R. ‘Maya’


R. ‘Maya’


R. ‘Maya’

R. ‘May Day’

The ‘May Day’ Pride

haematodes x *griersonianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late April-early June 2m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Exbury May Day	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1941	before 1941
May Day	A. M. Williams	before 1932	1932

Previously published texts indicate that a quartet of gardens made the pairing that would ultimately lead to ‘May Day’, Commander Alfred Martyn Williams of Werrington Park, Launceston, Cornwall - fourth son of the legendary J. C. Williams of Caerhays - being the first of those hybridisers to get his blooms to the show bench, pipping Henry McLaren, Lionel de Rothschild and Colonel Stephenson Robert Clarke to the post and coming away with an Award of Merit from the RHS for his troubles. The clonal quartet are apparently now all mixed-up in commerce, which is apparent in leaf shape and size variation, shades of flower colour and the presence or not of a petaloid calyx. Moreover, the Borde Hill cross has never been registered and the discovery that chloroplast cells and mitochondria are solely the gift of the female parent has necessitated the removal of the Bodnant plant from the pride given it was the child of a *griersonianum* x *haematodes* combination, which reversed the pairing made at Werrington and Exbury, so is therefore genetically different from its old grex-group companions. Of course, identifying this clone from the others without recourse to the complicated gizmos more usually ensconced in a full-blown bio lab (these not yet part of the standard feature set on an Apple watch), would be next to impossible if it wasn’t for the fact that the *IRRC* entry reports that the corollas, as well as being deep scarlet in hue, are also scented, this latter morphologic characteristic - if accurate - unique to Lord Aberconway’s pairing.

The presence of a large and irregular calyx may also help distinguish one clone from the other if the label on a specimen grown at Exbury is authentic: for as the photograph reveals, ‘Exbury May Day’ is clearly devoid of such petaloid lobes. And despite specific labels on plants at Brodick and Glendoick - for instance - proclaiming their specimens to be the ‘A.M. form’, these too are bereft of distinctive calyces. Yet the *IRRC* award clone description stipulates that a large and irregular, coloured and tomentose calyx is a feature of the Werrington plant.

Unfortunately, all this partitioning is speculative, and undermined in *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* where Peter and Kenneth Cox report that ‘the Exbury form has deeper-red flowers with large calyces and is more compact than the A. M. form’.

All the ‘May Day’ clones come with matt green leaves that have a thick, pale brown indumentum covering the underside, but they could be elliptic or oblanceolate in shape, and be up to 10 or even 16cm long, dependant on the clone being examined. Mature bushes form compact, flat-topped or rounded frameworks, wider than they are high, and each year produce a mass of flowers from late April onwards. Those trusses are loose and open, hold around eight drooping corollas, these campanulate through funnel-campanulate in shape, which will be scarlet, deep scarlet, brilliant scarlet, signal red or cerise in colour. Styles and stigmas are a conformist red, stamen filaments white, the anthers black.

Peter and Ken also report that at Glendoick, their woodland garden a few miles to the east of Perth, ‘May Day’ regularly suffers from bark split and so advise that the plant would be unsuitable for colder sites or where shelter is lacking.



R. ‘May Day’



R. ‘Exbury May Day’

R. ‘Melissa’

R. 'Melissa'

'Ascot Brilliant' x *arboreum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4 March 15m x 6m

With a habit that from some points of the compass is near columnar, this seedling from an 'Ascot Brilliant' capsule pollinated by a blood red form of *R. arboreum* has clearly benefitted from Muncaster's mild climate and plentiful rainfall to soar upward, totally dwarfing the other red-flowering and equally mature rhododendrons gathered around its base. Flowering occurs in March, with the blooms sometimes lasting in pristine condition until early April, the scarlet to red corollas, with a speckling of darker spots on the upper lobes, held in tight, balled trusses. Hundreds of these will usually open each year, while every so often, outside environmental influences and the growth cycle align, and the plant becomes a sheet of flame from base to tip.

Visiting rhodophiles will find this colossus at the top of the hill behind the castle, in the angle of the V-shaped junction where two of the garden's principal paths meet, and stuck into the ground, close to the trunk, is a label suggesting the plant is actually *R. arboreum,* for which the clean bole - some 77cm thick when last measured by The Tree Register - has been awarded champion status. But don't let the ground-based plaque fool you - as it has others - for high up, almost out of reach, and fairly well hidden, is another label: the cast-iron original. And this denotes the plant's actual parentage in capital letters: ASCOT BRILLIANT X ARBOREUM BLOOD RED.

Two issues of *The Rhododendron Society Notes* - Volume 2, Number 3, published in 1922; and Volume 3, Number 2, in 1926 - credit such a cross to Sir Edmund Loder (1849-1920), and indicate that first flowering occurred at Exbury in 1922, with Lionel de Rothschild subsequently naming it for the highly respected Sunningdale nurseryman and hybridiser Harry White.

Except the seed and pollen parents have been quoted in reverse within those two *Rhododendron Society Notes* appraisals, for the *IRRC* entry details the 'Harry White' pairing to be *arboreum* (blood red form) x 'Ascot Brilliant'. So assuming Sir John Ramsden's metal label was not also transposed - others in the garden follow the *female* x *male* convention adopted by the *IRRC* - the Muncaster plant would have originated from an Edward Magor match made in 1921 - No. 619 in the Lamellen stud book - R. 'Melissa'.

This hybrid flowered for the first time in 1929 and 'as might have been expected is a good red, 12 to the truss, and with a slight spotting of darker colour on the upper lobes' to quote from E. J. P. Magor's submission in *The Rhododendron Society Notes,* Volume 3, Number 5, which covers the years 1929-1931, the given morphology exactly matching the specimen growing at Muncaster.



R. 'Melissa'



R. 'Melissa'

R. ‘Melissa’

R. ‘Melissa’

The ‘Merkur’ Pride

‘Louis Pasteur’ x *williamsianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 May 3m x 5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Merkur	Dietrich Hobbie	1947	before 1958
Stadt Essen	Dietrich Hobbie	1947	1978

German nurseryman Dietrich Hobbie (1900-1995), had a long-standing relationship with the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh: receiving species seed and advice from Sir William Wright Smith in the late 1930s; collecting pollen from specimens growing in the gardens on visits after the war. All such aided the creation of the now famous hybrid crosses that emerged from Linswege - Hobbie’s nursery in Oldenburg Province - in the late 1940s and 1950s, so it was only natural that he should send a consignment of his best creations back to Edinburgh as a thank you, and these have long been established on the hillside at Benmore Botanic, the RBG’s west coast outstation, which is located on the Cowal Peninsula a few miles inland from Dunoon. That group of plants is one of the highlights of the spring season at the garden, lighting up the hillside, and there are many more Hobbie hybrids dotted throughout the woodland.

One of these is the little known ‘Merkur’.

The epithet translates as ‘mercury’ and it is likely to have been borrowed from the Black Forest mountain that towers over Baden-Baden in southwestern Germany. The cross itself is a ‘Louis Pasteur’ x *williamsianum* pairing made in 1947, and this has produced a tall and wide-spreading shrub with an intricate framework of branches that is clothed in shiny, dark green leaves, bronzy when young, elliptic through ovate in shape, the blades held for two seasons and carried on wine-red petioles.

The flowers form rounded trusses of eight open-campanulate bowls, red in the bud, candy-pink when expanded, shading to white in the centre, with reddish-pink margins. Those corollas are five-lobed, rounded with frilly edges, and the dorsals are decorated with four rays of darker reddish spots that point at nine, eleven, one and three o’clock. Completing the picture, the long and upward-curving style is surmounted by a crimson-hued stigma.

Gorgeous up-close, the blooms of ‘Merkur’ are quietly stunning en masse, the shrub fully hardy and easy to grow. Which begs the question: why has the hybrid not made it into the big time? For currently, it is a rarity in British gardens.

One answer might be ‘Stadt Essen’, a lower growing clone from the same cross, introduced in 1978, with similar pink-coloured flowers that pale to white along the centre of the lobes. These have been described - by Peter and Kenneth Cox in their 1988-published *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids* - as ‘the most attractive flowers of all the many Hobbie williamsianum hybrids’.

Wrong.

Because those of ‘Merkur’ are superior.



R. ‘Merkur’

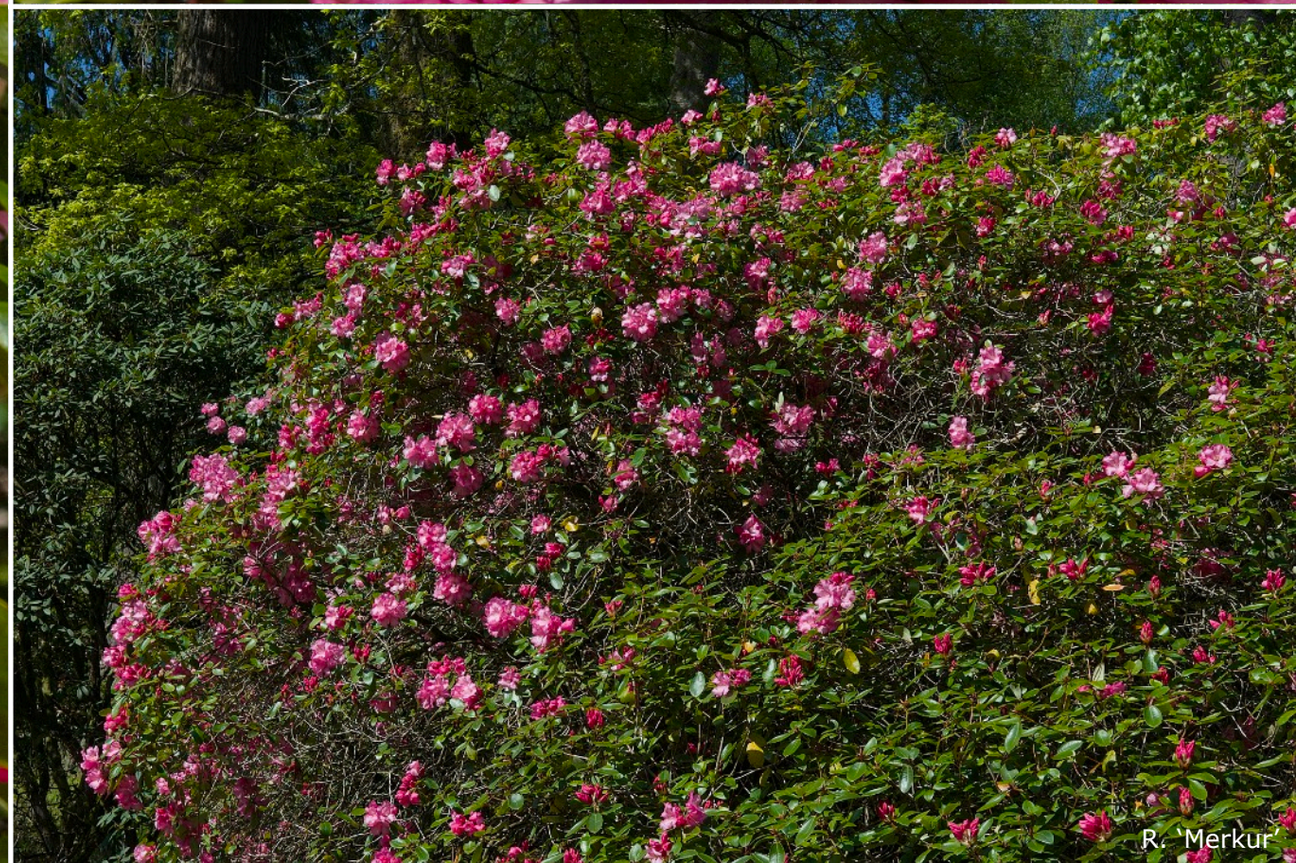


R. ‘Stadt Essen’




R. ‘Merkur’


R. ‘Merkur’


R. ‘Merkur’

R. 'Morgenrot'
yakushimanum x 'Spitfire'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 May 1.5m x 2.5m

'Morgenrot' is yet another out-and-out stunner conceived by the German hybridiser and nurseryman Hans Hachmann, an F1 *yakushimanum* cross with near red flowers.

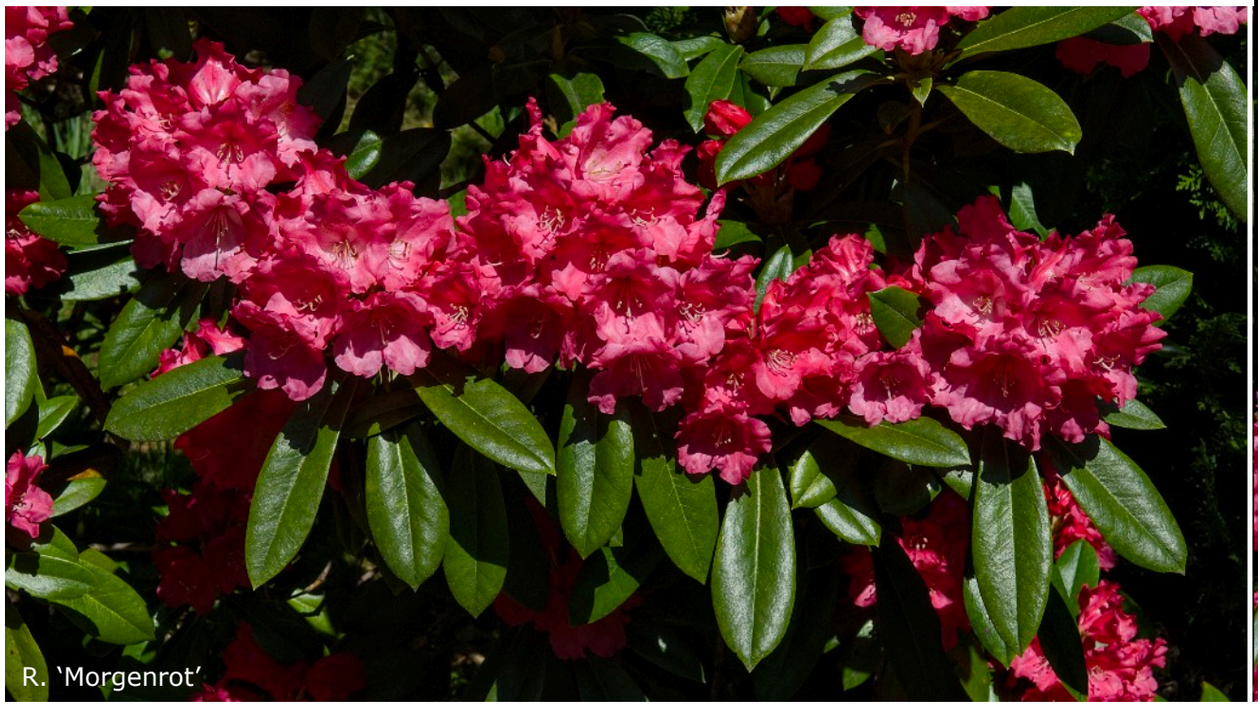
Pollen from the Kluis hybrid 'Spitfire' was daubed onto the Japanese species' stigma in 1963 and the cross named and introduced in 1974. It has a tight and compact habit that is densely filled with foliage, the leaves oblanceolate through obovate in shape, dark green in colour, 12cm long by 5cm wide, shiny and with a wash of indumentum across the abaxial surface. Flower-wise, between sixteen and eighteen funnel-shaped corollas are held in each open-topped to dome-shaped truss, of which there are an inordinate number on any well-grown mature specimen. Individually, the trumpets are five-lobed and 4cm long by up to 6cm across, dark red in bud, though when fully expanded, the hue will be purplish- or rose-red, shading inwards to a pale purplish-pink, the dorsal spotted dark red. And when backlit - as the photo on page 305 vividly confirms - they are simply mouthwatering.

Yet as has been previously stated, one of the widely known problems when using *R. yakushimanum* as the pollen donor or receiver in an F1 pairing, is a tendency for the offspring to display flowers that quickly fade and loose their colour, especially in strong sunlight. 'Morgenrot' bucks that trend, but only to a degree, though more so in the gardens of northern England and Scotland, where the strength of those rays is not as intense as experienced in the southern counties, despite a full sun placement being de rigueur to maintain a prolific flower bud set and tight habit. In the latter locales, the shrub will perform better than most of its contemporaries, but a run of bright days with high UV levels will result in an earlier fade to Neyron Rose unless protected by dappled shade.

The German epithet translates as 'Morning Red'.


R. 'Morgenrot'


R. 'Morgenrot'


R. 'Morgenrot'

R. ‘Morgenrot’

R. ‘Mrs G. W. Leak’

R. ‘Mrs G. W. Leak’
‘Coombe Royal’ x ‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 Late April-May 4m x 4m

On the subject of ‘Mrs G. W. Leak’, author, nurseryman and rhododendron hybridiser Frederick Street writes that:

> ‘It is so good that it is hard to imagine that there can be any possible improvement. The colour is a rich pink but a greater interest and beauty is given to it because the prominent red blotch in the centre of the flowers seems to spread out into the lighter pink of the petals giving it a glowing quality. It is a plant which excites interest whenever it is seen’
> *Rhododendrons,* 1965.

And that it most certainly does.

The cross, made by the Dutch firm of M. Koster & Sons in 1916, is a ‘Coombe Royal’ x ‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’ pairing where the floral inheritance from the principle species behind both hybrids is clear in the blooms of their offspring: genes from *R. griffithianum,* present in the ‘Coombe Royal’ mix, determining truss shape and the size of the corollas; those gifted by *R. caucasicum,* the ‘Chevalier Félix de Sauvage’ seed parent, contributing to the blotch. As often was the case, Koster’s chose to name their hybrid for the wife of a prominent British horticulturalist, the gentleman in question, Mr G. W. Leak - a hybridiser in his own right, raising new Delphiniums, Paeonies and Daffodils - then the manager of the Wisbech firm of Messrs R. H. Bath Ltd, President of the Horticultural Trades Association, a Council member on several other growers organisations, who also found time to serve on the RHS Floral and Narcissus Committees. Moreover, as with many other Boskoop-raised rhododendrons of the time, the hybrid’s constitution was more suited to the UK’s maritime climate than that of the Continent, so the epithet choice aided the marketing strategy in its name recognition amongst commercial growers, if not the general public.

The flowers of ‘Mrs G. W. Leak’ begin to open towards the end of April, the buds forming upright conical, yet somewhat lax trusses of about a dozen widely funnel-shaped corollas, the trumpets individually 5.5cm long by 8.5cm across. They are a mottled rosy-pink in tone, shading deeper on the three dorsal lobes where the large and heavy blackish-crimson-brown flare will be found. Five small, darker, crimson-red nectar pouches encircle the ovary. The pigmentation is most intense when the funnels are first fully expanded, with the deeper tones soon fading around the lobe margins, progressing through gradations of pale pink, and the overall transition is almost as if the blotch were sucking the colour from the surrounding petals. For the ray of streaks, speckles and spots maintains its fire even when all else turns to milky-white.

Fairly large, oblanceolate through narrowly elliptic deep green leaves cloak the tangled branch framework, the blades 10 to 15cm long, 3 to 5.5cm wide, with a pointed apex and a distinct yellow mucro. They are held for two to three years, so provide an adequate if not dense covering, but in wetter or colder climes prove the hybrid’s bane as they are susceptible to leaf spot, and when afflicted, can be highly disfiguring.

The shrub’s habit is at first upright, then spreading, ultimately resulting in a fairly compact dome around 4m high with a similar width, this the usual form of a mature shrub. Juvenile plants take some time to begin flowering freely, but then, with age, provide ever more impressive displays. The hybrid is heat tolerant, but its winter hardiness is only rated down to -18ºC, so most specimens will be found planted in dappled shade rather than full sun, the shelter trees also prolonging the life of the flowers, but opening up the habit.


R. ‘Mrs G. W. Leak’


R. ‘Mrs G. W. Leak’

R. ‘Mrs G. W. Leak’

R. ‘Mrs G. W. Leak’

R. 'Muncaster Hybrid'

Unknown x Unknown

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late May-June 6m x 6m

Towards the end of May or the early part of June, if you were to walk unawares into the 'Muncaster Hybrid' glade within Church Wood - about halfway along and bordering the Terrace Walk - at Muncaster Castle in western Cumbria, you would quite literally be rooted in your tracks, stopped dead: by a vast semi-circle wall of pink bloom hemming you in on both sides, as well as ahead. Of course, there is an escape, for the path slants off to the left passing beneath a tangle of overhanging branches, but rhodophiles will want to absorb every facet of the scene before them and it will be many minutes before they finally move on. For the flowers on display are simply riveting.

Patrick Synge, visiting the Castle in 1952 prior to composing an article for *The Rhododendron Year Book 1953,* was told the story behind the hybrid by either Sir John Ramsden himself, or the head gardener of the time, Mr Blair, who conducted the tour of the grounds. Synge records that:

> 'The very fine deep pink 'Muncaster Hybrid' had grown to great size and was laden with flower. Acquired about 1860 from a local nursery which has long since disappeared, no other name had been given to this hybrid, which was one of the finest Rhododendrons of the "hardy hybrid" type I have yet seen. It has the appearance of being related to 'Pink Pearl' but is without the purple anthers'.

That same historical account has been related to many other visitors since 1952, myself included, but it has a number of flaws, the most obvious being the 1860s date and the fact that 'Muncaster Hybrid' is clearly a second-generation *griffithianum* cross not an ironclad. For as Volume 84, Tab 5065 of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* details, *R. griffithianum* only began flowering in UK cultivation during May 1858, and two years would have been nowhere near enough time for a hybridiser to make, raise and flower an F1 pairing - such as the Mangles *griffithianum* x *catawbiense* hybrid 'George Hardy', for instance - and then combine that cross with another species or hybrid - 'George Hardy' x 'Broughtonii' (as in 'Pink Pearl') - plus raise, flower and propagate that F2 selection. Even if, to speed up the process, top grafting techniques were employed and seedlings distributed instead of vegetatively produced juveniles. So even twelve years would have been pushing it.

Moreover, those blooms would have caused an absolute sensation if the plant had been marketed in the 1860s, 1870s or 1880s, or indeed, if the shrub had been introduced at any time before 'Pink Pearl' arrived on the scene from Bagshot during 1896.

So where did this fantastic creation come from?

We can discount 'Muncaster Hybrid' being one of Sir John Ramsden's own crosses, for he surely would have taken credit for such and exhibited the blooms at any number of shows in search of an RHS award even if the pairing had duplicated that of 'Pink Pearl', or alternatively, mirrored the equation of one of the stream of Continental near-copies arriving in the UK during the early 1920s - 'Betty Wormald' or 'Rosamund Millais' perhaps, these respectively 'George Hardy' pollinated by an 'Un-named Red Hybrid', and by 'Doncaster', with both introduced by the Dutch firm of M. Koster & Sons.

Another possibility also exists: 'Muncaster Hybrid' could be a named cross whose label was lost in transit. Yet if it was, at least one of the many experts who have visited the gardens in the last ninety years or so, would have been able to identify it as such.

Which leaves just two possible avenues of inquiry open:

Most of the original rhododendron planting at Muncaster was carried out between the two World Wars, and present amongst the mix of species and hybrids installed throughout the woodlands, are many crosses made by Edward Magor of Lamellen, in Cornwall.

John Hammond, rhodophile and garden historian, includes information on how those plants were distributed in an appreciation of this master hybridiser that he wrote for the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group's 2012 Year Book, an essay that he titled *The Rhododendron Legacy of the Magor Family of Lamellen, Cornwall: An Historical Perspective*. Within the text he reports that:

> 'One of the most significant, and perhaps least known of Mr Magor's activities was his involvement in distributing both species and hybrids to "gentlemen gardeners" by the circulation of a 'List of Surplus Plants for Sale'. This list was being distributed as early as 1918 and by the 1920s there was a 'network' in place whereby the landed gentry were able to sell or exchange surplus plants and thereby service each other's needs; however, it was not realised until recently just how large a volume was involved'.

A number of examples are then given, one being a set of deliveries to Larachmhor Garden in the Highlands, where:

> 'Between November 1926 and November 1930, ten batches of plants were supplied comprising 102 species, 90 small species seedlings, 64 hybrids (including some of Mr Magor's best crosses) and 32 small hybrid seedlings. Many were large plants around 5 to 6ft high'.

So 'Muncaster Hybrid' might have been included in a Lamellen consignment along with batches of 'Arbsutch', 'Fargarb', 'Fulgarb' and a host of other Magor hybrids, as multiple clones of the trio mentioned - differing ever so slightly one from another - can be found dotted across the grounds and may have been sent as unflowered seedlings.

Patrick Synge tangentially details the second possible source of 'Muncaster Hybrid' in his 1953 *Year Book* article:

> 'In the top garden also was a notable plant of *R. griffithianum,* now about 20 ft. in height. This plant was originally at Tittenhurst where the late Mr Lowinsky protected it in winter with a canvas tent'.

So like Lionel de Rothschild, Sir John Ramsden too managed to purchase some of the plants Thomas Lowinsky had amassed at Tittenhurst Park between 1898 and 1926, with these then successfully relocated to Muncaster.

Quoting from *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* by C. E. Lucas Philips and Peter N. Barber, this first published in 1967:

> 'Lionel spent three days at Tittenhurst and was glad to find many good specimens of rhododendron species, as well as the hybrids of the time. There were also some thirty *discolor* crosses and a prodigious number of Mr Lowinsky's own unnamed hybrids'.

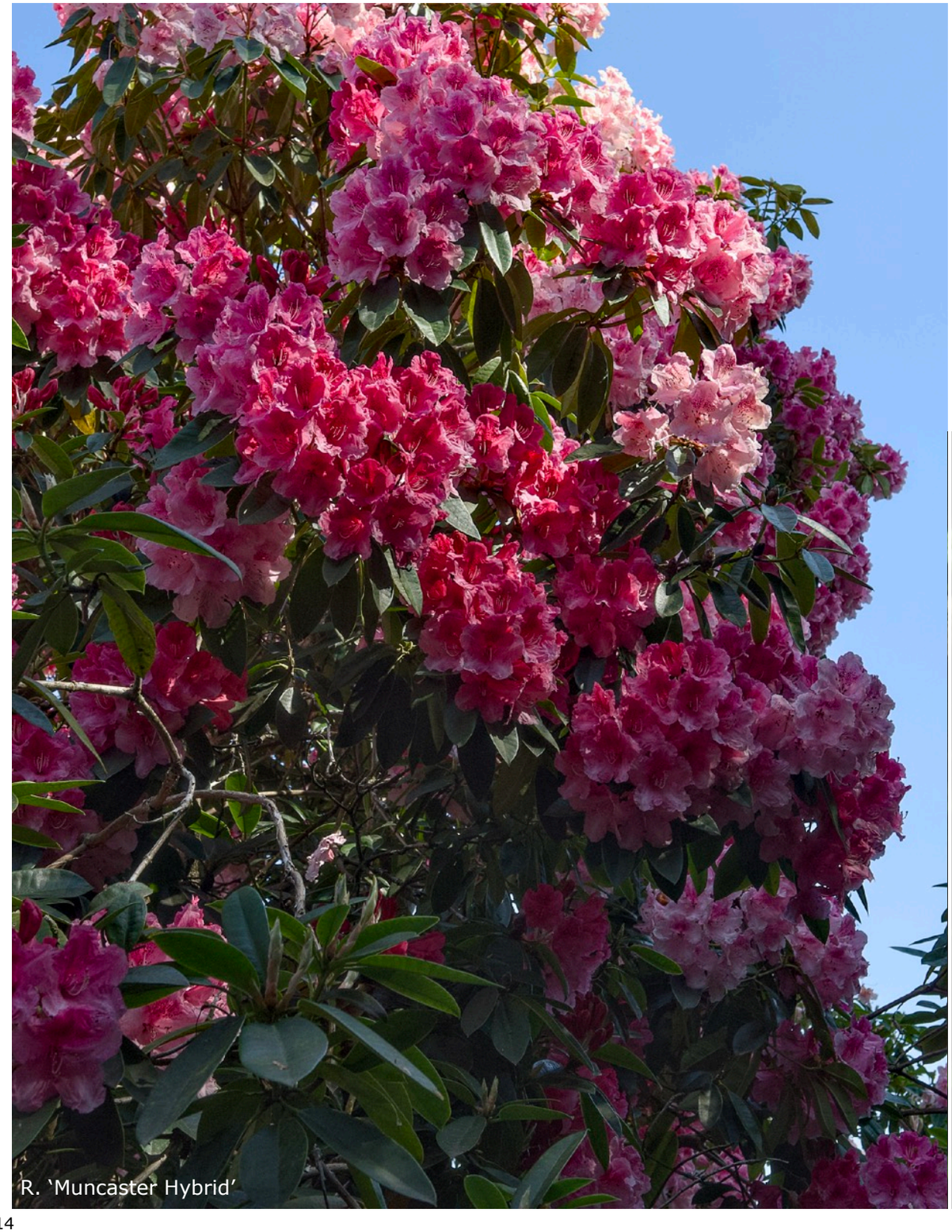
Might one of those unnamed Thomas Lowinsky shrubs been the nascent 'Muncaster Hybrid' cross? For if so, its acquisition by Sir John would explain why no one has been able to match it with any other registered hybrid.

Now fast-forward to 1952, some twenty-six years later, and benefitting from the very favourable climate and high rainfall along the Irish Sea coast that powers 'the very rapid and luxuriant growth at Muncaster' - again quoting from the 1953 *Year Book* - an already well-developed rhododendron could easily have added several metres to its height and girth, and in doing so, become the paragon Patrick Synge observed.

R. ‘Muncaster Hybrid’

R. ‘Muncaster Hybrid’

The ‘Muncaster Hybrid’ glade in Church Wood.



R. ‘Muncaster Hybrid’

All of the above is pure speculation, of course, despite the supporting, documented evidence, yet given the fact that Lionel de Rothschild used Lowinsky Hybrid No. 1284 in a combination with *R. griersonianu*m to produce ‘Fantasy’, and pollinated *R. facetum* with Lowinsky Hybrid No. 3630 to create ‘Retreat’, might not the blooms of Lowinsky Hybrid No. 1860 be lighting-up Church Wood and other spots across the Muncaster estate?

‘Muncaster Hybrid’ has dark green narrowly elliptic through elliptic-ovate leaves, each 16.5cm long by 6.5cm wide, which are somewhat shiny or matt, pointed at the apex, flat or sometimes curved longitudinally, the blades often showing a gentle V-shaped profile. They are held on the shrub for between two and three years.

The corollas are pinkish-red in colour fading out through soft pink to white, with two wide rays or a fan of black spots on the dorsal. Each is five-lobed, widely funnel-shaped, with white stamens and style, the stigma of which is crimson. Flower trusses are globular, or tall and conical, tightly packed with between 10 and 12 trumpets, each of which is 6.5cm long by 9cm across at the mouth.

Habit is upright and spreading, the shrub decidedly vigorous and thriving in full sun at Muncaster, with a hardiness rating probably down to around -18ºC, but likely not matching the -21ºC figure of ‘Pink Pearl’.



R. ‘Muncaster Hybrid’

R. ‘Muncaster Hybrid’

R. `Muncaster Mist'



Sir John Ramsden

R. ‘Muncaster Mist’
campanulatum x *floribundum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late March-April 4m x 6m

‘Muncaster Mist’ is probably the best known and most widely distributed of Sir John Ramsden’s rhododendron hybrids, a *campanulatum* x *floribundum* pairing made sometime before 1958 and introduced by his son, Sir William Pennington-Ramsden in 1964.

The foliage is very close to some forms of the pollen parent, with the blades large, broadly elliptic, grey-green or dark-green, deeply veined, often convex in profile and held for two years. They are 16 to 20cm long and up to 7.5cm wide, with a thin, but persistent greyish-fawn indumentum cloaking their underside. A number of sources suggest that the shrub will remain medium-sized and compact, but any such notion will quickly be dispelled by a jog around the largest specimen resident in the Castle grounds, which has twice layered itself, so although still only a modest 4m or so in height, from end to end the span is approaching 10m.

The flowers of ‘Muncaster Mist’ are composed of widely campanulate corollas, 5cm long by 7cm across, whose hue has been described as smoky-blue, though lilac-mauve is nearer the truth. A dark purple-black blotch will be found at the base of the dorsal lobe and a smattering of similarly coloured spots seen extending upwards. The conical trusses can be packed with between nine and twelve such bells and are usually produced in profusion on mature shrubs, but with restraint by younger plants for a number of years.

Those blooms can open as early as mid March if the weather is mild, with new growth quickly following, so a frost-free site is essential. The locale of Muncaster’s champion might appear unprotected, but in reality, the grassy plateau on which it is set is only a few dozen metres from a wooded hillside that plunges steeply down to the valley of the River Esk, so two essential drainage boxes are ticked by the locale’s residence and the shrub is certainly thriving in its near full sun placement. On the other hand, a specimen grown in the Valley Gardens at Windsor Great Park, set in dappled shade amongst trees, is equally fine, the planting spot prolonging the deeper tones in the blooms that would otherwise soon be bleached by the stronger sunlight.



R. ‘Muncaster Mist’


R. ‘Muncaster Mist’


R. ‘Muncaster Mist’


R. ‘Muncaster Mist’

R. ‘Muncaster Mist’

R. ‘Nancy Evans’

The ‘Nancy Evans’ Pride

‘Hotei’ x ‘Lem’s Cameo’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Early May 2m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Butter Brickle	John Lofthouse	1976	1982
Lyn’s Memory	Lynne A. Hutchison	1987	1994
Moondancer	John Lofthouse	1976	1987
Nancy Evans	Edwin C. Brockenbrough	1970	1983
Palouse	Jim Barlup	1981	1995
Stardancer	John Lofthouse	1976	1987
Sunrise Serenade	John Lofthouse	1976	1986

If Charles Caleb Colton is right about imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, then Doctor Ned Brockenbrough will be receiving respect by the truckload, for not only has his ‘Hotei’ x ‘Lem’s Cameo’ pairing been duplicated by several other highly regarded hybridisers, but the result of that combination - ‘Nancy Evans’ - has been wholeheartedly embraced by the entire rhododendron fraternity, both as a garden plant and a potential parent in further breeding experiments. Moreover, and without question, it is hands down a prize-winning cross despite the current lack of an AM or FCC (for the value of its 2002 RHS Award of Garden Merit, which can be removed on a whim if someone decides that too many such commendations have been made within the genus - as has happened - is, due to that very impermanence, questionable).

The flowers of ‘Nancy Evans’ expand from orange-red buds in early May, nineteen widely-funnel-shaped corollas in each tight ball-shaped truss, amber yellow in tone, these at first shaded orange within and more deeply without. Each trumpet is 5cm long by 6.5cm across, with 5 or 6 lobes, and a large, similarly coloured, cup-shaped calyx supports each bloom. This has irregular and deeply cleft lobes that can be even longer - up to 6.5cm in length - which gives the appearance of almost hose-in-hose blooms. Free-flowering from a young age, the shrub sets its floral display against mid to dark-green, glossy elliptic leaves, these 10cm long by 4cm wide, and although the perfect foil for those corollas, the blades are only held for one or two years. However, the habit is compact, and the hybrid remains a low to medium-sized bush for many years, though ultimately a height of around 2m will be attained along with a spread of 3m or more.

Two minor negatives should be noted by prospective purchasers: the new growth appears at the same time as the flowers, so may mar the display; and the drainage must be decidedly swift. A sheltered position in dappled shade will also prove the ideal site given the -15ºC hardiness rating.

The ‘Nancy Evans’ epithet was chosen as an honorific for the wife of Daniel J. Evans, the three-term-serving 16th Governor of Washington State, and later United States Senator.



R. ‘Nancy Evans’



R. ‘Nancy Evans’

R. ‘Naomi’

The ‘Naomi’ Pride

‘Aurora’ x *fortunei*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late April-early May 8m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Exbury Naomi	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	1933
Molly Buckley	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1980	1980
Naomi	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	1933
Naomi Astarte	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1942
Naomi Carissima	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1942
Naomi Early Dawn	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1942
Naomi Glow	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1942
Naomi Hope	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1942
Naomi Nautilus	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	1938
Naomi Nereid	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1942
Naomi Orpha	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1992
Naomi Pink Beauty	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1942
Naomi Pixie	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	before 1982
Naomi Stella Maris	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	1939
Paris	Lionel de Rothschild	1926	1968

In May 1933, at just twelve years of age, Lionel Nathan de Rothschild’s youngest daughter - Naomi Louisa Nina de Rothschild (1920-2007) - graciously allowed her father to borrow her Christian name for entry No. 108 in the Exbury studbook. That listing recorded the details of a cross made in 1926, which had placed pollen from *R. fortunei* onto the style of a hybrid the UK’s master hybridiser had originally purchased, unflowered, from Richard Gill’s nursery in Cornwall. When, for the very first time, it did bloom - during the spring of 1922 - the rhododendron was baptised ‘Aurora’ and its soft pink blooms went on to secure an immediate Award of Merit from the RHS. So L de R’s hopes were high for the seedlings of this *fortunei-griffithianum-thomsonii* mix when they set their first flower buds in 1932. And equally, those inflorescences did not disappoint, winning their own AM when introduced in 1933. Indeed, the shrub upon which they opened went on to become the most famous and widely planted of all the Rothschild rhododendron hybrids: ‘Naomi’.

That epithet of course, is actually the cover-all name for the entire pride, because the premier introduction was ‘Exbury Naomi’, sweetly scented, with 14 funnels in a compact, globular truss, their hue lilac-pink on a biscuit-yellow ground. That deeper tone is most evident around the lobe margins, but it fades fast in full sun and only marginally slower in dappled shade. Expanding from deep cerise buds, the seven-lobed corollas are each 6.5cm long and up to 9cm across when fully dilated and just like their seed parent, they enticed an on-the-spot positive response from the RHS floral committee when first presented for assessment.

Foliage-wise, the ‘Naomi’ pride bear matt, mid green leaf blades that have a broadly elliptic shape, with each being around 11.5cm long by 5.5cm in width, and they are held on the bush for between one and two years. The shrub’s habit will ultimately develop into a small tree, those sturdy branches sporting flower buds from the lowest to the highest rung, and the oldest specimens at Exbury are now close to 8m in height with a spread not far short of that figure. They are also winter hardy down to -21ºC and can be grown in full sun if needs must, though of course the pigmentation suffusing the blooms will suffer and pale, especially in southern locales. Powdery mildew infection is the only negative to note, the leaves susceptible through their *R. thomsonii* heritage, but usually to a far lesser degree than that experienced with that species.

Prospective purchasers should also note that as young plants, the ‘Naomi’ pride are not free-flowering, for only with age will they produce that vast sweep of bloom for which they are justly renowned. So it was not until 1938 that ‘Naomi Nautilus’ was introduced, with ‘Naomi Stella Maris’ following a year later. Both clones were again graced with coveted RHS floral awards, the former an AM, the latter an FCC. However, in total, fourteen named selections have now been registered, all from the original match apart from one, the 1980-introduced clone, ‘Molly Buckley’, which resulted from an apparent repeat pairing made by Lionel’s son Edmund de Rothschild, and while that number is below the twenty-two entries accrued by Sir Edmund Loder for his *fortunei* x *griffithianum* Loderi pride, it is still too many, even though one of the best - ‘Naomi Astarte’ - only garnered an AM in 1997. The clones have also become mixed-up, both in commerce and in gardens, and just like the Leonardslee pairing, crosses recording ‘Naomi’ as one of the parents in the equation have also been logged with the International Rhododendron Registrar - including some from the rhododendron’s New Forest residence - even though technically such an entity does not exist, this state of affairs exacerbated by the ‘Naomi’ epithet also being the accepted synonym of ‘Exbury Naomi’.

Amongst the treasure trove of hybrids he created - some 1200 pairings made over the course of little more than twenty years; resulting in 460 named and registered selections; nearly all of which are head and shoulders above the competition - members of the ‘Naomi’ pride were Lionel de Rothschild’s personal favourites and an unexpected encounter with any one of them in full bloom - as a path is turned or another masterpiece blocking the view ahead recedes - will find any rhodophile brought up in their tracks. Today, dotted throughout the woodland at Exbury, and in countless rhododendron collections across the length and breadth of Great Britain, ‘Exbury Naomi’ and her sisters take pride of place when in late April and on into May, a gamut of opulent trusses covers each mature specimen. And their fragrance too acts as a magnet, drawing admirers from afar; as does the buzz of a thousand bees harvesting the abundance of soon to be honeyed nectar.

R. ‘Exbury Naomi’

R. ‘Exbury Naomi’


R. ‘Naomi Astarte’


R. ‘Naomi Early Dawn’


R. ‘Naomi Hope’



R. ‘Naomi Nautilus’



R. ‘Naomi Nereid’



R. ‘Naomi Orpha’

R. ‘Naomi Pink Beauty’

R. ‘Paris’



R. ‘Nimrod’



R. ‘Scheherezade’

The ‘Nimrod’ Pride

irroratum x *calophytum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Mid March-early April 6m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Nimrod	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1963
Scheherezade	Edmund de Rothschild	before 1963	1988

‘Nimrod’ is an out-and-out cracker all year round, with large spear-blade-shaped dark green leaves densely filling a robust framework and commanding attention even when the eye-catching flowers have faded. It is one of Edmund de Rothschild’s undisputed hybrid triumphs, a coup de maître cross, although from the parental equation, it appears a simple one, no more than a straightforward *irroratum* x *calophytum* F1 pairing.

Yet in fact, it was a combination no one else had tried until pollen was applied to style at Exbury in the early 1950s, although a check of the *IRRC* will reveal that an unknown French hybridiser made the reverse cross back in the 1920s and one of the UK’s leading horticulturalists and a rhododendron doyen to boot - Collingwood Ingram - had not only obtained one of the seedlings, but named it ‘Calotum’ in 1934. Except there is where the story apparently ends, for the shrub appears not to have been distributed beyond Ingram’s own garden at The Grange, Benenden Green, Kent, and is possibly no longer in cultivation. If so, that same fate will likely not befall ‘Nimrod’ due to the canny choice of clones used in the match: one of Exbury’s finest specimens of *R. calophytum* providing the pollen; and the AM-awarded ‘Polka Dot’ selection of *R. irroratum* - raised by Edmund’s father Lionel de Rothschild - maturing the seed and so virtually guaranteeing the heavily spotted flowers.

Those corollas are individually 5cm long and wide, funnel-campanulate in shape, five-lobed, with wavy margins. They are purplish-pink in the bud, opening white flushed pink, with innumerable purplish-red flecks on all of the lobes and five darker, purple-hued nectar pouches ringing the base of the throat. Twenty-two such trumpets are gathered into each and every domed or ball-shaped truss and while the hybrid is slow to start blooming as a youngster, mature specimens put on an annual floral extravaganza from mid March into April that is simply stunning. But new growth too extends early, so a woodland site offering protection from spring frosts, as well as wind shelter to avoid broken leaf stalks, will be essential despite the H6 hardiness rating. The dark green foliage is thick and substantial, the leaves with deeply impressed veins above, a glabrous surface below and an abaxial midrib that is prominent and often stained red for much of its length. Each blade is a narrowly elliptic dagger, pointed at the apex and tapering or rounded at the base, 18cm long and up to 5.5.cm broad. And they are held for two to three years, so the sturdy framework of branches is demurely dressed rather than fully open to view. Habit is upright and spreading, a dome easily 6m high and wide with age, dimensions that will almost certainly be breached in west coast gardens where the growing conditions are more favourable or as the oldest shrubs become eligible for a pension.

The British Aerospace AEW3, the biblical King of Shinar, several geographic locales or even the ship used by Ernest Shackleton on his 1908 expedition to the Antarctic could have supplied the epithet, or perhaps Mr Eddy was simply an admirer of Elgar. Whichever would have remained an enigma had not he introduced ‘Scheherezade’ - with slightly darker flowers - in 1988, its appellation perhaps giving a musical nod to the *One Thousand and One Nights* adaptions of Rimsky-Korsakov or Ravel, despite the extra ‘e’.

R. ‘Nimrod’

R. ‘Oklahoma’

R. ‘Oklahoma’

‘Bellerophon’ x ‘Tally Ho’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 June 3m x 3m

Whether it was Cunard's trans-Atlantic liner *Queen Elizabeth* - carrying the cast, crew, scenery and costumes for the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma!* - running aground on a sandbank off the port of Southampton in the Solent close to Exbury Gardens on April 17th, 1947 - less than two weeks before the production’s West End opening at the Theatre Royal – that subliminally or otherwise ultimately prompted Edmund de Rothschild’s choice of epithet - minus the exclamation mark! - is unknown, but his father’s ‘Bellerophon’ x ‘Tally Ho’ pairing ended up so christened when it was introduced in 1948.

The show opened to rave reviews and packed houses, by the by, but ‘Oklahoma’ the hybrid, appears to have slipped in under the radar and then been mostly forgotten.

At least it was, until 1975.

Which was when Alan Hardy exhibited a truss from a plant growing in his garden at Sandling Park, Kent, to the RHS Floral Committee, this finally securing the rhododendron an Award of Merit.

Yet given those packed trusses of stunning red blooms, that near three-decades-long oversight must surely be rated an error of near criminal proportions. For between twenty and twenty-two openly funnel-shaped corollas emerge from each flower bud to be arranged in a loose circle comprising two or three tiers, with every one of the trumpets in that ensemble 5cm long by up to 8.5cm across at the mouth. The darker spotting on the dorsal lobe is so slight it can only be described as a tokenism, and equally, the reflexed calyx lobes, supposedly standing proud at the base of the tube, because although specified in the registration as being up to 3cm long, they are usually a mere fraction of this figure. However, each is coloured red and sports fine white hairs at the join with the pedicel, while the stamen anthers, plus the stigma at the end of the style, are flushed dark black.

The foliage too is distinguished: 17.5cm long narrowly elliptic blades of a glossy dark green; somewhat rugulose above; with a thin and loose, pale brown indumentum below; and these are held on the shrub for two years. Regrettably they are prone to chlorosis and the loose, open habit of the hybrid, exacerbated by long inter-nodal growth - this facet compounded by the requirement for a planting site in dappled shade - does nothing to assist any visual appeal.

Hardiness is borderline, hence the sheltered locale prerequisite, and a consequence of two dollops of *R. facetum* genes in the ‘Oklahoma’ parental mix, but if the wind does come sweeping down from the plains, that shelter will already be in place, ensuring an untroubled transition through the winter months. Because the -12ºC H4-5 rating makes the hybrid unsuitable for any but the mildest of locales in the UK, specifically, those gardens sited along the west coast and in the south. Yet flowering in June, with the bloom time often extending into early July, for those lucky few who can give Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Oklahoma’ sanctuary, it too, would assuredly, also be doing fine. And on the naming front, maybe Mr Eddy simply couldn’t get that damn tune out of his head!



R. ‘Oklahoma’



R. ‘Oklahoma’



R. ‘Osgood Mackenzie’

R. ‘Osgood Mackenzie’

sinogrande x *hodgsonii*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H4	April	10m x 10m

Another liberty has been taken, because if ever a rhododendron hybrid deserved to be named and registered, it is this F1 species pairing, with one parent coming from the Subsection *Grandia* botanic pigeonhole, the other from Subsection *Falconera,* and each must have been a superlative plant in its own right. For in combination, with pollen from *R. hodgsonii* placed onto the style of *R. sinogrande,* something special has been created. Other gardens have made the same cross, although none of their progeny have been registered with the *IRRC.* Yet to my eyes, those plants, seen on innumerable garden visits over the years, simply lack the sheer majesty of the mature specimen at Inverewe. So they are both figuratively and literally, dwarves in comparison.

And every feature of this paragon is outstanding: bark, leaves, stature, flowers.

So seen in full bloom, under leaden skies, the spectacle is utterly mesmerising; the glowing purple balls breathtaking.

Four decades ago, stumbling upon this vision of loveliness, my infatuation with Genus *Rhododendron* began, and each time that acquaintance has been renewed since, the power of this colossus to visually stun the beholder has grown.

Yet it remains unchristened, despite the ideal choice of epithet surely being apparent to all. And one currently absent from the *IRRC* listings: Rhododendron ‘Osgood Mackenzie’. An honorific long overdue; indeed, a perfect pairing.



R. ‘Osgood Mackenzie’

R. ‘Osgood Mackenzie’

R. ‘Osgood Mackenzie’

R. 'Osgood Mackenzie'

R. ‘Penjerrick’

The ‘Pejerrick’ Pride

campylocarpum x *griffithianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 April-early May 6m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Fay Norman	Lady Norman	1937	2007
Penjerrick	Samuel Smith	before 1917	1923
Penjerrick Cream	Samuel Smith	before 1917	before 1988
Penjerrick Pink	Samuel Smith	before 1917	before 1988

‘The Most Beautiful Rhododendron Of All’ ™

That is a hard sobriquet to live up to. Most especially when hardiness is lacking and the sheltering surrounds of a large woodland garden are required to produce even half-decent mature specimens. But in such hallowed locales, Samuel Smith’s *campylocarpum* x *griffithianum* pairing is an undoubted star.

The directed pollination was made sometime between 1889 and 1917: the first date being when Anna Maria Fox appointed Smith head gardener at Penjerrick, her house and garden near Falmouth in Cornwall; the second, when John Guille Millais briefly noted its existence in the first volume of his *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* though only as an unnamed pairing, the nine-word tangential aside included in the ‘*R. campylocarpum* x *R. Griffithianum*’ paragraph on page 135. The cross was finally named in 1923 after garnering an Award of Merit from the RHS, and thereafter, it quickly took on near mythical status: Henry McLaren, for instance, stating just five years later - in 1928’s Volume 3, Number 4, of *The Rhododendron Society Notes* – that if he ‘were confined to growing just one hybrid Rhododendron he would, without hesitation, grow PENJERRICK’.

Regrettably, Lord Aberconway then goes and muddies the waters by reversing the given parentage when writing that *R. campylocarpum* was used as the pollen parent. Other authors add to this confusion by associating ‘Penjerrick’ with the Mangles hybrids ‘Mrs Kingsmill’ and ‘Mrs Randall Davidson’, which are actually *griffithianum* x *campylocarpum* pairings, such texts often declaring them to be ‘an older introduction from the same cross’, to quote from the 1988 Peter and Kenneth Cox tome *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids.* But Millais is equally guilty of the same association and of reversing the parentage equation of the Valewood plants in the process, as are those experts responsible for past updates of *Bean’s Tree and Shrubs*. In fairness, these three hybrids, along with the other duplicate pairings made at Caerhays, Lamellen, Leonardslee, Trewithen and elsewhere - the majority thankfully unregistered with the *IRRC* - are all very similar in general physical as well as floristic appearance. However, only ‘Fay Norman’, crossed in 1937, named in 2007 and registered in 2008, is genetically identical to ‘Penjerrick’. Because as we now know, the DNA coding of the organelles present in each newly conceived embryo, is the exclusive gift of the female parent, be it a rhododendron seed or a human foetus. In a plant, these would include the chloroplasts and the mitochondria, respectively crucial to the photosynthesis process and for generating chemical energy within an individual cell, and their efficiency has been shown to vary between different rhododendron species. So although from a morphological vantage point a *campylocarpum* x *griffithianum* combination might still be considered the same as a *griffithianum* x *campylocarpum* pairing, scientific research has proven that genetically, this is not the case, and such associations can no longer stand.



R. ’Penjerrick’



R. ‘Penjerrick Cream’

The original distribution of ‘Penjerrick’ consisted of seedlings rather than vegetatively propagated individuals from a named clone, with Bodnant reportedly ‘procuring some of the surplus’ (Aberconway, *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society,* Volume 76, 1951). So although three named clones are registered - ‘Penjerrick’, ‘Penjerrick Cream’ and ‘Penjerrick Pink’ - only the flowers of the AM form are committed to being pale pink, the gamut of the others encompassing white, ivory-white, white flushed pink, cream, pale yellow, pale yellow flushed pink, and pale pink. Those blooms are carried in lax through pendent trusses of six to nine campanulate corollas, each bell 10cm across at the mouth with a ring of small, crimson-coloured nectar pouches encircling the ovary at the base of the throat, and most clones - but not all - are slightly scented.

The leaf blades are elliptic through oblong in shape, obtuse at the tip but with a distinct mucro; rounded or somewhat cordate at the base; up to 15cm long by 7.5cm wide; mid to dark green above and glossy; a paler grey-green below. But they are only held for one year and in wetter locales can be prone to mildew and leaf spot.

‘Penjerrick’ is a vigorous grower, forming a small tree in time, often with a single, smooth-barked trunk. Most adopt an umbrella-shaped form, though some clones may be quite sparsely branched. All flower freely, mature shrubs usually awash with bloom from mid April onwards. That means the hybrid is not suitable for a ‘frost hole’ - to again quote Mr McLaren - and it only ‘just survives with us in Scotland, but suffers badly in severe winters’ - to once more report the hands-on experience of the owners of Glendoick Gardens. Two hundred miles south of Perth however, in the far from balmy climes of Ray Wood - on the Howardian Hills of North Yorkshire - the ‘Penjerrick’ clones thrive, though Jack may occasionally trounce the flower buds.



R. ‘Penjerrick Cream’

R. ‘Penjerrick Pink’

R. ‘Pink Pearl’

R. 'Pink Pearl'
'George Hardy' x 'Broughtonii'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late April-May 6m x 4m

'It is not too much to say that no new plant of recent years has created such a sensation with the public as R. Pink Pearl'.
J. G. Millais, *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* 1917.

And from the moment John Waterer and Sons of Bagshot, Surrey, unveiled 'Pink Pearl' to a flabbergasted public at the Temple Show in 1896, and an enthusiastic collector, there and then, paid £50.00 for the first plant sold - a sum equal to £6,534.00 today - the world of rhododendron hybridisation was turned on its head, as the ground quite literally shifted. For customer demand meant the array of specialist nursery firms in the UK and on the Continent all had to have their very own 'Pink Pearl' equivalent. But unlike today, when publishing the parentage of a newly introduced hybrid is regarded as de rigueur, such an equation in the closing years of the Victorian era was a closely guarded secret.

The man who actually made the match, John Waterer II, had died in November 1893, and responsibility for managing the nursery had transferred to his two eldest sons, namely John III (1865-1948), and Frank Gomer (1867-1945). The latter was then given the added responsibility of marketing his father's hybrid, having already rescued the young plant from an overly acquisitive employee some years earlier, the disappearance and recovery of such detailed by Eleanor Willson in her superb *Nurserymen to the World,* a historical account of the horticultural firms gathered around Woking and northwest Surrey in the heyday of the industry:

'The story goes that Gomer noted the plant as a seedling, kept a careful watch on it and when the plant set a flower bud visited it every day in the trial grounds to watch its progress. Then one morning to his dismay he found it had disappeared; a few days later, passing the garden of a cottage in which one of his employees lived, he saw it planted out in a central bed. In the 19th century, trial grounds were usually in wild and inaccessible parts of the nursery that might appear to the uninitiated as neglected. To a nursery worker the removal of an occasional plant to his own garden was regarded as a normal perquisite'.

But not in this case, and 'Pink Pearl' was soon back on site.

Once that sole flower had bud opened, the Waterers knew they had a winner on their hands and the plant was entrusted for propagation into the care of Charlie Rose, their senior nurseryman, who features in the now classic photograph of the hybrid, taken around 1890, with the size of the plant - if that date is accurate - indicating that the cross was most likely made at least a decade before the shutter clicked. Gomer Waterer gave the first clue to its lineage in a 1903-published account for Volume 1 of *Flora and Sylva:*

'There has been a great deal of discussion as to its parentage, and although I do not in the present article intend to give its immediate parents, we can say that it was raised from the results of crossing two hardy hybrids, and is not, as has been said, a direct *Aucklandii* seedling; yet it throws back to that strain'.

With an Award of Merit gifted to 'Pink Pearl' in 1897, the year it was introduced; a First Class Certificate following in 1900; Queen Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII, vocal in her praise of the plant; and demand for the rhododendron so high that the nursery had 'barely been able to supply it' (to again quote Gomer Waterer): the volume of enquiry and debate showed no sign of quietening down despite confirmation of the Hooker-introduced *R. griffithianum* being part of the parental mix. So by 1917, when J. G. Millais published the first volume of his *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* speculation and rumour was still rife:

'The origin of Pink Pearl has never been given by Messrs John Waterer, though rumour has it that it was produced by using the pollen of R. George Hardy and Cynthia. It is certain that Mr Scott, working for Mr Peter Lawson, raised a hybrid (*R. Griffithianum* x R. John Waterer) of very much the same kind at Golden Acre Nurseries in Edinburgh, for Mr Mangles saw such a plant and purchased one in 1882.

It has also been said that Mr Mangles actually raised Pink Pearl, but I do not think that this is correct. His hybrids are closely allied to Pink Pearl, but all differ from that plant.

Sir Herbert Maxwell has told us that, some years ago, Messrs Methven of Edinburgh purchased a number of seedling hybrid Rhododendrons at the sale of Peter Lawson & Son. Some years later one of these seedlings was flowering, and was purchased by one of John Waterer's travellers. This plant was said to be the original R. Pink Pearl. Messrs John Waterer, however, deny this statement, and claim to have raised this hybrid at their own nursery. Argument in such a case is useless, but I feel certain, however, that Peter Lawson did raise a similar plant to R. Pink Pearl.



The original plant of 'Pink Pearl',
c. 1890, and nurseryman Charlie Rose.

'For Mr Mangles states in his notes that he had purchased a plant bearing such a description, and this plant I found at Miss Mangles' garden at Littleworth Cross - a plant too whose age and appearance would confirm such a statement. It would seem, therefore, that the Lawson plant was raised some years before Messrs Waterer's example, and that the two raisers may have accidentally hit upon the same parents'.

However, when Volume 2 of JGM's now classic tome hit the bookstands in 1924, conjecture and tittle-tattle had become fake news:

'Now we come to a new aspect of the case giving a definite statement of origin:

Ten years ago Mr Coomber, head gardener to Colonel Leonard Messel at Nymans, Sussex, obtained the pollen of R. Loderi from a plant growing at Ashfold near Horsham and placed it on R. Loder's White growing in the garden at Nymans. In time the seedlings grew and several flowered in 1923. Most of these had the usual *Griffithianum* hybrid leaves and trusses, pale pink or tinted white, but one of them developed truss, flowers and leaves practically similar to fine examples of R. Pink Pearl, but if anything slightly finer in all respects. Here we have a definite statement of fact as regards the origin of at any rate one form of R. Pink Pearl.

This result in breeding opens our eyes to what must be a new view in hybridization because it seems to prove either that one original parent such as *R. Griffithianum* is all potent in certain lines, such as colour and form of leaves, and truss in subsequent hybrids even when other species or hybrids are brought in, or that we may arrive at the same results by different roads. There is no room for argument, that Coomber's R. Pink Pearl can be the same breeding as Lawson's or Waterer's R. Pink Pearl because R. Loder's White was raised by Mangles about 40 years ago and R. Loderi by Sir E. Loder 23 years ago. Such a hybrid in the time of Lawson or the Messrs John Waterer was therefore impossible. As I have suggested, it looks as if we could raise practically the same hybrid by having different parents provided that one powerful, insistent and dominating strain such as *R. Griffithianum* or *R. Fortunei* was used in the first instance.

I think myself that Lawson, Waterer and Coomber have all achieved the same results, employing slightly different strains but emanating from a common source'.

In the paragraph immediately preceding this bunkum, Millais had written that 'Mr Gomer Waterer has informed me that R. Pink Pearl was raised at the Bagshot nursery. His father was not too sure of the exact origin but thought it was R. George Hardy x R. Cynthia'.

That pairing continues to be quoted in many texts, even today, but Gomer Waterer was still not putting his cards on the table, merely breathing new life into a hare that had already run. Nurseryman and author Frederick Street discovered that to be the case while researching an article he would title *Pink Pearl and its Progeny*. This was published in *The Rhododendron Year Book 1950,* and the true lineage of 'Pink Pearl' was finally revealed. For Street reports that:

'Mr Donald Waterer has kindly lent me some notes written by his father, the late Mr Gomer Waterer, who introduced 'Pink Pearl', which was raised by his father, the late Mr John Waterer. These notes give the parentage as 'George Hardy' x 'Broughtonii'. The influence of 'George Hardy' is very strong. The similarity between the foliage and flower can be seen clearly. It is difficult to trace any characteristic of either 'Broughtonii' or 'Cynthia'. 'Broughtonii', an old *arboreum* hybrid, would suggest a flowering period before the end of May when combined with the influence of *Griffithianum* in 'George Hardy', another early flowering variety'.

Frederick Street was also one of the first authors to consider a new dichotomy:

'To those with a fair general knowledge of plants and gardening 'Pink Pearl' is the Rhododendron of Rhododendrons. To others, with a more specialized knowledge of the genus, it is the lowest of the low'.

The team of authors updating the entry in *Bean's Trees and Shrubs* report that 'the fashion now is to disparage it, but discriminating judges of an earlier generation admired it very much'. And many still do, Mr Street for one:

'If it is not already known, if it is not already a little obvious from the foregoing, I must confess to being an admirer of 'Pink Pearl'. I will try to give a restrained and objective description. The foliage, for a hardy hybrid, is good. It cannot lay claim to the beauty of *sinogrande, Falconeri* nor *fictolacteum,* but as an evergreen shrub it has good evergreen foliage. When it is growing really well the leaves are often more than a foot long. The habit, generally, is good. It is not so "leggy" as 'George Hardy' but it can become a little loose and straggly, particularly in half shade. In the open the habit is more compact. This would support Mr Waterer's description of the parentage. 'Cynthia' could not be described as compact, but 'Broughtonii' is definitely close-growing. The flowers of 'Pink Pearl' are large, the truss is good and holds up well. On established plants the flowers and trusses are enormous. The colour is soft pink and the most attractive state of the truss is when it is half open. The lower half is fully open with soft pink flowers of good shape and size while a few buds stand above these in a shade of deeper pink. When it is fully open and about to fade there is a tendency to blue in the colour. 'Pink Pearl' is hardy and free flowering. Probably its greatest claim to popularity is that it can be relied on to produce a generous crop of flower year after year even under the most trying conditions.

I am the first to admit that there are many better Rhododendrons than 'Pink Pearl'. But a great many of its peers can only be grown in the more favoured gardens. 'Pink Pearl' needs little beyond a lime-free soil'.

The owner of Bodnant, in North Wales, however, was in the 'loathe it' camp:

'It was not desired that the garden should be limited to Rhododendrons, nor could its size be increased, so to find room for newer Rhododendrons great care had to be taken to eliminate those hybrids and species which were of inferior merit. In the slaughter, 'Pink Pearl' for one disappeared entirely'.
Rhododendrons at Bodnant, by Henry McLaren, *The Rhododendron Year Book 1947*.

A glance at the full morphological specification sheet would reveal that up to nineteen broadly funnel-shaped corollas are present in each conical truss, with an individual member of the cluster some 6.5cm long by between 9 and 10.5cm across at the mouth, 5-lobed and boasting wavy margins. In the bud the blooms would be rose, the hue mottled on opening, a soft mauvy-pink fading to white at the edges, enhanced by a wide ray of crimson-brown speckles and spots on the dorsal. The rhachis is 7.5cm long, the pedicels up to 4.5cm, stamen filaments and the style tube are flushed deep pink, the anthers coloured mauve. The leaves are thick, a pale or medium dull green, narrowly elliptic-oblanceolate in shape, rounded or pointed at the apex, tapering at the base. They are usually around 15cm long by 5cm wide, but can attain twice that length and are often concavely curved along the longitudinal axis. Each blade may be held for up to three years, so younger specimens will be fairly well-clothed despite the upright and leggy habit.

Critical voices will rightly note that any hope of maintaining a compact framework outwith a position in full sun, especially in the northern counties of England or in Scotland, will be quickly dashed. So too a decent shape if solitary vegetative growth buds are not pinched-out soon after they start to expand. Furthermore, those same experts will point out that 'Pink Pearl' is totally unsuited to the typical postage-stamp gardens currently found throughout suburbia. And again they will be correct in saying so, for this is a hybrid that needs a lot of room if it is to develop fully. However, these are negatives that can be addressed, albeit only partially in the case of habit if sunlight intensity is lacking. What cannot be fixed by position or practice is how quickly the flowers fade, which even back in 1917, had been commented upon by J. G. Millais:

> 'One fault of Pink Pearl is that it remains so short a time in flower, as a rule only one week in full sun; but in cool seasons, when there are no heavy rains, I have had it in good flower for a fortnight, notably in 1915, when the flowers lasted longer than usual'.

Another fault - ridiculous though it may appear at first - is the sheer quantity of bloom produced, for this weighs down and often twists the branches, a deformity from which their original pose is only partially recovered. Complaints of a straggly mien usually stem directly from this deficiency, while in addition, over-budding can compromise a shrub's long-term health, especially if it is not deadheaded. Millais strongly recommends removing excess buds on all specimens over 2m in height during February, leaving only around forty inflorescences on the plant instead of several hundred. If that sounds a bit drastic, his remedy for dealing with a bush in poor health - 'cut it down and start afresh' - may also fail to appeal, even though in this case the suggestion has some merit. Multiple flower buds on the same branch tip should certainly be addressed.

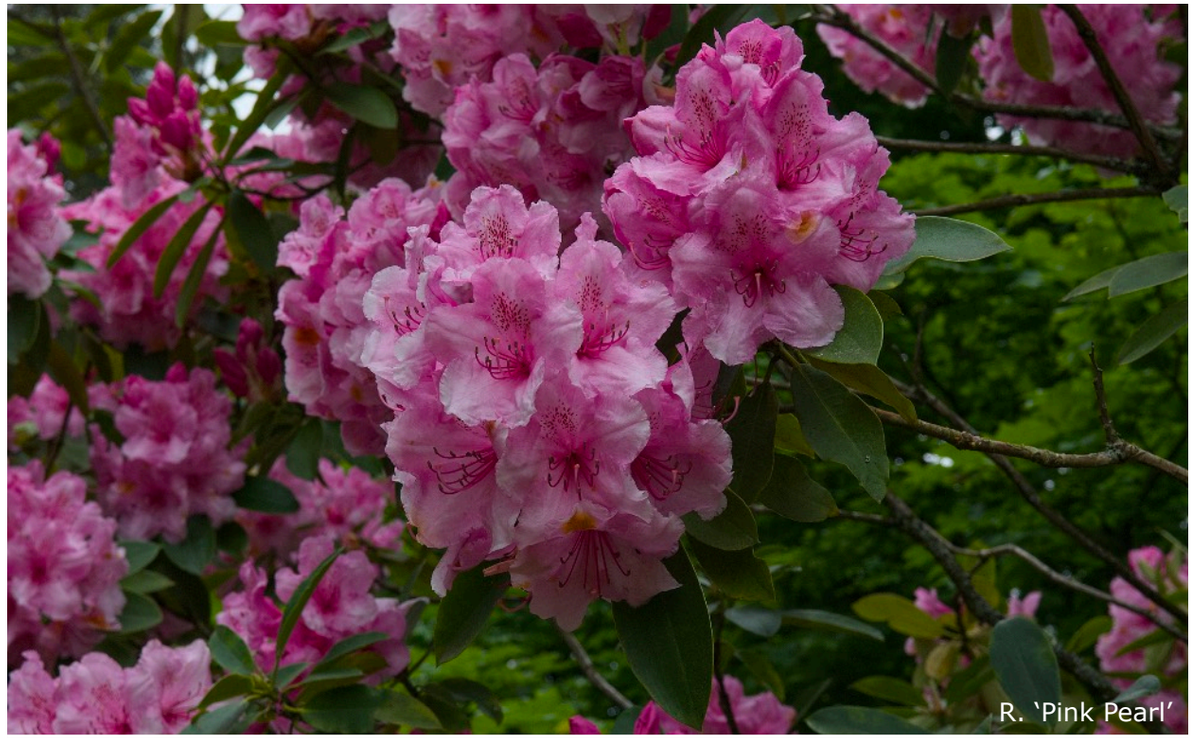
Of course 'Pink Pearl' is now a commercial standard in all the milder areas where rhododendrons can be grown, tolerant of temperatures down to -21ºC, but damaged if they drop much lower. It has also been widely used by the hybridising fraternity, most especially by some of the Dutch nurseries, with its list of offspring including 'Countess of Derby', 'Gomer Waterer', 'Hollandia', 'J. G. Millais' and 'Professor Hugo de Vries', plus the two sports 'Mother of Pearl' and 'Topsvoort Pearl', the latter of which has very mixed reviews.

Two hybrids that are often mistaken for 'Pink Pearl' in gardens and wrongly sold by nurserymen in its stead when their stocks have run out, are 'Betty Wormald' and 'Marinus Koster'. Both come from the Boskoop nursery of M. Koster & Sons and are very fine hybrids in their own right. They are a match with 'Pink Pearl' in terms of hardiness, RHS awards, flower colour, truss and in the profusion of bloom, and one actually has the edge on the Waterer hybrid. That is 'Betty Wormald', whose flowers are without an undertone, hold their pigmentation much longer and only rarely weigh-down the branches.

Yet it was 'Pink Pearl' that was planted in the thousands, if not millions, as opposed to all those others, and 'Pink Pearl' that is still just as popular today, a garden centre and DIY superstore staple, even though it has been superseded. That popularity was confirmed by Frederick Street in his 1965 book *Rhododendrons:*

> 'Whatever its faults, whatever its virtues, it must be conceded that 'Pink Pearl' is the best-known rhododendron. It is almost an institution - it is like the Albert Memorial, you may not like it, but you would miss it if it were gone. In an exhibit at a Flower Show eight visitors out of ten will greet 'Pink Pearl' as an old friend. And seven of the eight will greet it affectionately as a very dear old friend'.

And my opinion? 'Muncaster Hybrid' has it outclassed by an order of magnitude.


R. 'Pink Pearl'


R. 'Pink Pearl'

R. ‘Polar Bear’

R. ‘Polar Bear’

diaprepes x *auriculatum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 July 6m x 8m

Roza Stevenson of Tower Court, Ascot, along with her husband John Barr, are the only hybridisers to have made a *diaprepes* x *auriculatum* pairing, placing pollen onto style in 1926, and that combination resulted in their most widely known and most often planted hybrid, R. ‘Polar Bear’.

Fusing two late blooming species, the cross begins opening its inflorescences after most clones of *R. diaprepes* have finished their display and two to three weeks before the buds of *R. auriculatum* begin to conclude the flowering season, thereby bridging the gap. A First Class Certificate was gifted to the selection by the RHS when it was exhibited in 1946, but although many labelled plants in gardens up and down the length and breadth of the entire British Isles claim this provenance, ‘hundreds of seedlings were grown at Tower Court and many distributed’. And given that garden’s demise after John Barr’s death in 1950, ‘it is likely that the FCC clone no longer exists, or at any rate, is not commercially distributed’. It also means a degree of variation within the ‘Polar Bear’ flock, especially with regard to flowering time, which can vary significantly between clones, as Peter and Kenneth Cox, of Glendoick Gardens, Perth, report when stating that ‘one of ours flowers two to three weeks before the other’ (all three quotes come from their 1988-published book, *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids*). Nevertheless, and despite its other faults, for those rhodophiles with a garden big enough to accommodate the hybrid, ‘Polar Bear’ is a must-have, as it is simply the best late-flowering hybrid available.

Hardy enough to succeed in all but the coldest of UK gardens, potential purchasers of ‘Polar Bear’ will need to allocate sufficient space to accommodate the 8m-wide spread of a mature specimen. In addition, the chosen site must also offer dappled shade throughout the day and protection from early autumn frosts and strong winds, all of which equate to a woodland locale. Here, the foliage will attain its stated dimensions of 22.5cm in length and 7.5cm in width, those blades oblong-elliptic through elliptic in shape, pale green in colour, deeply veined but quite thinly textured, and with a prominent abaxial midrib. Growth is vigorous, especially in west coast gardens with high summer rainfall totals, and young branchlets can often exceed 0.4m in length as they extend, yet still form a sturdy framework. The leaves, however, are only carried for one year, falling shortly after the new growth begins to emerge. In consequence, juvenile specimens might therefore appear somewhat inadequately clothed, but the long branch-tip whorls of a mature plant provide more than sufficient attire, especially if the hybrid has developed into a very large shrub rather than a small tree.

‘Polar Bear’ takes quite a while to set its first flower bud and even longer to begin flowering freely, but the wait for those pure white corollas is more than worthwhile. Tubular-funnel-shaped, each 7-lobed trumpet is 9cm long and more than 11cm across at the mouth of the bell, with eight to ten of them carried in each flat-topped truss. They are also sweetly scented. The extent of any green speckling in the throat varies from clone to clone, but all will have a yellowish-green smudge of colour encircling the ovary, this sometimes shot with reddish-brown streaks on the dorsal lobe. And the wash of bloom across a mastodon-sized specimen will stop onlookers in their tracks, particularly as this encounter will take place in mid July, when of course, the rhododendron flowering season has long been over.

Regrettably however, a number of flaws may mar the display:

The first is a ramification of the thinly-walled corollas, which are decidedly flimsy, so turn brown in hot weather and become badly marked and often crumpled if hit by anything close to heavy rain.

The second is due to vegetative growth kicking-off at the same time or shortly after the flower buds have begun to expand, so while the crimson leaf bracts may be eye-catching highlights across the sea of white, the newly emerging foliage is a blight.

The final detriment and equally sullying, are the old leaves, yellowing horribly before they drop, but retained throughout most of the floral pageant.

If those last three points have somewhat tarnished the hybrid’s appeal, a stroll along the famed ‘Polar Bear Walk’ at Castle Howard will re-establish it. Of course, aged relatives may wrongly assume this to be North Yorkshire’s version of the old Mappin Terraces at the London Zoo and so expect to see psychologically stunted specimens of *Ursus maritimus* endlessly trudging backwards and forwards over the same ground, clearly distressed, while in fact, this is actually the rhododendron equivalent of Benmore’s Redwood Avenue or the wide boulevard of Monkey Puzzle trees at Castle Kennedy, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale. A floristic folly that was undergoing restoration on my last visit, the uphill walk to the circular reservoir that powers the Atlas Fountain, should indeed prove spectacular when the double row of ‘Polar Bear’ specimens are in full flower.



R. ‘Polar Bear’



R. ‘Polar Bear’



R. ‘Polar Bear’



R. ‘Polar Bear’

R. ‘Polar Bear’

R. ‘Powell Glass’

R. 'Powell Glass'

multi-generational *catawbiense* hybrid

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H7	May	3m x 5m

Mixed in amongst all the legends and tall stories that surround the white-flowering forms of *R. catawbiense* - variously listed and registered as *R. catawbiense* var. *album, R. catawbiense album* (Glass), R. 'Catalgla', R. 'Catanea' and R. 'Powell Glass' - are a few relatively undisputed facts:

In 1936, a gentleman by the name of Powell Glass discovered a white-flowering form of *R. catawbiense* growing on the mountains of Virginia, a significant find because the species usually and predominantly opens lilac-purple blooms. Glass was the son of US Senator and Secretary of the Treasury, Carter Glass (1858-1946). Work-wise, he was Editor, Assistant Publisher and General Manager of *The News* and *The Daily Advance,* two local papers published in Lynchburg, the former in the morning and the latter in the afternoon. Glass had also served as a major with the 317th Infantry Battalion in France during the First World War. He died in July 1945.

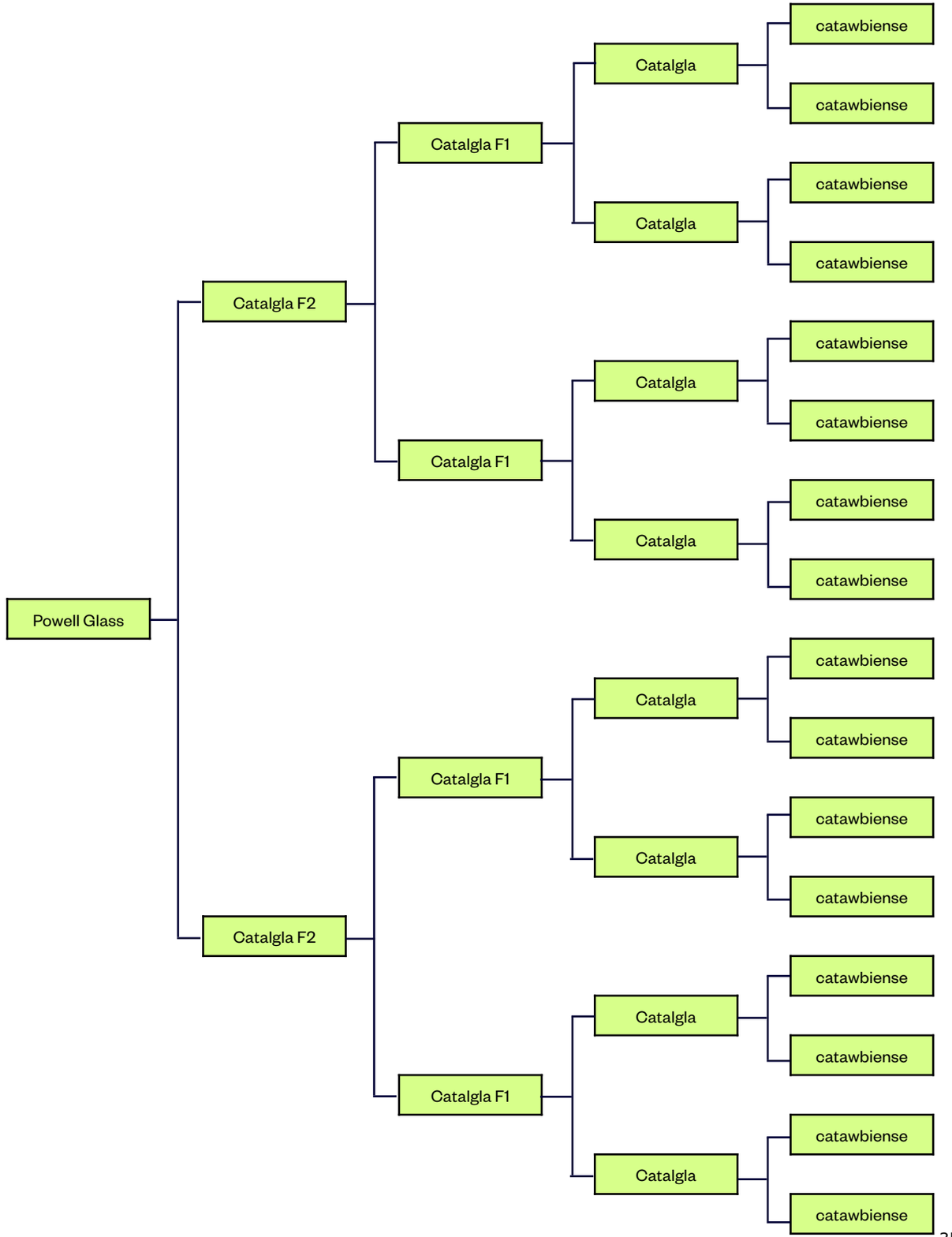
According to Mrs Glass:

> "Mr Glass saw the white rhododendron while fishing in a mountain stream, Dancing Creek. There were several bushes in white flower among the purple ones. He was startled and interested. At once he marked some of the plants for future identification. That autumn he returned to remove some of the plants having received permission to do so from the authorities of the national park. There was much difficulty - no road and heavy underbrush. The plants had to be, one at a time, put on a horse drawn drag and taken a distance to a motor truck. Not the next year, but the second year (after much correspondence with several rhododendron experts including Mr Gable - all discouraging) he gathered the seeds and sent them to Mr Gable. In four years Mr Gable reported two plants in flower. The next year, more flowers and all true in colour. By that time the beetles had come into that zone and Mr Gable could not bring his plants here. Finally, however, he did send a friend who brought in his car five, I think, of the plants. Of the original clones from the mountain I have only one small plant which I am treasuring."

The above history, outlined in correspondence between Mrs Glass and the sculptor and rhododendron hybridiser Edmund Amateis in the late 1950s, features in an article he wrote for the *Quarterly Bulletin of the American Rhododendron Society* (Volume 14, Number 1, January 1960), from which the excerpt above is reproduced.

Joseph Benson Gable (1886-1972), named one of those seedlings 'Catalgla', a compaction of Catawbiense Album Glass (Cat-al-gla). He selected another clone for his friend and fellow hybridiser Guy Nearing (1890-1986), who, clearly delighted with the gift, separately registered it as 'Catanea'.

Gable also sold some seed selfed from 'Catalgla' - so three generations on from the original Dancing Creek plant - to Edmund Amateis (1897-1981), who sowed and then selected the best white forms from his progeny, and then selfed, sowed and selected once again, producing in the process a group of fifth generation seedlings the most outstanding representative of which - in written consultation with Mrs Glass of course: "As to a name, I could wish that my husband's name might live in so beautiful a flower" - was registered as 'Powell Glass' in 1961. For those whose comprehension of that multi-person extended breeding programme became a little murky after 'three generations on', clarification is offered opposite, assuming I've got it right…



‘Catalgla’ has a fairly dense habit if grown in strong sunlight with just a dappling of light shade. In the northern counties of England, as well as in Scotland, the habit is consequently somewhat more open. The foliage - medium-sized, elliptic, mid-green and middling at best - is liable to become chlorotic, the leaves sometimes more yellowy than verdant. The white flowers, opening from pink buds and carried in large trusses of up to 18 funnel-shaped corollas, redeem all such faults. They are spotted greenish on the dorsal lobe with the uppermost flecks often crimson-purple. The style and stamen filaments too are white but in contrast, the anthers are a pale mauve-purple.

Three generations later, with the colour selections made by the trained eye of an artist, any residue of a mauve undertone is long gone, the corollas of ‘Powell Glass’ pure white and only faintly speckled pale green, the mauve stamen anthers pleasingly retained. Habit is a touch more compact even up north, though the foliage remains mundane and is only held for one, sometimes two years. On a positive note, the leaves are far less chlorotic, making the Amateis hybrid the one to opt for if such a choice is available. Yet despite mature plants spending much of May covered in bloom, both crosses are quite rare finds in British rhododendron gardens. They have also been virtually ignored by the UK’s hybridising fraternity, though the opposite is the case with regard to their North American rhododendron-breeding fellows.



R. ‘Catalgla’



R. ‘Powell Glass’

R. ‘Powell Glass’

R. ‘President Roosevelt’

‘Limbatum’ sport

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late April-May 2m x 3m

That the variegated-leaved R. ‘President Roosevelt’ was named for Teddy rather than Franklin Delano appears one of the least contentious points in this hybrid’s backstory, given that the rest of its history is pretty much a mystery and still hotly debated.

Officially, according to the *IRRC,* it is registered as a sport from R. ‘Limbatum’, which is John Standish’s pre-1857 pink-flowering ‘Cunningham’s White’ x ‘Blandyanum’ cross, whose corollas have a dorsal lobe with reddish margins. Plus of course, uninteresting and bog-standard green leaf blades. Other sources - for instance, D. M. van Gelderen and J. R. P. van Hoey Smith, in their 1992-published book *Rhododendrons* - cite it as a straight *R. ponticum* hybrid. Not that that species is absent from the ‘Limbatum’ mix, just that it only contributes around 30% of the gene pool.

Who spotted the variegated shoot is unknown, as is the hybridiser if indeed a directed pollination event took place. So too the date when that pollen was placed onto the style or alternatively, the year when the mutation occurred, although most expert opinion accedes it was sometime before 1900. As to a locale for the happening, the clear majority would favour attaching a ‘Made in the U.S.A.’ sticker to the plant labels, but a few sticklers claim the hybrid originally came from Holland, which strictly speaking should be referred to as the Netherlands unless the two North Sea-bordering provinces of North Holland and South Holland are the focus of our attention. Out on left field is the suggestion that ‘President Roosevelt’ is a Belgium *R. arboreum* hybrid, but this premise is such a farcicality that its authors shall remain nameless. As will the individual who chose the ‘President Roosevelt’ epithet, basically because his or her appellation is actually unknown.

General agreement has however been reached amongst the doyens on the fact that the rhododendron was first listed in 1930 by the Boskoop nursery firm of Charles Mesman and Co., although this Dutch firm did not specifically introduce it. Technical specifications too have mostly been settled, with the morphology consisting of conical trusses of 17 to 24 widely-funnel-campanulate corollas; these white or blush-white in the centre, with frilly, bright red lobe margins; white stamen filaments, these sometimes flushed pink; the style usually red, but also sometimes white; and thick, large, dark green and shiny leaves, rarely held for more than one year. Some alternative, parallel universe descriptions, offer a truss population of between 15 and 30 corollas.

On this side of the multiverse, ‘President Roosevelt’ is without doubt the best of those few elepidote rhododendrons with variegated foliage, but like most such plants, the genes behind those irregular patches or streaks of yellow and gold are not stable, so the shoots often revert. When they do, recourse should be made to a pair of secateurs. The leaves will also burn in full sun on a hot day during the summer, so a position benefitting from dappled shade in the afternoon is advised, especially for those who garden in the southern counties. Shelter will also be needed in areas subject to early autumn frosts, for the hybrid’s new growth only begins to extend fairly late in the season.

Two other, more serious problems, should also be noted:

The branches are decidedly brittle and weak. They will snap if hit by a sudden, very strong gust of wind or are weighed-down under a build-up of snow, plus sag under the weight of bloom or simply the new growth, leading to a sprawling and straggly habit. Even worse, when grown on its own roots, the main stem can sometimes rock and then break off at the rootball, so as the young plants for sale at your local DIY store or garden centre will almost certainly have been propagated via cuttings - because the hybrid roots very easily from such - if full-on Atlantic gales, unfiltered through a shelterbelt of trees, are a regular feature of its soon-to-be new residence, opt for a grafted specimen if you can.

Without doubt, the flowers and foliage of ‘President Roosevelt’ have given it a wide fan base and lasting appeal, this despite the less than obvious drawbacks apparent from the many well-grown specimens found blooming abundantly in most of the UK’s woodland rhododendron gardens, and the admonition that ‘connoisseurs regard it as being rather vulgar and common’ - to quote from John [Frederick] Street’s 1988 *Classic Garden Plants: Rhododendrons* - has not impacted on its popularity by so much as a jot, especially as such sentiments are simply ridiculous.

However, a word of warning: rhodophiles contemplating a prominent front garden placement for their specimen should be aware that this could be seen by elitist members of the botanical fraternity as the horticultural equivalent of a raised middle finger.



R. ‘President Roosevelt’

R. ‘President Roosevelt’

R. ‘Purple Splendour’

R. ‘Purple Splendour’
ponticum hybrid
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late May-early June 3m x 4m

‘The most striking purple hybrid ever raised’.
Peter and Kenneth Cox, *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988.

‘A splendid rhododendron of the most sumptuous colouring’.
Beans Trees and Shrubs (Eighth Edition, online), 1978.

‘There is nothing else quite like it among hardy hybrid rhododendrons’.
John [Frederick] Street, *Classic Garden Plants: Rhododendrons,* 1988.

The object of this praise is of course R. ‘Purple Splendour’.

Conceived at the Waterers Knap Hill nursery sometime between 1860 and 1890, with the pairing believed to have been made by Anthony Waterer Sr. (1822-1896) - rather than his son, Anthony Waterer Jr. (1850-1924) - the full parentage equation is unknown, so the cross is usually referenced as a *R. ponticum* hybrid, despite the fact that *R. maximum* and *R. catawbiense* are widely accepted as likely parts of the genetic mix by the doyens, most especially as Anthony Sr. ‘admired the blotched or spotted upper petal inherited mainly from *R. maximum* which, in his opinion, gave form and substance to the flower’, the quote lifted from the historical account of the Waterer nurseries that may be found within the aforementioned *Beans Trees and Shrubs*. Yet for some reason, the hybrid was overlooked, only being ‘rediscovered when the nursery was revived by Gomer Waterer in the early 1920s’ (John Street, *ibid,* p. 46).

John Guille Millais had actually seen the shrub in flower before the second volume of his *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids* was published in 1924, writing that ‘some of Anthony Waterer’s new hybrids are also well worth space, as they contain plants of striking colour, such as Purple Splendour (the best late blue-purple)’, so the cross had certainly been rescued from obscurity and named before the second Anthony’s death. It had also been earmarked for propagation, with sufficient stocks built-up by 1931 to allow Gomer to exhibit a specimen and secure an Award of Merit from the RHS.

‘Purple Splendour’ has a compact domed flower truss holding around fifteen widely funnel-shaped corollas, each of which is 5cm long and some 7 or 8cm across at the mouth. Technically their hue is described as deep purplish-blue, this tone intensified by the large dorsal blotch, which is a fan of black speckles and spots on a purplish-brown ground. Set against this is the usually tight cluster of stamens and style, their filaments and tube flushed in matching purple, the large anthers yellow, but effectively creamy-white, their brilliance a complete contrast and the visual hook that first captures and then holds an onlooker’s eye and attention.

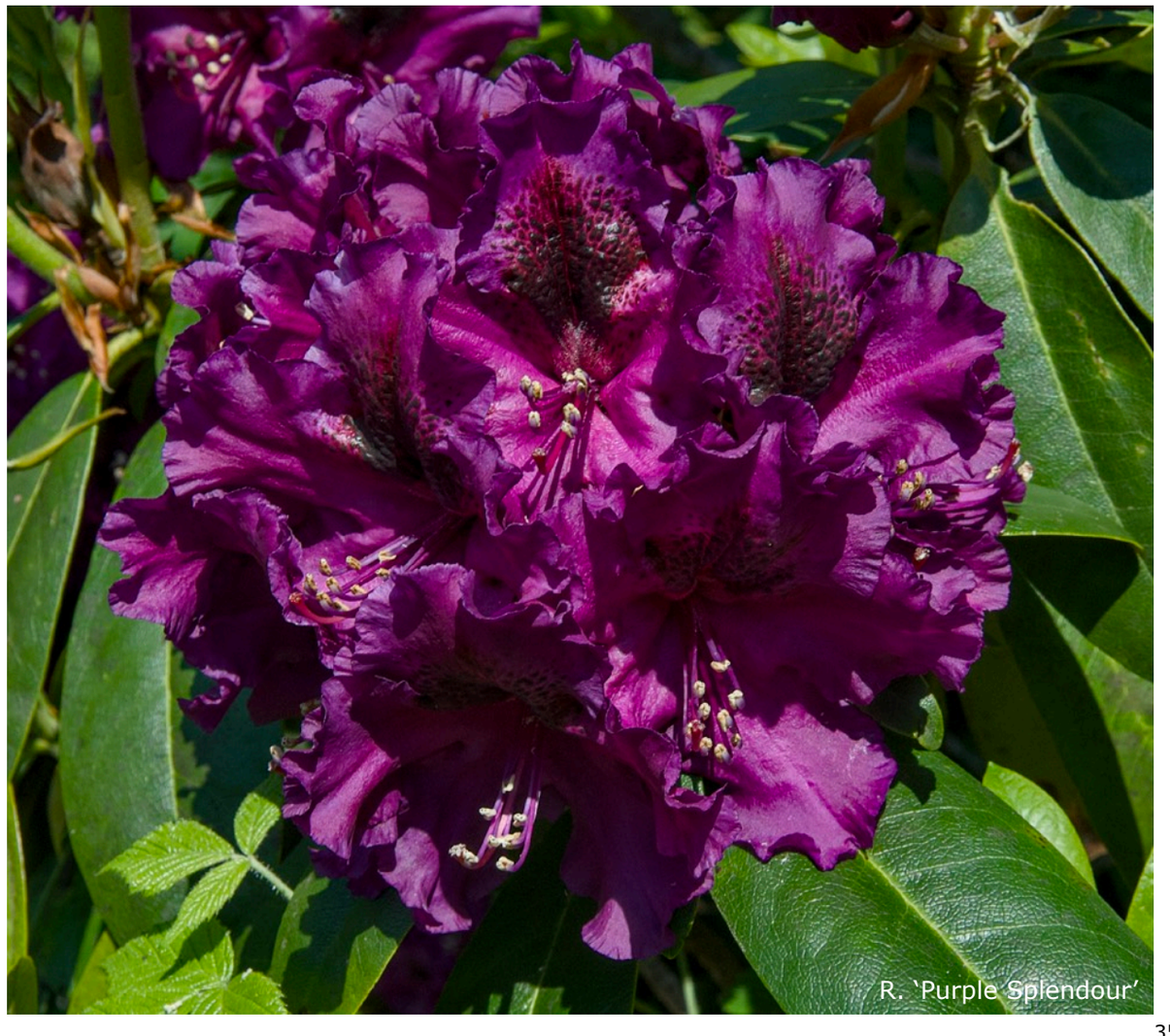
Those blooms are framed by dark green and glossy, oblong-elliptic leaves, 8 to 10cm in length, 3 to 3.5cm in width, reticulate above with a pointed or rounded apex. In the main, these are only held for one year, so much of the underlying superstructure is exposed and on view, especially if the shrub has been planted in too much shade and has been unnecessarily drawn-up. For despite a vigorous rate of growth, specimens will usually maintain a compact if upright habit when grown in light dappled shade in the south or full sun in the north.

Flower buds are first set when the plants are still very young, a surround of small but distinctive leaf-like bud-scales denoting them from the vegetative buds. A known problem at this stage is over-budding leading to a loss of vigour, so juveniles should have this glut considerably reduced before the inflorescences begin to expand. Such action will also help address the problem of poor deportment. Additionally, ‘Purple Splendour’ has shown a marked susceptibility to both the powdery mildew fungus and to root rot. The latter can be prevented by assuring continued good drainage at the planting site, while risk of the former can be reduced by increasing air circulation around the shrub and either relocating known carriers of the disease or removing them completely.

A vast slew of supposedly better-coloured purple-flowering hybrids have arrived over the years since ‘Purple Splendour’ was first introduced, the most recent glut via the auspices of micropropagation, and while their advocates may claim that the Waterer hybrid’s floral display has at last been superseded, such assertions have as much validity as Donald Trump maintaining that he won the 2020 United States presidential election. For if the quote that began this portrait is continued, the two authors state that the cross still ‘has a depth of purple not seen in any other rhododendron species or hybrid of this type’.

And that remains the case.

Regardless of the detractors who would have you believe otherwise.


R. ‘Purple Splendour’

R. ‘Purple Splendour’

R. ‘Purple Splendour’

R. 'Queen of Hearts'

R. ‘Queen of Hearts’
meddianum x ‘Moser’s Maroon’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 May 4m x 6m

There is a song on the Vanessa Williams 1991 album *The Comfort Zone* that perfectly sums up Lionel de Rothschild’s pairing of *R. meddianum* with ‘Moser’s Maroon’, the cast-aside hybrid he had clearly been fated to find in a French nursery: Track 6, *Save the Best for Last.* For it was one of the final crosses this master hybridiser made before his sudden and untimely death in January 1942, the match recorded as LR 1193 in the Exbury stud book. And in ‘Queen of Hearts’, Lionel produced ‘one of the finest post-war rhododendrons, a striking shrub, an object of deep and moving beauty when in full bloom’ to quote the not-unbiased authors of 1967’s *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber, who, it has to be admitted, tend to be a bit doe-eyed with their praise and prose. So in contrast, the authors of 1988’s *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* father and son, Peter and Kenneth Cox, describe the shrub as ‘hardly worthy of an FCC, as despite the impressive flowers, it makes a poor garden plant’. The rub, is that both sets of authors are correct in their assessments: the floral display will indeed stop you in your tracks, while the flamboyant deportment will have you pulling your hair out!

The flower buds set on ‘Queen of Hearts’ open in May, each revealing sixteen widely funnel-shaped corollas that are individually 6.5cm long and 7.5cm across at the mouth. They are a glowing chrysanthemum-crimson in tone, with a fan of black dots and dashes spread across the dorsal lobes, and their white stamen filaments provide the perfect visual contrast. The corolla margins are somewhat wavy and each bloom is held in the embrace of a large red calyx with deeply cleft, acuminate lobes. The flower trusses are domed-shaped and they are produced in profusion, this vast quantity of bloom often weighing down the branches, which of course contributes to the straggly habit.

The main culprit responsible for such however, is the hybrid’s vigour, gifted by the mitochondria that came not from ‘Moser’s Maroon’, but from *R. meddianum,* though the upright, lanky and leggy habit of the former has also been incorporated into the genes of ‘Queen of Hearts’. That parentage ‘ensures a shrub of convenient size, 3.3 to 4m high, fairly close in structure in normal situations’, though it should be noted that the authors of *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* were equating such a locale with Exbury Gardens on England’s southern coast. Elsewhere - basically all points north given the H7 hardiness rating - long internodal growth, along with that “Brewer’s Droop” when in bloom, will be the price that has to be paid for the floral extravaganza unless the shrub is sited in full sun. Luckily, beyond the southern counties, the foliage relishes such a position.

Those blades are elliptic-lanceolate through obovate in shape and often slightly convex in profile. They are dark green above and matt, with distinctive veining and a yellow midrib, and covered below by a thin but loose fawn-coloured indumentum. Each is up to 11.5cm long by 5.5cm wide and they are held for two, sometimes three years, so a fairly dense patina of leaves can cloak much of the branch structure, although extended limbs will likely be left fully exposed. Regrettably, chlorosis may denude their number.

Lionel de Rothschild did not live to see his sumptuous creation in flower for it first bloomed in 1949, when it was introduced and named by his eldest son, Edmund, and gifted the first of its floral awards by the RHS. Key to a successful placement away from the UK’s southern seaboard, is a station where anything more than the merest flicker of shade caressing the leaves is avoided. Established in just such a setting, a mature specimen of ‘Queen of Hearts’ will show doyen and casual observer alike, why - in my opinion - it is the finest of all the Exbury red hybrids.


R. ‘Queen of Hearts’


R. ‘Queen of Hearts’

The ‘Queen Wilhelmina’ Pride
griffithianum x Unknown Hardy Hybrid
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 April-early May 6m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Godesberg	Otto Schulz	around 1890	after 1896
King George	Otto Schulz	around 1890	after 1896
Lord Swaythling	Otto Schulz	around 1890	before 1926
Princess Juliana	Otto Schulz	around 1890	before 1910
Queen Wilhelmina	Otto Schulz	around 1890	after 1896
Sir Isaac Balfour	Otto Schulz	around 1890	after 1896
Souvenir de Madame J. H. van Nes	Otto Schulz	around 1890	after 1896

R. ‘Queen Wilhelmina’ is one of the hybrids originally bred by Otto Schulz in the greenhouses of the Royal Porcelain Factory, Berlin - the Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur in German; the company still successfully trading today, with its name usually abbreviated to KPM - where he was employed as head gardener. The cross was made in the late 1880s or early 1890s, with *R. griffithianum* pollinated by an unknown hardy hybrid. Frederick Street, in his 1965 book *Rhododendrons,* suggests that the most likely breeding options available to Herr Schulz at the time included the ironclads ‘Carl Lackner’, ‘Ludwig Leopold Liebig’, ‘Prince Camille de Rohan’ and ‘Staatsrätin von Massenbach’, which in addition to upping the hardiness of the resulting progeny, gave them their purity of flower colour.

Because Otto Schulz was primarily tasked by KPM to produce beautiful flowers.

But not for their gardens.

For their range of china tableware, dinner services, vases and figurines, all of which were adorned with individually hand painted images of those and other blooms.

Between 1886 and 1908, the porcelain painting and glazing was overseen by Herr Alexander Kips, artistic director at the factory, with individual artists each signing the works they produced. Yet once those flower trusses had been used in a design, they were of no further use to Schulz, Kips or KPM, and so with space in the greenhouses at a premium, in 1896 all the *R. griffithianum* seedlings were sold-off to the Dutch nursery firm of C. B. van Nes & Sons.

Based in Boskoop, South Holland, so subject to winters that were far less severe than those experienced in Germany, many of the plants were propagated and trialled outdoors, although even in The Netherlands, most proved too tender to survive without protection. However, some were found to be hardy enough to prosper in the climatically even milder gardens of England, so after sufficient stocks were built-up, these plants were named for their intended market and exported across the Channel.

‘Queen Wilhelmina’ must clearly have been considered the best of the bunch by van Nes, for its epithet is an honorific for Princess Wilhelmina Helena Pauline Maria of the Netherlands, who in 1890 at the age of ten succeeded to the Dutch throne and became Queen, though her mother Emma ruled as regent until her inauguration in 1898. It will come as no surprise therefore that the blooms are stunners: blood red in the bud, a deep and pure, near unmarked rosy-scarlet when they first open - deep strawberry-pink is the alternate description - the campanulate corollas fading over time to rosy-pink. These have widely flared lobes with wavy margins, the blooms individually 7 to 8cm across at the mouth and carried in a loose, open-topped truss of eight. Produced in profusion on a mature shrub, they can open from early April onwards if the season is mild, but usually delight the eye from late April into early May.

The display is also set against a fine foil: downward-pointing, dark green and glossy, oblong-lanceolate through elliptic leaves, these flat or with a concave longitudinal profile, some of the blades actually mirroring the alphabet’s twenty-first letter.

Otto Schulz’s ‘Queen Wilhelmina’ is regrettably too tender to succeed long-term in most gardens along the east coast and inland, so is confined to UK locales in southern England and along the west coast, with those sometimes ahead-of-schedule blooms not assisting matters with regard to early spring frosts. The hybrid has yet to be graced with an RHS floral award despite having flowers that rival if not surpass the poise and allure of its seed parent. Yet despite the horticultural authorities overlooking such charms, they have not escaped the attention of the hybridising fraternity, for ‘Britannia’, ‘Calomina’, ‘Captain Blood’, ‘Earl of Athlone’ and ‘Unknown Warrior’ - to name but five - were all carried in a ‘Queen Wilhelmina’ seed capsule.


R. ‘Queen Wilhelmina’

R. 'Queen Wilhelmina'



R. ‘Queen Wilhelmina’



R. ‘Queen Wilhelmina’



R. ‘Queen Wilhelmina’

R. ‘Queen Wilhelmina’

R. ‘Red Dragon’

The ‘Red Dragon’ Pride

thomsonii x *griersonianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4 Mid April-early May 6m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Charles H. Pattman	T. C. Thacker	before 1938	1938
Hecla	Henry McLaren	1931	1941
Red Dragon	Henry McLaren	1931	1943

‘Red Dragon’ is one of the Bodnant ‘reds’ that should be far better known and much more widely grown than is currently the case, although with the shrub only reliably resilient down to -10ºC - or possibly -12ºC, midway towards H5 - those potential new planting sites will be restricted to venues located along the west coast of the UK, plus the mildest locales in southern England, this effectively mirroring the outdoor distribution of nearly all of the Exbury ‘reds’. Henry McLaren’s pairing, made in 1931, is a *thomsonii* x *griersonianum* cross, which although avoiding the even more tender *R. elliottii* that was often favoured by his hybridising rival Lionel de Rothschild for his fiery-flowered creations, does nothing to up the toughness. The flowers however, are another story entirely:

They are carried in open through flat-topped tiers of up to ten large funnels, the corollas brilliant scarlet-crimson in tone, widely 5-lobed, the dorsal trio heavily spotted darker. Stamen filaments and style are flushed scarlet to match, with the medium-sized, rimmed rather than lobed calyx, similarly hued. The fairly long, yellow pedicel holding each trumpet, is also tinted crimson above. And needless to say, mature specimens will be a blaze of colour from mid April onwards.

Morphologically the leaf blades are nearer those of the pollen provider in shape rather than the seed parent, being dark matt-green ellipses, flat or sometimes convex in profile, pointed at the apex, rounded or tapering at the base, with just a hint of a fawn tomentum on the underside. They are only held for one year, occasionally two, but the well-branched superstructure is adequately clothed nonetheless. Habit varies between a very large shrub 6m or more wide but only 4m high, or a small tree that reverses those dimensions, the choice of which dictated by the site and the surrounds.

‘Hecla’ is a sister seedling, which was named and introduced two years earlier in 1941, this boasting tubular-funnel corollas that have much more obvious spotting on the dorsal lobes, with their pigmentation nearer crimson-red. ‘Charles H. Pattman’ opens rose-red flowers and was introduced in 1938 by T. C. Thacker, the pairing made at his Knowle Nursery in Warwickshire, possibly in advance of the Bodnant mating.

Henry McLaren’s choice of epithet must surely reflect the high regard he had for this hybrid, the ‘Red Dragon’ appellation borrowed of course from the national flag of Wales - *Y Ddraig Goch* - not the mahjong tile or William Blake’s series of biblical paintings. It has absolutely no connection with Francis Dolarhyde or Thomas Harris, though a mature shrub in full bloom would certainly be reflective of the amount of blood shed in the American novelist’s fabulous tale of murder and mayhem. The visual impact of ‘Red Dragon’ when bedecked from head to toe with bloom therefore, is nothing less than stunning, which makes the lack of any RHS floral exhibition award decidedly puzzling, because at Muncaster in early May, the massed mature plantings are simply spectacular.


R. ‘Red Dragon’


R. ‘Hecla’

R. ‘Red Dragon’

R. ‘Red Dragon’

The ‘Ring of Fire’ Pride

‘Darigold’ x ‘Idealist’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late May-June 2.5m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Desert Gold	Willard & Margaret Thompson	1970	around 1988
Ring of Fire	Willard & Margaret Thompson	1970	1981

The photo of Willard and Margaret Thompson’s ‘Ring of Fire’ that appeared in Homer Salley and Harold Greer’s 1986-published book *Rhododendron Hybrids: A Guide To Their Origin,* set off an involuntary acquisitional reflex action in all UK rhodophiles akin to one of Pavlov’s dogs salivating whenever the food bell rang. It was ‘Lem’s Cameo’ all over again. And the specialist nurseries were soon swamped with “do-you-have-one?” requests, the answer invariably coming back, “Not yet, but we’ll put your name on the list”.

The pairing had been made in 1970, with Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Idealist’ used to pollinate Bill Whitney’s ‘Darigold’, and the Thompsons had selected, named and registered the new hybrid in 1980, introducing it from their nursery in Waldport, Oregon, the following year. By 1988 a few plants had been shipped across the Atlantic - minus any soil around their roots, of course - but even in the Pacific Northwest, availability was limited at best. At which point, micropropagation rose to the challenge.

And there’s the rub.

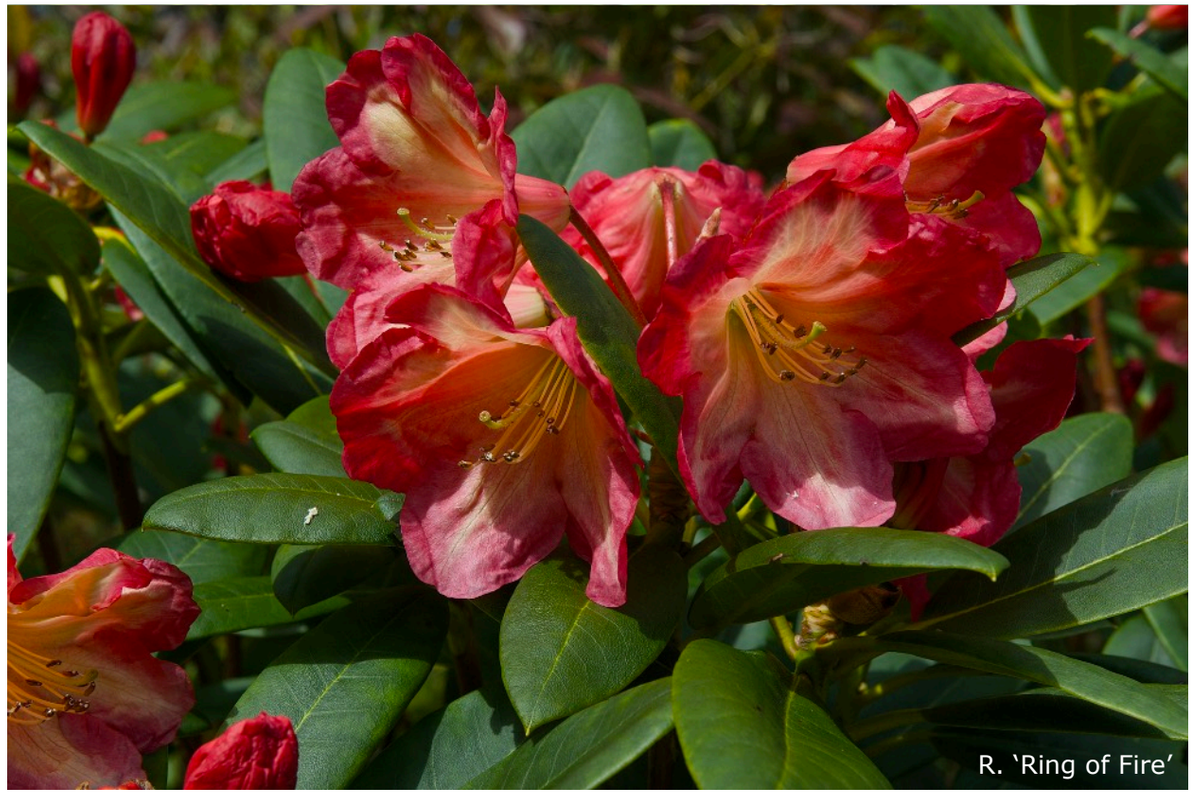
Because there is a distinct difference between the plants now available in both the UK and the US, from that original plant photographed by Harold Greer.

For instead of the ‘most striking flower of yellow with a narrow band of orange-red around the margins’ as reported by Salley-Greer and confirmed as such on 35mm film stock, the blooms on offer today are decidedly inferior to that, with far more muted hues, a wider outer margin, and the junction between the colour bands often indistinct, as the two photos on this page confirm.

Kenneth Cox, in his 2005 book *Rhododendrons & Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* rightly describes the micro-prop flowers as ‘muddy’, so it would come as no surprise to learn that the foliage of a more mediocre clone was likely cut-up for the test tubes, or flaws in the process itself resulted in the tonal downgrade.

However, even given the above, when they first open and the corolla pigments are at their most intense, ‘Ring of Fire’ can still be an eye-catcher. The broadly-funnel-shaped corollas, seven-lobed and each around 6.5cm long by 8.5cm across, are carried in a domed truss of ten or twelve individuals, the blooms set against mid-green to dark yellowish-green, elliptic leaves that are 12.5cm long by 5cm wide. Unfortunately, these are only held on the bush for one, or sometimes two years, so although young plants may have a fairly dense cloak of foliage, once a decidedly upright habit kicks in, older specimens, even though they barely top the 2m-mark, can appear quite ‘leggy’.


R. ‘Ring of Fire’


R. ‘Ring of Fire’

R. ‘Ring of Fire’

R. ‘Rohais’

R. ‘Rohais’

lacteum x *macabeanum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 April 7m x 5m

Follow the path on the east side of the burn at Crarae Woodland Garden above the upper bridge, climbing towards the top of the glen, and visitors will pass through a group of yellow-flowering, large-leaved hybrids. Each is slightly different, with the best clone now named ‘Rohais’ after Lady Campbell, wife of Sir Ilay, who owned the estate before presenting the garden to the National Trust for Scotland in 2001. The plants have been identified as *R. lacteum* x *R. macabeanum* crosses and they were grown from apparently open-pollinated seed provided by the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, around 1962.

Sixty years later, the tallest specimens are now approaching - if they have not already surpassed - the 7m height mark, forming huge, umbrella-shaped domes in the process, with their branches criss-crossing above the path over your head. Their leaves are smaller and narrower than those of typical *R. macabeanum,* as well as less rugose, with some exhibiting slightly rippled margins, while the flowers are held in spherical trusses of around twenty corollas, ventricose-campanulate in shape and creamy-yellow-white in colour, each gifted a crimson-purple blotch deep in the throat. The lobe margins are slightly frilled.



R. ‘Rohais’



R. ‘Rohais’



R. ‘Rosenkavalier’

R. ‘Rosenkavalier’
facetum x ‘Tally Ho’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4-5 Late May-June 2.5m x 4m

‘Rosenkavalier’ is yet another visual stunner, but it also has a few negative features, as the vivid scarlet flowers are easily marked and the thin branches often bow under the weight of bloom due to long internodal growth. Add-in the fact that the leaves are rarely held on the shrub for more than a year, so present much of the supporting framework for visual inspection, and that 75% of the genetic inheritance comes from *R. facetum* - ‘Tally Ho’ being a *facetum* x *griersonianum* pairing - which gives a hardiness rating of -12ºC, midway between H4 and H5, and so consigns the hybrid to the milder horticultural locales of southern England, plus those along the western seaboard.

The question then, is why on earth would anyone want to grow it?

Especially when previously published comments from highly regarded doyens decry ‘Rosenkavalier’ as ‘a pointless hybrid to make for most UK gardens’.

Yet by extension, if such advice were followed to the letter, it would remove some of the most spectacular floral treasures from our cultivated woodlands.

For instance, most members of Subsection *Grandia* and Subsection *Maddenia*.

Oh, and over a third of Lionel de Rothschild’s hybrids, including virtually all of the renowned Exbury ‘reds’ - oops.

So perhaps before a similar, unthought-through opinion is again ventured in print, those conceiving it might do well to remember that the overwhelming majority of gardens spread throughout the British Isles - public or private - will be found to the south and west of the River Tay.

An unknown individual at RHS Wisley, in Surrey - rather than Francis Hanger (1900-1961), the garden’s rhododendron-hybridising curator - was responsible for making the *facetum* x ‘Tally Ho’ match that resulted in R. ‘Rosenkavalier’. The pairing was made in the early 1950s and towards the end of that decade, the juvenile plants were starting to flower. The best of these had 10cm wide corollas carried in flat-topped trusses of fifteen tubular-funnel-shaped trumpets, all the lobes of which were spotted darker, and it was selected, named and introduced in 1959, winning an Award of Merit in the process. The longevity of the leaf blades has already been commented upon, but whilst these are still in place, they will be found to be narrowly-elliptic in shape, matt green in hue, often with a recurved profile, and sporting a thin layer of fawn indumentum below, though this is decidedly detersile. Epithet-wise, the shrub’s anonymous hybridiser was clearly a person of culture, borrowing their chosen appellation from the three-act Richard Strauss comic opera of 1911 vintage.

In summary, the faults of ‘Rosenkavalier’ up-close are all too apparent, but set at the back of a border and hemmed-in by a clutch of lower-growing hybrids, the sweep of colour decorating a mature shrub from late May onward is formidable eye candy. But as indicated, only for those who garden where winter lows rarely dip into double figures.



R. ‘Rosenkavalier’



R. ‘Rosenkavalier’



R. ‘Rosenkavalier’



R. 'Rothenburg'

The ‘Rothenburg’ Pride

‘Diane’ x *williamsianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 April-early May 4m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Mark Henny	Rudolph Henny	before 1964	1964
Rothenburg	Viktor von Martin	1944	1968

Spreading wider than it grows tall and covering itself annually with a profusion of creamy-white balls, Viktor von Martin’s ‘Rothenburg’ is hardy enough to thrive in any UK garden where rhododendrons can be grown. The flower trusses open from buds that are coloured reddish-brown throughout the winter months and they comprise five through nine openly-campanulate corollas, each one 6.5cm long by up to 10cm wide at the mouth, these lightly spotted crimson and yellowish-pink on the dorsal lobe. The foliage is dark glossy green, the blades broadly elliptic in shape and around 8cm in length. The shrub’s habit is compact, the growth vigorous, and young plants reliably begin to set flower buds from about five years of age.

Gerd Eiting and Jan-Dieter Bruns, of the Bruns Nursery in Oldenburg, have spoken of the hybrid’s origins in an interview with Nordwest Zeitung Online, a paraphrased translation of which appears below:

> ‘Viktor von Martin was a German landowner who lived in Bremenhain, Upper Lusatia, which is part of the Görlitz district of Saxony. In the 1930s, he had purchased rhododendrons for his estate from many of the nursery firms in Ammerland to the northwest, not only for planting, but to hybridize. This he did, the interruptions of the Second World War notwithstanding, but at the end of the conflict he fled west with his family. Included in his luggage were several packets of rhododendron seed, one of these being his ‘Diane’ x *williamsianum* pairing that had been made in 1944. Having done business with the Bruns Nursery in the past, the seed was germinated by the firm and the young plants set out in their Rhodopark. Von Martin himself selected the best specimen from the group when they first began to flower, naming it ‘Rothenburg’, and the nursery introduced the hybrid in 1968.’

In northwestern Germany as elsewhere, ‘Rothenburg’ has one major Achilles heel: it flowers and grows early in the season, so requires a sheltered site if the blooms and young shoots are to avoid a frosting. Otherwise it is without problem, shrugging-off the far more severe lows of an Oldenburg winter without demur.


R. ‘Rothenburg’


R. ‘Rothenburg’

Elepidote Hybrids
S-Z

R. ‘Sappho’

R. ‘Sappho’

unknown x unknown

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 May-early June 6m x 6m

‘Rhododendron ‘Sappho’ - a white with a black mark in the centre, so powerful in its contrast that when it is in flower it dominates the whole of the garden scene.’
Frederick Street, *Rhododendrons*, 1965.

That quote eloquently sums up why ‘Sappho’ is still regarded as “the best and most popular blotched white hardy hybrid” - to paraphrase a likely double-digit number of other published authors - and why countless members of the world-wide hybridising fraternity have tried to better its blooms, as well as tame its nature. Yet none have even come close to duplicating the almost electric frisson of its flowers.

For that large heavy flare of rich purple overlaid with black, when juxtaposed against a perfectly-proportioned surround of milky white, is an attention grabber in a league of its own. And even more so when the central dorsal lobe is duplicated - as regularly happens within the corollas at the base of the truss - so effectively doubling the magnetic attraction of that unsurpassable blotch.



R. ‘Sappho’, unmistakeable foreground right in the curving display,
featured at the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, Philadelphia, USA.

The hybrid came into being at the Knap Hill nursery when the first Anthony Waterer (1822-1896), was in charge of that famed establishment, running it with his cousin Robert Godfrey (*c.* 1812-1870), and in an article written for the *American Rhododendron Society Quarterly Bulletin* - Volume 4, Number 1, published in January 1950; *QBARS* being the forerunner of *JARS* - that he titled *Rhododendrons and Azaleas at the Knap Hill Nursery,* the last member of that horticultural dynasty to manage the family business, G. Donald Waterer (1913-2006), set out the history of their breeding programme:

> 'When the elder Anthony Waterer and Robert Godfrey took charge of the Nursery in 1853, there were several colour forms of the species *R. catawbiense* and *R. ponticum,* as well as a considerable number of hybrids between those two species and *R. arboreum* and *R. caucasicum*. For the next 40 years Anthony crossed and re-crossed his hybrids, raising every year many thousands of seedlings and selecting from them only those which showed a very definite advance on their predecessors. His criteria were briefly these. The hybrids must flower in late May or early June to avoid damage by spring frost. The truss must be broadly conical in shape and filled fully and compactly with flowers to withstand heavy rain. He did not admire self colours and preferred each flower to have a well marked blotch to give it form and substance. Foliage was also a prime consideration, for he liked his plants to be pleasing to the eye either in or out of flower.'

The exact pairing that gave rise to 'Sappho', made before 1867, remains unknown, but an 1843-vintage 'Boddaertianum'-like hybrid with spotted white flowers has often been suggested as one of the parents. This is 'Smithii Album', and it was first listed in that year by the Trillon nursery of Le Mans, France, with the plant the likely result of an *arboreum* x *ponticum* cross. Yet given the surplus of available hybrids available at Knap Hill that Donald Waterer details, resort to such an interloper should have been unnecessary, especially as 'Smithii Album' was generally considered inferior to 'Boddaertianum' - having fewer corollas in a smaller truss. Plus many of the shrubs Anthony Waterer already had to hand would have duplicated the Trillon parental combination, though of course far stranger things have happened in the world of rhododendron hybridisation, the most obvious exemplification being Lionel de Rothschild personally discovering 'Moser's Maroon' hidden away at the back of another French horticultural emporium.

Donald Waterer's *QBARS* article confirms that 'Sappho' first flowered in 1870, so pollen probably met style at Knap Hill in the early 1860s and its selection for propagation and introduction would have been a no-brainer once those blooms were seen, especially as the hybrid also ticked every single one of Anthony Waterer's other boxes.

Those morphological attributes, both positive and negative, are well documented, with 'Sappho' known to be hardy down to -26ºC or lower, so it can be planted anywhere in the UK where the soil is right for rhododendrons unless you happen to garden atop a Munro. If left to its own devices, the hybrid will attempt to replicate just such a mountain, broaching the 4m height and width marks with ease, the wide-spreading dome then quickly surmounting 6m, accomplishments all achieved in but a few decades. Of course, the bush will be gawky and gangly until mature, with a decided legginess problem even when grown in full sun, plus the branches often bend and twist to produce an open middle, but an assault with a pair of secateurs will - in this case - attenuate the problem without harming the plant, especially if space is limited. As will pinching-out any solitary terminal vegetative buds from the moment of planting, such a combination of techniques producing a much better shaped and tighter framework that should also be well-filled with foliage. Long, internodal growth will still be apparent, but that is the nature of the beast even if the advice of some experts - to hard prune every five years - is religiously followed. Those aforementioned leaf blades are held for two years, occasionally three, and they are dark green, pointed ellipses with a distinct midrib that often develop a gently V-shaped longitudinal profile. Each can be up to 12.5cm in length by as much as 4cm across at the widest point and while their visual appeal is several orders of magnitude away from that of a large-leaved species, they best the foliage of most other *ponticum* hybrids and trounce that borne by 'Pink Pearl'.

In bud, the flowers are mauve, these expanding into widely funnel-shaped bowls 5cm long that are between 7 and 8.5cm across at the mouth. Those corollas have lobes with wavy-margins, display ten or twelve stamens within that are white-filamented and topped by brown anthers, and have a darker, creamy-green flushed style that may be shorter or slightly longer than its encircling male cohorts. Fourteen or fifteen individuals are carried in each compact, conical truss, and a mature shrub will display a sea of purple-black-punctuated white blooms, though not every branch tip will be so graced, especially in the years immediately post some extensive cosmetic surgery.

The 'Sappho' epithet, first used by the Waterers for an unregistered and now lost rosy-crimson hybrid, then later also assigned to a yellowy-orange deciduous azalea, and lastly borrowed by Ben Morrison in the 1940s for one of his Glenn Dale evergreen azaleas, is of course the name of the writer of the *Ode to Aphrodite,* the Greek lyric poet of legend from Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, believed to have lived from around 630 to 570 BC. Today, the term is regarded as a symbol of female homosexuality, and although the lady herself may or may not have subscribed to such tendencies - historians are, as usual, still debating the issue - the rhododendron named for her has no such issues, as a glance down the *IRRC's* pages will quickly confirm. 'Calsap' and 'Lady de Rothschild' are probably the best known and most widely grown of its many offspring, but they, like the low-to-medium-growing, so-called 'tamed' pretenders - 'Peeping Tom' is the best of these - are no more than pale imitations of the real thing.

A little over a century on from when it first bloomed, R. 'Sappho' was finally gifted an Award of Merit by the Royal Horticultural Society after trial at Wisley.



R. 'Sappho'

R. ‘Sappho’

R. ‘Sappho’



R. ‘Sappho’



R. ‘Sappho’





R. ‘Sappho’



R. ‘Scintillation’

R. ‘Scintillation’
unknown x unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 May 2.5m x 3m

Charles Owen Dexter (1862-1943), was a textile manufacturer by trade, managing the family-owned Beacon Manufacturing Company in New Bedford, Massachusetts, with his uncle and cousin. Blankets were their business and by the 1920s they were one of the largest producers of such in the United States. And it was in 1921, at the age of 59, that Dexter was told that he didn’t have much longer to live. So he brought an abandoned farm in nearby Sandwich and commissioned a local architect to turn the rolling countryside into a fine country estate complete with a colonial style house for his retirement: Shawme Farm. Paul Frost, the man entrusted with that redevelopment, was a fan of rhododendrons and so a comprehensive collection was established across its 100 acres, including a batch of new plants recently arrived at a Cape Cod nursery that had never been seen in New England before. These came from the Exeter-based British firm of Robert Veitch & Sons and their blooms - clean and radiant - were in total contrast to those of the ironclads. And Charles Dexter immediately became completely fascinated with them. So much so that growing vegetables was forsworn and the next 22 years of his life was spent hybridising rhododendrons, the expert medical opinions of his doctors given short shrift.

It has been estimated that when Dexter’s breeding programme was at its height, he was growing between 5,000 and 10,000 hybrid seedlings each year, some 200,000 in total. Advice on such was sought from the experts, Charles Sprague Sargent and Ernest Wilson at the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, to name but two, and species seed was acquired in the early 1930s from Edinburgh Botanic. *R. decorum, R. discolor, R. fortunei, R. griersonianum* and *R. haematodes* are all known to have been used in the pairings he made, along with hybrids such as ‘Britannia’, ‘Cornubia’, ‘Earl of Athlone’, ‘Lady Eleanor Cathcart’ and ‘Pygmalion’, but a record of the exact combinations of those matches has been lost, though visitors to Shawme Farm have reported that Dexter personally wrote the equations into a black notebook he carried with him when out in the grounds. Thousands of the seedlings were given away to his family and friends, and to institutions far and wide, with hundreds more propagated and distributed, but they were often gifted before they had first flowered and no proper selection process to weed out the chaff was ever undertaken. So Charles Dexter is never referred to as the American Lionel de Rothschild or Henry McLaren, for although around a hundred or so of his hybrids are very fine indeed, they are swamped in number by many thousands of unnamed inferior plants bequeathed by himself or sold off by successive owners of Shawme Farm after Mrs Dexter put the property up for sale.

‘Scintillation’ was one of those ‘gifts’, and today, it is Charles Dexter’s most highly rated hybrid: introduced into UK gardens; distributed by the specialist nurseries. A 1978-published book, *Hybrids and Hybridizers: Rhododendrons and Azaleas for Eastern North America,* written by Philip Livingstone and Franklin West, sets out its history:

> ‘The original plant was sent by Charles Dexter to the New York Botanical Garden about 1940, and there grown as NYBG #67. The first choice of the Bowers Committee in 1949 on its initial visit to select superior Dexter hybrids [see below], it was labeled NY #1. Cuttings were rooted by Paul Vossberg, who named it and introduced it in 1957. It is the most widely distributed of all the Dexter hybrids and has been pronounced as best of them all by many expert rhododendron growers. It is fortunate that cuttings of this were taken for shortly afterwards the original plant was washed away in a flash flood.’

Other doyens go further, believing 'Scintillation' to be simply the finest rhododendron hybrid ever raised in the USA and its technical specifications include winter hardiness down to -26ºC, with the shrub being easy to grow and free-flowering from a young age. Usually unfazed as to position, in the hottest areas of the UK, a spot in dappled shade should be selected to forestall any leaf burn.

Those blades are oblong in shape, 15cm long by 5cm across. Dark glossy green above, they often develop a convex longitudinal profile, but sometimes, sadly, they may also be slightly twisted and show a mild susceptibility to yellowing. They are held for two years, on strong stems, so more than adequately cloak the framework.

Flowering occurs in May, the buds opening to form a rounded, globular truss with between 11 and 15 broadly funnel-shaped corollas, each 5cm long by up to 6.5cm across at the mouth. Their tone is a strong purplish-pink, shading paler towards the centre, each flower having 5 or 6 wavy-edged lobes, with a greenish-yellow to brown-and-bronzy flare of spots and speckles on the dorsal.

Habit is dome-shaped, slightly wider spreading than the shrub ultimately grows high, which at 2.5m makes the hybrid a perfect choice for today's typical urban garden. But only if you like the flower colour, which some do not.

As would be expected of so highly rated a rhododendron, American hybridisers have used 'Scintillation' extensively since its introduction, as have some European nurserymen, notably Hans Hachmann of Germany, but none of the cultivar names that feature on the listings of those crosses remotely threaten to topple Dexter's hybrid from its number one spot. A word of warning, however: the *IRRC* reports that a number of clones have been distributed under the 'Scintillation' epithet in the US, but it is unclear if any of these lesser pretenders have, to date, made it across to this side of the pond.

Over the years, various attempts have been made to gather back together all of Charles Dexter's best hybrids and return them to their true home, which since 1967 has been the location of a non-profit museum focused on early Americana. This has largely been successful, with the Heritage Museum and Gardens now holding a collection of around 160 named plants, amongst the tens of thousands of unnamed varieties still happily growing in the grounds.

Regarding Charles Owen Dexter himself, Chapter 1 of *Hybrids and Hybridizers* is a 30-page biography of his life and rhododendron breeding programme, along with seven pages of colour photographs portraying many of his better crosses. Additionally, several superb articles on Dexter have featured in the American Rhododendron Society journal over the years, namely: *Stepping Stones In Rhododendron History,* by F. W. Schumacher (*QBARS,* Volume 11, Number 4); *Dexter Rhododendrons: Their Past, Present & Future,* by Herman Howard (*QBARS,* Volume 26, Number 2); and *Dexter Rhododendron Secrets,* by Jonathan Leonard (*JARS,* Volume 47, Number 1). All of these can be freely accessed online at the Virginia Tech University Library, the url being:

https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/



Charles Dexter

R. ‘Scintillation’

R. ‘Scintillation’



Richard Gill

R. 'Shilsonii'
thomsonii x *barbatum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 March-early April 6m x 6m

Richard Gill (1849-1927), was the head gardener at Tremough, the home of the Shilson family, located close to Penryn in Cornwall. He would later establish his own nursery business - R. Gill & Sons - with this initially based on land leased from the estate. Today, Tremough is the Penryn Campus of the Universities of Falmouth and Exeter, having previously been a part of the Falmouth College of Arts and before that a convent school educating girls from the local community, but in the 1850s, the 70-acre estate was one of the chosen Cornish gardens that received seed from Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker's 1849-51 expedition to Sikkim, and its balmy woodland, close to the sea, provided those species rhododendrons with the perfect environ in which to thrive.

Gill's employer at the time, D. Henry Shilson, encouraged his head gardener to cross the various plants Hooker and others had collected, which by the late 1880s and 1890s were mature specimens, flowering annually. This he did, producing award-winning hybrids such as 'Beauty of Tremough', 'Duke of Cornwall', 'Gill's Triumph', 'Richard Gill' and a host of others that would form the kernel of his new business venture. He was the first hybridiser to make a *thomsonii* x *barbatum* pairing, the window when pollen likely met style probably sometime between 1890 through 1892, and his cross remains the only such pairing that has been officially registered with the *IRRC,* the selected progeny from that combination named for his employer, exhibited in 1900, and gifted an Award of Merit from the RHS that very same year. Yet soon after the shrub's introduction into the UK's major rhododendron gardens, 'Shilsonii' quickly gained a notoriety for being a difficult plant to please. As Henry McLaren, writing in 1927, makes clear:

> 'It has a reputation, I think deserved, of not being the easiest of plants to grow, and undoubtedly Sir Edmund Loder's reverse cross has the better constitution, although Gill's hybrid has, as a rule, the finer flowers. The cross, however, is a fairly hardy one, and the flower-buds are rarely injured by winter frosts.'
> *The Late Mr Richard Gill and his Rhododendron Hybrids,* published within Volume 3, Number 3, of *The Rhododendron Society Notes*.

Or as ten years earlier, John Guille Millais had reported:

> 'The vivid scarlet of the large waxy flowers, produced in the first week in April, have attracted nearly all Rhododendron lovers, who have seen the Tremough specimens in bloom, but with the exception of a few Cornish gardens I cannot hear that many gardeners have been successful with this hybrid. It gets along well enough until it begins to flower freely and then the plant (especially if grafted) seems to suffer a considerable shock, even if it does not die outright. I have lost many, and now only possess one in good health, and that is retained by liberal disbudding.'
> *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* 1917.

Lord Aberconway reports that the reverse cross made at Leonardslee, along with a dupe of the original combination, employed different forms of the species to those used by Gill, this a practice already trialed by Sir Edmund Loder when he disenfranchised the lacklustre 'Kewense', while Millais documents that 'Sir John Llewellyn has raised a similar hybrid, and has planted many groups of them in the open at Penllergare'.

In fact, the cross was repeated at any number of gardens, and of course, at the time, the progeny from a *thomsonii* x *barbatum* pairing were regarded as being identical to those

R. ‘Shilsonii’

R. ‘Shilsonii’

raised from a *barbatum* x *thomsonii* cross, thus a clonal mix-up was virtually predestined. So despite none being registered - Leonardslee's *barbatum* x *thomsonii* 'Nestor' excepted - in commerce today, they are all muddled-up. Which means that outwith a fully equipped genetics laboratory, it is beyond the bounds of possibility to identify which of the pair matured the seed, as opposed to merely providing the pollen. Equally, as night follows day, some non-vegetatively propagated individuals were almost certainly included within the jumble even though considered doyenic opinion suggests most of the forms originated from Leonardslee.

Morphologically therefore, the 'Shilsonii' technical spec sheet has to encompass blood red, crimson and scarlet flowers, with those basically campanulate corollas held in loose through compact trusses of 12 to 15. They are usually of a waxy texture, often have darker veining, and will sometimes be graced with discreet brown speckles or spots on the dorsal, their dimensions averaging around 4.5cm long by 5cm across at the mouth. Constantly present are the five blackish nectar pouches gathered around the ovary at the base of the throat, while the stamens are usually white with black anthers, the style glabrous and often whitish, but sometimes flushed yellow, and its stigma svelte or stocky. A pale green flushed crimson calyx while glabrous, is irregularly petaloid, the lobes up to 2cm long.

On the other hand, the foliage is said to resemble the blades of *R. thomsonii,* each leaf being around 11.5cm long by 7cm wide, basically elliptic in shape, dark green in colour, apiculate at the apex and cordate at the base. More often however, they are a halfway house between the two parents.

Habit too is pretty consistent, mature specimens being tree-like, to around 6m high, spreading as widely, with many displaying a beautiful metallic or copper-coloured bark.

A sheltered woodland planting site for R. 'Shilsonii' is an absolutely de rigueur sine qua non, needed to prevent the blooms succumbing to frost or the shrub being stripped of its foliage in a gale, not to mention branches being broken by the fiercest of gusts. Where such provision is to hand, long-established Goliaths will put on a floral display each March that will simply take your breath away.



R. 'Shilsonii'



R. 'Shilsonii'

R. ‘Shilsonii’

R. ‘Shilsonii’



Man’s shot silk coat and breeches, *c.* 1790

R. ‘Shot Silk’

campylocarpum x *dichroanthum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April-May 2.5m x 2.5m

Shot silk, the name of the fabric from which Sir John Ramsden borrowed the epithet for his *campylocarpum* x *dichroanthum* cross, is woven from warp and weft yarns of two or more colours, the interweave producing an iridescent effect, with the ‘shot’, actually the single throw of the bobbin that propels the weft thread through the warp. Garments produced with this material can be described as having a warp colour shot with a weft colour, so a blue warp may be shot with a pink weft, or as in the shot silk suit shown in the photograph opposite, have a purple warp and a green weft.

‘Shot Silk’ the rhododendron has a creamy-white warp and pale pink weft, all the corolla lobes having a smattering of darker pink spots and the dorsal bearing a crimson-red flash at its base. Like the cloth, the widely funnel-shaped and frilly-edged blooms are easily stained, wind-hurled raindrops being the principal culprit at Muncaster. Flesh-pink in the bud, seven or eight trumpets are carried in each rounded to conical truss.

The hybrid has medium-sized leaves that are elliptic-lanceolate in shape, dark green in colour, and somewhat glossy, the blades distinctly ribbed and often graced with a V-shaped profile. They are carried for two years, so the upright framework of branches while well-cloaked above, is often bares below the knees.

Sir John might also have chosen to christen his 1933-introduced hybrid ‘Changeant’, though this alternate term for changeable silk doesn’t have quite the same ring.



R. ‘Shot Silk’


R. ‘Shot Silk’


R. ‘Shot Silk’


R. ‘Shot Silk’

R. ‘Sonata’

R. ‘Sonata’

‘Purple Splendour’ x *dichroanthum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late May-June 2m x 3m

The firm founded by German émigré Gustav Reuthe was still based at Keston, near Bromley, when in the 1940s and late 1950s it crossed and introduced ‘Sonata’ - so long before the move to Crown Point, near Sevenoaks - and the hybrid is probably the most well known and widely distributed of the nursery’s elepidote rhododendrons, though the yellow-flowering lepidote cross named for Princess Anne would top the overall popularity list. In this case, *R. dichroanthum* was used to pollinate Knap Hill’s ‘Purple Splendour’, with the two-tone colour meld of Chinese Coral and crimson that resulted, not to everyone’s taste.

Morphology-wise, the funnel-shaped flowers, 4.5cm long by 5cm across, are held in a loose, open truss of 11 to 13 corollas, these crimson at the margins and with some reddish overtones, which fade through orange-red to orange at the centre, the locale where a fan of brown spots is scattered across the dorsal lobes. Mature specimens will be awash with bloom annually, but juvenile plants are known to be reticence about setting more than a few flower buds, this aversion persisting until they are six or seven years of age.

The shrub’s leaves are small ellipses, 6.5cm long by 2.7cm wide, dark green in tone, held for two years, with the bush a tight, upright grower at first that only really begins to spread out after a decade or more and even then remains compact and densely clothed, although eventually it will just about top 2m in height and stretch to 3m or so in width.

‘Sonata’ will thrive in full sun or light dappled shade in the south of England, but requires an unshaded position to maintain a liberal flower bud set in the northern counties and Scotland. Winter hardiness is good, but the -18ºC figure excludes the hybrid from longterm cultivation in the UK’s coldest inland gardens.



R. ‘Sonata’



R. ‘Sonata’


R. ‘Susan’


R. ‘Susan’

R. ‘Susan’
campanulatum x *fortunei*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late April-May 4m x 6m

J. C. Williams is the only rhododendron hybridiser to have officially registered a cross from a *campanulatum* x *fortunei* pairing and his clonal choice of pollen parent was clearly critical in maintaining the near-blue pigmentation of the flowers ‘Susan’ displays. This hue, technically described as ‘Amethyst Violet’, though pale purple and bluish-mauve are equally accurate, is deeper on the three dorsal lobes than it is on the two below, with that triad also heavily spotted maroon. Regrettably, over time, the blooms fade-out to white, remaining darkest for longest around the lobe margins. An average of around twelve funnel-shaped and five-lobed corollas will fill each rounded truss, those trumpets when fully expanded, individually 7.5cm long by 9cm wide at the mouth.

If the blooms were not sufficient of themselves, ‘Susan’ also bears foliage that is their near equal: elliptical-shaped blades some 14cm long by 6.5cm across; dark green, glossy and glabrous above; paler and matt below with a thin tomentum at first. They are retained on the bush for two years and despite having to cloak a framework produced by a strong and vigorous constitution, preserve the dignity of most mature specimens thanks to the shrub’s compact dome-forming habit, which will clock in at a third wider than it is high. Expert opinion is in agreement on where such specimens should best be grown: a spot in dappled shade the ideal locale for preserving the flower colour, even in England’s northern counties and across the border into Scotland, though not above the Central Belt, beyond which a full sun placement is recommended. The hybrid is fully hardy and well able to thrive across the whole of the UK wherever the soil type is right, especially if ensconced within the protection of a woodland glade.

Sadly, it is at this point that the doyens diverge - for the *IRRC* gifts J. C. Williams the hybridiser credit, while most other sources opt for his cousin and question whether ‘Susan’ is in fact a hybrid at all, as ‘unfortunately, its history is not fully known’. The online entry in *Bean’s Trees & Shrubs* then goes on to state that the plant ‘was raised by P. D. Williams of Lanarth, Cornwall, and originally known as “Williams’ Campanulatum Hybrid”, but later named ‘Susan’ and put into commerce by Messrs W. C. Slocock. It is near to *R. campanulatum,* but it is difficult to believe that it is a hybrid between that species and *R. fortunei,* as stated by Lionel de Rothschild, and later in the *International Register*.’

On that second point, Frederick Street can also be quoted:

> ‘Susan’ is said to be a hybrid between *R. campanulatum* and *R. fortunei,* but there seems to be very little influence of *R. fortunei,* and it could almost be a very good form of *R. campanulatum.* The leaves are dark green with a brown underside and the plant has a neat habit of growth.’
> *Classic Garden Plants: Rhododendrons,* 1988.

The gift of an AM in 1948 and an FCC in 1954, both after trials at Wisley, confirm just how good ‘Susan’ is, regardless of its lineage or which member of the Williams clan actually made the selection or pairing. One positive facet however, has, over time, changed to a negative, because the leaves, once considered mildew resistant, must now be regarded as somewhat susceptible to the fungal disease.

R. ‘Susan’

R. ‘Tally Ho’

The 'Tally Ho' Pride

facetum x *griersonianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 June 4m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Jacquetta	Lord Edward digby (Gardener - Mr. G. Smith)	1939	1953
Tally Ho	Lady Loder	before 1933	1933

On May 27th 1933, two eminent rhododendron hybridisers arrived at the same flower show separately, but each brought with them a new cross that sported stunning vermilion-coloured blooms: Joseph John Crosfield of Embley Park; and Dowager Lady Muriel Rolls Loder of Leonardslee. The Hampshire pairing was a *griersonianum* x *facetum* match, while that from West Sussex was a *facetum* x *griersonianum* combination, with everyone present in the hall that day agreeing that the two plants were virtually indistinguishable. At which point, the RHS Floral Committee members who were judging the exhibits magnanimously decided that each hybrid should receive a First Class Certificate. Even more remarkable, both were there and then named 'Tally Ho'.

Now, in 1933, it may have been the perfect compromise to head-off an unseemly handbags-at-dawn to-the-death fist fight, but fast-forward through eighty-plus years of cutting-edge scientific research and you bump into chloroplasts and mitochondria, which as has been stated throughout this text, are solely the gift of the female parent. Thus, at a cellular level, a *griersonianum* x *facetum* hybrid will not be the same as a *facetum* x *griersonianum* cross despite their supposedly mirrored, outward appearance. Because the organelles that power their cells or carry out the process of photosynthesis evolved to meet the differing challenges that their host species faced, so their efficiency in accomplishing such tasks will be at variance. Not poles apart admittedly, but those performance factors will subtly effect the morphology of each cross by having a bearing on their hardiness, size, robustness and flower bud set (to tick just four boxes).

Of course, out in the real world, it is far too late to even consider separating the two and applying a 'Leonardslee Tally Ho' tag to the Loder plant - as the Crosfield hybrid is believed to have been the first raised, so takes precedence in the botanic name game - for both have been widely distributed by the nursery trade. They will also have been mixed-up with a third clone, this a Lionel de Rothschild crossing of the two species, made at Exbury, though not officially registered. And it goes without saying that trying to ascertain which form of 'Tally Ho' was subsequently used as a parent in the vast array of registered hybrids conceived after its, or rather, their introduction, is basically an impossibility. Equally, down under, a fourth mating also resides under the 'Tally Ho' banner, this one apparently paired by Edgar Stead of Christchurch, New Zealand, although helpfully, this blooms later in the season than its three UK cohorts. Oh, and completing the cast, is an addition from Minterne in Dorset, where in 1939, the Leonardslee *facetum* x *griersonianum* combination was duplicated by Lord Digby and 'Jacquetta' introduced in 1953.

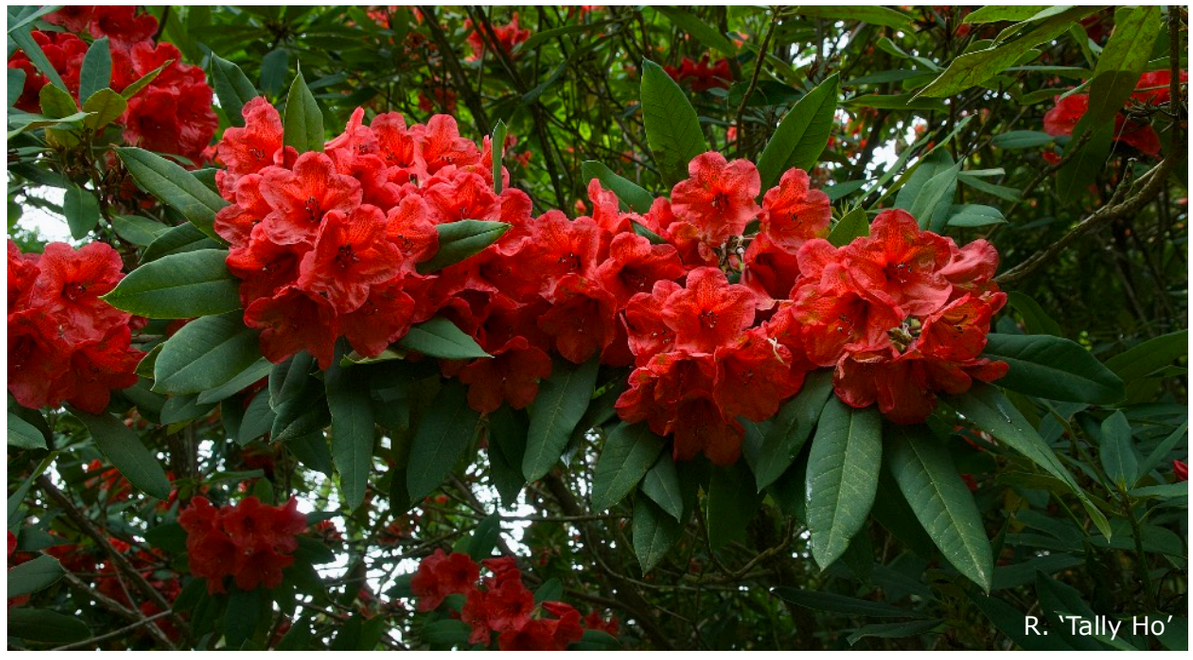
Lionel de Rothschild has often been quoted as saying that he 'could see no difference between the three forms' grown in the UK, which in consequence resulted in an amalgam description, a construct 'made from several plants, all very much alike' to quote from the online edition of *Bean's Trees & Shrubs*. Those specifications detail 9 through 14 funnel-campanulate corollas that are vermilion or orange-scarlet in tone and spotted darker. Each is up to 6cm in length and 9cm wide at the mouth, and they are gathered into a relatively compact truss on glandular pedicels. The stamen filaments and style tube are coloured as the corolla, with the latter also tomentose and glandular throughout its length.

The trio's leaves have a bullate upper surface and are basically oblong-elliptic in shape, being matt green above and having a persistent, pale brown, floccose or tufted indumentum below. The blade length is variable, being between 9 and 15cm long, and correspondingly 3 to 4.5cm wide, but sometimes extending to 24cm in length and almost 8cm in width, with the Leonardslee form said by the authors of *Bean's Trees & Shrubs* to be even longer, which would appear to speak volumes for the *R. facetum* organelles and rather less for L de R's eyesight.

'Tally Ho' will ultimately top 4m in height when fully mature and extend out to at least 6m, with the habit somewhat open and straggly, especially when grown in too much shade, though a woodland placement is non-negotiable given the H4-5 maximum winter hardiness figure of -12ºC. Some shade is also essential for the leaves, which are notably 'sensitive' to prolonged spells of unbroken blisteringly hot sunshine across the summer months.

However, severe cold is the worst enemy, with bark split and bud tenderness known to be widespread problems if the shrub is grown away from the milder gardens of the southern counties and those along the western seaboard. Moreover, early autumn frosts can also wreak havoc, damaging the young growth, which begins to extend quite late in the season and so is not fully hardened-off if winter arrives early. Peter and Kenneth Cox confirm that prognosis in their 1988-published *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* reporting that plants of 'Tally Ho' growing at Glendoick - their garden to the east of Perth in Scotland - regularly suffered such damage and in the end, died because of it.

A number of published texts credit the Leonardslee 'Tally Ho' pairing to Sir Edmund Loder instead of to his daughter-in-law, the authors of these works regrettably failing to take cognisance of two facts: that *R. griersonianum,* discovered in 1917, first flowered in UK cultivation - at Borde Hill and Caerhays Castle - during the spring of 1923; and that Sir Edmund himself had passed onwards to that great woodland rhododendron garden in the sky that awaits us all (or not), on April 14th, 1920.



R. 'Tally Ho'



R. ‘Jacquetta’



R. ‘Jacquetta’



R. ‘Jacquetta’



R. ‘Tally Ho’



R. ‘Tally Ho’



R. ‘Tally Ho’

R. ‘Taurus’

The ‘Taurus’ Pride

‘The Honourable Jean Marie de Montague’ x *strigillosum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 April-early May 4m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Grace Seabrook	Cecil S. Seabrook	before 1966	1966
Taurus	Frank Mossman	1962	1970

If the array of named selections of *R. occidentale,* along with the seed gathered from populations of that species in the wild throughout the 1960s and 1970s in partnership with Britt Smith or the scholarly articles that resulted from their explorations and collecting trips to Oregon and California, were the only contribution Frank Mossman had made to Genus *Rhododendron,* then this Nebraskan-born ophthalmologist would be more than entitled to rest on his laurels. But at his home in the Vancouver district of Portland, on the north bank of the Columbia River, he was also quietly breeding hybrids, though only a few of these have been registered: four deciduous azalea crosses that not unsurprisingly involve *R. occidentale* in their couplings; and three elepidotes. Two of the latter are nothing to write home about, but the third is a cracker, and it regularly tops the polls as the best red-flowering hybrid available: ‘Taurus’.

The luminous blooms it opens are campanulate in form and carried in a large globular truss of sixteen individuals, each corolla 9cm wide at the mouth. Their colouring is turkey red in the throat, changing to cherry red and then orient red on the lobes, with a modest speckling of black spots on the dorsal. The stamen filaments, style and stigma are also flushed red, as is the calyx. And flower bud set is prolific from an early age.

To that morphology can be added attractive, dark green and thick, elliptic leaves, the blades 18cm long by 7cm wide, pointed at the apex and retained for two years, on a sturdily-branched, upward growing shrub that has proven to be hardy down to -21ºC and which more than justifies its place as a top-ranked commercial standard, not only in America, but in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. It will tolerate a full sun placement in the southern counties of England and has come unscathed through the UK’s recent hard winters, even in those gardens bordering Scotland’s east coast. And if that wasn’t enough, the foliage has proved itself impervious to insect attack and specimens of all ages are easy to grow and disease resistant.

All those traits have likely been amplified by the plant’s chromosome count: for like Tower Court’s R. ‘Gargantua’ - formerly *R. decorum* ssp. *diaprepes* ‘Gargantua’, but now known to have been germinated from a selfed pollination of an ailing specimen of that species made by Roza Stevenson - Frank Mossman’s 1962 cross is also an elepidote triploid. And the fact that it is a genetically-enhanced polyploid may also explain why many doyens had previously questioned its lineage.

‘Taurus’ is registered as ‘The Honourable Jean Marie de Montague’ pollinated by *R. strigillosum,* yet Peter and Kenneth Cox have concluded that ‘this plant is too good to have half pure *strigillosum* in it, and this part of the parentage was probably a hybrid’ (*The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988). If such was the case, it is probable that one of Hjalmar Larson’s concoctions - such as ‘Double Winner’ or ‘Etta Burrows’ - may perhaps have inadvertently supplied the pollen granules, but it wasn’t, and the pedigree is as stated in the *IRRC* registration. Because the scientific technique of flow cytometry - where the amount of genetic material in a cell is ‘weighed’ (this an advance on the old tried-and-tested method of staining actively growing cells and counting the chromosomes under a microscope) - has now shown ‘Taurus’ to have thirty-nine of those DNA threads.

All was revealed in an article titled *Weighing In: Discovering the Ploidy of Hybrid Elepidote Rhododendrons,* which was published in *Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias 2012.* The authors - Sally and John Perkins, José Cerca de Oliveira, Mariana and Silvia Castro, and João Loureiro - report that ‘The Honourable Jean Marie de Montague’ though a diploid rhododendron - one whose cells contain the standard set of 26 chromosomes - is not so principled when producing its ovules, as these are often unreduced gametes instead of the usual haploid gametes. In layman’s terms: the female eggs have 26 chromosomes, instead of just 13.

So when that *R. strigillosum* pollen grain wormed its way down the inside of the style and entered one of the chambers of the ovary, it met up and fused with one of those mutant eggs, which gave the newly conceived seed a total of 39 chromosomes, thereby making it a triploid.

And just as the Stevensons at Tower Court noticed a supercharged weirdo sprouting-up amongst their otherwise normal selfed seedlings of *R. diaprepes,* Frank Mossman too spotted his own nonconformist. Just as Cecil Seabrook must have done a few years earlier with a seedling germinated from that same combination of parents, which he introduced in 1966 after naming the plant for his wife. Because ‘Grace Seabrook’ too has now been confirmed a triploid with 39 chromosomes in each of its cells.



R. ‘Taurus’

R. ‘Taurus’

R. ‘Taurus’

R. ‘Taurus’



R. ‘Top Banana’

R. ‘Top Banana’
Unknown x Unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Mid-late April 2.5m x 2m

Although ‘Top Banana’ is a stunner, the shrub is reportedly somewhat difficult in UK cultivation. It is one of Bill Whitney’s hybrids, but the parentage, like many of his crosses, is unknown. ‘Hotei’ is believed by many doyens to be part of the mix, but only the plant’s physical characteristics have evidenced this assessment. George, Anne and Ellie Sather, who took over the Whitney Garden and Nursery along the shores of the Hood Canal in Brinnon - on Washington State’s Olympic Peninsula - just a few years before the hybridiser died, and who subsequently introduced many of his crosses onto the market, have written a number of articles for the American Rhododendron Society Journal about Whitney and his plants. Their thoughts on ‘Top Banana’ are that:

> ‘Bill may have used ‘Hotei’ as one of the parents in this plant as the bloom colour is the same, along with leaf size, shape and colour. The two major differences are the time of bloom (late April) and the fact that this plant buds as a young plant, whereas ‘Hotei’ buds as a 6 to 8 year-old. The plant is a little more upright than ‘Hotei’ and retains 2 years of leaves. It propagates well, and appears to be much more consistent in blooming year after year. However, it is also prone to root rot, as is ‘Hotei’. Hardiness also appears to be the same’.
> *W. E. Whitney: The Man, His Garden, His Legacy,*
> Anne and Ellie Sather, *JARS,* Volume 38, Number 3, 1984.

Peter and Kenneth Cox, writing in their 1988 *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* also report that it needs perfect drainage, with Ken adding in 2005 that because the hybrid puts out very early growth, which at Glendoick - to the east of Perth in Tayside - meant it was often hit by a late spring frost, the nursery had reluctantly given up propagating it commercially (*Rhododendrons & Azaleas: A Colour Guide*).

Nevertheless, a fine specimen of the hybrid can still be found in the woodland garden at Glendoick and this has now crossed the 2m height mark and is still ascending, so a 2.5m ‘ultimate’ figure would certainly prove achievable, though whether in time it will soar up to 4m and so match its perhaps-parent is open to question. Currently, the plant’s spread is a little less than its height.

The full morphologic spec sheet for ‘Top Banana’ details open funnel-shaped corollas, 5cm long by 6.5cm across at the mouth, these carried in a fairly tight globular truss of 17 individuals. Each is 6-lobed, these often with wavy margins, and although reddish-orange in the bud, the blooms open a pure brilliant yellow. At the base of the corolla a large-lobed calyx will be found, each of its petals up to 2.8cm in length and coloured to match the blooms, though any visual hose-in-hose effect is minimal. The leaf blades are elliptic in shape and glossy olive green in tone, this combined with a flat or slightly convex profile, and a length of up to 11cm.

‘Top Banana’ flowers around two weeks earlier in the UK than it does in the Pacific Northwest, so mid April rather than at the end of the month, which compounds the need for a frost-free environment to protect the development of both vegetative and floral buds. West coast locales, along with sheltered sites in the southern counties will therefore prove to be the best horticultural residencies where the hybrid can thrive longterm, safe from a debilitating Jack attack, although as the photo on the right shows, it may not escape molestation by leaf spot.



R. ‘Top Banana’

R. ‘Touchstone’

R. 'Touchstone'
griffithianum x 'Roseum Superbum'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Late April-May 6m x 4m

'Touchstone' is another of the fabulous introductions from Embley Park in Hampshire, a J. J. Crosfield pairing likely made in the late 1920s that used the *R. catawbiense* hybrid 'Roseum Superbum' to pollinate *R. griffithianum*. The result of that match is a tall-growing shrub bedecked with large balls of neyron-rose from late April into May, the strawberry-pink blooms an instant eye magnet. And if that unique hue were not enough, the corollas also have a mottled streak of white running down the centre of each lobe to catch your attention, this intrusion most intense on the lower petals, while the yellow-green blob of the stigma above provides added visual punctuation. Broadly campanulate in shape and 7.5cm long by 10cm across, the flowers are carried in a loose truss of ten or eleven bells, these paling to a softer pink over time. At their rear, an irregularly lobed and reflexed, glandular and ciliate calyx will be found, this usually coloured to match.

The foliage of 'Touchstone' is dark green and semi-glossy, elliptically-shaped, often with a very shallow V-profile, the veins and midrib distinctly impressed into the upper surface. Each of those glabrous blades may be up to 14cm long by 4.5cm wide and they are held on the bush for two years. A vigorous, open, yet well-branched habit will produce a fine upright shrub with the potential to hit 6m in height over time, such specimens spreading out to around 4m in width, and if set in a spot gifted a modicum of dappled shade in west coast gardens, with that scintilla moderately augmented in southern locales, flower bud set will be maximised, the deeper hues of the corolla pigmentation prolonged, and the best shaped specimens of 'Touchstone' produced.

Joseph Crosfield died in 1940 and Embley Park was put up for sale the following year, but luckily, Harold Hillier was later able to move many of the exquisite hybrids growing in the grounds to the woodland garden he was developing in connection with his nursery business at Jermyn's House nearby. Today, in the care of Hampshire County Council, those shrubs, now fine mature specimens, can be seen in all their glory within the 72-hectare arboretum of the Sir Harold Hiller Gardens, 3 miles to the northeast of Romsey.


R. 'Touchstone'


R. 'Touchstone'


R. ‘Unique’


R. ‘Unique’

R. ‘Unique’

campylocarpum hybrid

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	Mid April-May	1.8m x 2.5m

When *R. campylocarpum* was introduced into British gardens during 1851, it was the only true yellow-flowering rhododendron then known and effectively, the ‘Black Tulip’ of the genus according to Frederick Street (*Rhododendrons,* 1965). Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker had discovered the species three years earlier at the start of his expedition to the Kingdom of Sikkim, a tiny mountainous enclave of less than 2,800 square miles, sandwiched between Nepal and Bhutan to the west and the east, Tibet and the Indian state of West Bengal to the north and the south. Yet despite cultivated plants grown from Hooker’s seed blooming in 1856, apart from James Mangles - who paired it with *R. griffithianum* in the 1860s or 1870s to raise ‘Mrs Kingsmill’ and ‘Mrs Randall Davidson’ - no one, not a single other representative of the rhododendron hybridising fraternity, incorporated the species into their crosses. Or at least, admitted to such in their registered parental equations.

It was a situation that would change dramatically after *R. campylocarpum* was exhibited by the Veitch Nursery of Chelsea in 1892, scooping a First Class Certificate from the RHS in the process. Then, almost overnight, every British hybridiser was clamouring for a specimen to use as either a seed or pollen parent, with a tsunami of introductions snowballing through the 1920s, 30s and 40s, peaking in the 1950s, but never really calming down across the five decades that would follow.

However, it was back in 1934 that the Slocock Nursery of Woking, Surrey, unveiled a singular masterpiece: ‘Unique’ - probably the most commercially successful and popular *campylocarpum* hybrid ever raised, though what other ingredients fashioned its features remain a mystery.

Morphologically, the shrub is perfectly proportioned, graced with fine foliage and hosts a plethora of ivory-flushed-pink flowers from mid April onwards, such characteristics securing the cross an Award of Merit on its introduction, and a First Class Certificate just one year later.

The blooms that ornament ‘Unique’ are carried in a dense, dome-shaped truss of around fourteen corollas, each 5cm long by 7cm across at the mouth. They bear a light sprinkling of crimson spots on their dorsal lobe, although these almost pass unnoticed, as does the pale yellow flush that decorates the throat. A small, glandular-ciliate calyx holds each flower in place, its own lobes edged crimson, while the style and the stamens are gathered into a tight, central cluster within each funnel-campanulate bowl.

The oblong-ovate through broadly elliptic leaves are the perfect foil for those blooms, being dark green and glossy, and up to 8cm long by 4.5cm wide. The shrub’s rate of growth is slow and its habit, compact and dense, so more than a decade will be required for it to breach the 1m height mark. Yet if set in too much shade or the canopy above is allowed to close, mature plants will look decidedly unkempt and be somewhat leggy, whereas on bushes benefitting from a full sun placement, the cloak of foliage will cover the framework from top to bottom despite the leaf blades only being retained for two years at most. In the southern counties of England however, a dappling of light shade will prolong the depth of colour in the blooms without encouraging undue scraggliness.

Ultimately, ‘Unique’ will top-out at around 1.8m and spread to 2.5m or a touch more, with youngsters grown from a rooted cutting not becoming free-flowering until they are around five years of age, after which a predictably prolific descriptor will come into play. Just as important, the thick leaves are both disease and insect resistant, while the shrub itself should prove easy to grow and be problem-free.

R. ‘Unique’

R. ‘Vesuvius’

R. 'Vesuvius'
griersonianum x 'Romany Chai'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Early June 2.5m x 4m

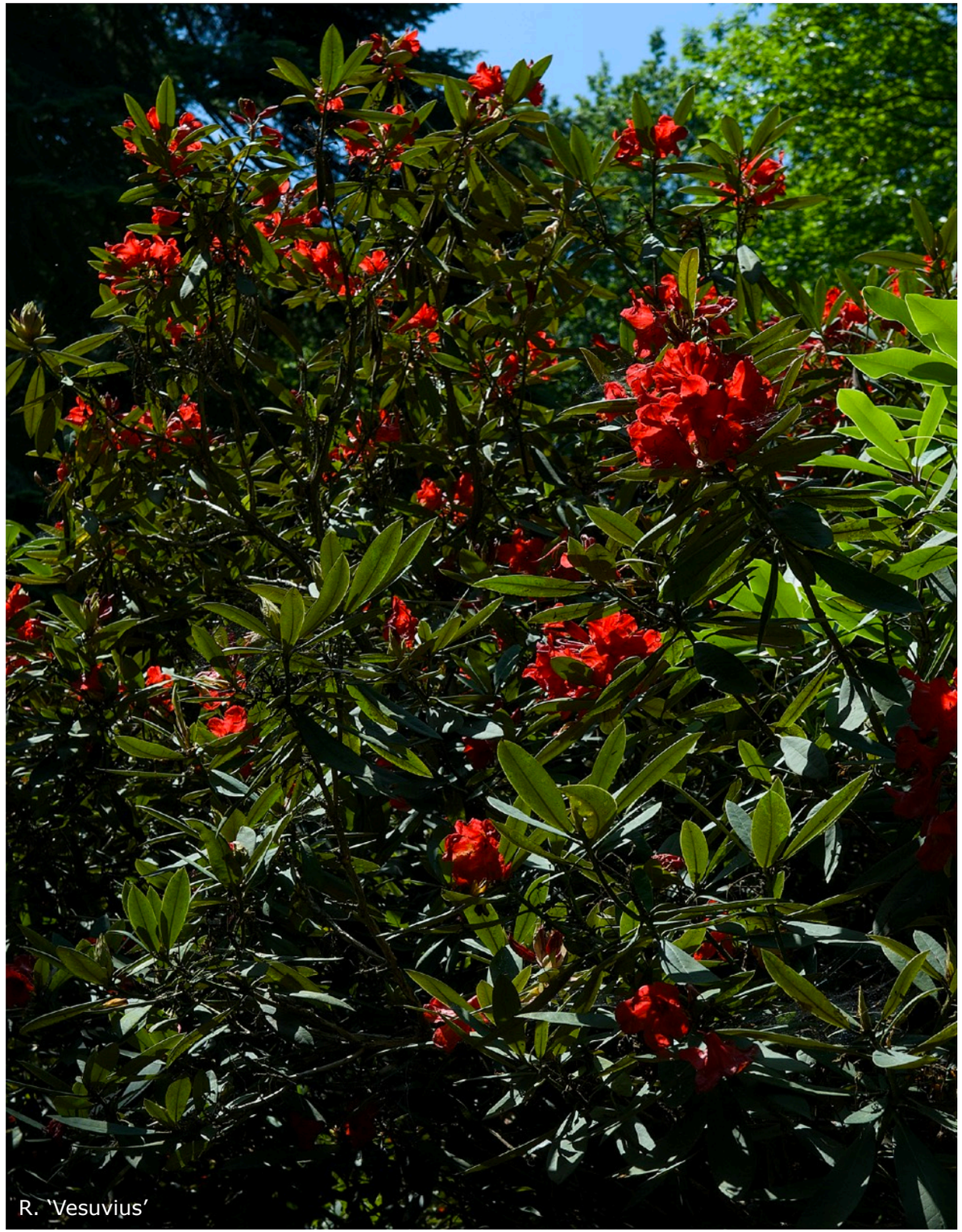
Altogether there are six rhododendrons that have been named for the Italian volcano that in AD 79 buried the Roman cities of Herculaneum, Oplontis, Pompei and Stabiae under a wave of molten lava and a cloud of ash. On its own, that eruption is estimated to have released more energy than the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs combined and there have been any number of huge pyroclastic events since, with Mount Vesuvius still active today and its past nature indicative of violent, sudden, and near instantaneous outbursts. Yet three million people live within the predicted blast radius, most, if not all of whom, will certainly not be able to outpace the outpouring of rock, pumice and poisonous gases that will spew forth at a rate of 600,000 cubic metres per second and likely shoot some 21 miles up into the sky if the next major fireworks display approaches anything like one of those cataclysmic ebullitions that have occurred in the past. The word 'crazy' comes to mind, but then this is Italy and the Italians we are talking about, although the citizenry of Japan appear as equally nonchalant about their own country's placement atop the Pacific Ring of Fire and residentially cozying-up to its vents. At least on the surface.

Plinian recrudescences aside, three of those *IRRC* registrations are for evergreen azaleas, the remaining trio elepidote hybrids, and amongst the latter, is a Standish & Noble pairing from the 1850s that has not officially been transferred across from the 1958 register; an *arboreum* x *catawbiense* cross made at the Waterers' Bagshot nursery even earlier in the 19th Century; and lastly, the subject of this discourse, a *griersonianum* x 'Romany Chai' match that was introduced in 1951 by the Sunningdale Nurseries when Jim Russell was running the business, but which is almost certainly one of Harry White's less fabled creations.

All six 'Vesuvius' registrations naturally have flowers that are some shade of fiery red, though only the Standish & Noble entry is gleefully reported to have blood red blooms. Vermilion red is the corolla hue of its successor, the flowers unspotted, with stamens and style flushed to match, so only the huddle of black anthers within provide a visual contrast. Nine through eleven funnels will be found in each flat-topped truss, each held in place by a small, deeply lobed red calyx at the end of a long and similarly coloured pedicel, which is also graced with a dusting of white tomentum.

The foliage is narrowly elliptic in shape, matt green in tone, pointed at the apex and tapering at the base, often convex in profile and with a thin patina of indumentum below at first, though this is quickly lost. Held on the bush for up to three years, the blades fill in all the gaps that result from quite long internodal growth and the cluttered-array habit of upwardly-ascending branches.

Sunningdale's 'Vesuvius' may not be the hardiest of rhododendrons despite incorporating the genes of 'Moser's Maroon' into its makeup via Lionel de Rothschild's 'Romany Chai', but the -15ºC rating will prove adequate enough for most sheltered gardens in the UK and the array of dazzling red blooms that cover the 2.5m high by 4m wide dome of a mature specimen from early June onwards are simply too good to miss.


R. 'Vesuvius'

R. ‘Viking Silver’

The ‘Viking Silver’ Pride

yakushimanum x *pachysanthum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Mid April 1.6m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Silbervelours	Hans Hachmann	1988	2001
Viking Silver	Svend Hensen	before 1995	before 2005

‘Viking Silver’ is a selection from an unregistered *yakushimanum* x *pachysanthum* pairing made in the early 1990s by the Danish rhododendron expert and nurseryman Svend Hansen. It is noted more for the silvery tomentum that covers the juvenile foliage, which persists right through the summer months and on into October even if grown in full sun, than the flowers, though these are just as spectacular, if not more so.

Morphologically, the cross combines everything good from the two parent species, this vividly demonstrated in mid April when hundreds of flower buds open across a mature plant, these almost completely obscuring the foliage beneath in a near solid blanket of bloom. Initially, the corollas will be flushed with deep pink, especially on the outer surface, although this hue quickly pales, then fades away almost entirely, revealing an underlying white. Yet even so, the display’s sheer quantity will still take your breath away.

And then the new growth begins to poke through, continuing the spectacle.

Hans Hachmann was the first hybridiser to register a pairing of the two species, making his match in 1988 and introducing ‘Silbervelours’ to the rhododendron-buying public in 2001. That plant has ventricose-campanulate corollas that are 4cm long by 5cm wide, these carried in trusses of up to sixteen bells, and the shrub’s mature foliage is dark green and glossy above, though the deeper hue is only revealed once the silvery tomentum has finally been shed, and outwith a gust of wind, the thick, woolly indumentum on the abaxial leaf surface below, only divulged on inspection. Gifted a dense, compact habit, the shrub will take over a decade to breach 0.7m in height.

‘Viking Silver’ mirrors many of these traits, but crucially, flowers two weeks earlier, the blooms often fully open midway through April, rather than at the end of the month, and in consequence, the hybrid is therefore much more prone to frost damage, as is evidenced by the scattering of browned corollas dotted amongst the untouched trusses in the full-page photograph opposite left.

That same cautionary note also holds true for the vegetative buds, which begin extending shortly after the boutade of bloom is done, so despite the H5-6 hardiness rating, a planting spot well away from any known frost pocket, or one that alternatively benefits from the overnight protection afforded by being close to a house wall, while still in near full sun during the day, should be where this gem is set in the soil or a container.



R. ‘Viking Silver’

R. ‘Walloper’

The ‘Walloper’ Pride

‘Anna’x ‘Marinus Koster’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late May-June 5m x 5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Arnold Piper	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	1971
El Camino	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	1973
Gwen Bell	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	before 1970
Lem’s Monarch	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	1971
Pink Walloper	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	before 1970
Point Defiance	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	1970
Rose Walloper	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	before 1976
Walloper	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	before 1976
Walloper No. 10	Halfdan Lem	before 1955	before 1971

If Halfdan Lem had not created ‘the most beautiful rhododendron hybrid in the world’, namely ‘Lem’s Cameo’, then the ‘Walloper’ pride would have been his most well-known and widely planted hybrids. There are currently nine members of the group, some better known than others, all monsters in the nicest sense of that word, and all stunners: ‘Arnold Piper’, ‘El Camino’, ‘Gwen Bell’, ‘Lem’s Monarch’, ‘Pink Walloper’, ‘Point Defiance’, ‘Rose Walloper’, ‘Walloper’ itself, and ‘Walloper No. 10’, plus synonyms aplenty.

The pride’s parentage equation is registered as ‘Anna’ x ‘Marinus Koster’, the latter being a *R. griffithianum* hybrid from the well known Dutch nursery firm of M. Koster & Sons, while the former is one of the plants grown by Lem from seed sent to him in 1939 by Fred Rose, the head gardener at Townhill Park, in Southampton. Named by Halfdan for his wife - a fine story in and of itself, but already told - ‘Anna’ is known to be difficult - the rhododendron, not Mrs Lem, who was apparently his co-conspirator in all things. A 1988 article for the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society titled *Another View of Halfdan Lem,* written by Gwen Bell and published in Volume 42, Number 1, reveals that:

> ‘‘Anna’ seemed to be his favourite plant for hybridizing, but some of us have had problems using it, regardless of whether it was the seed plant or the pollen plant. He told me that when ‘Anna’ was the seed plant, I should withhold applying the pollen until the flowers were fading and past their prime. This worked for me most of the time. But to get pollen from ‘Anna’ was something else. He suggested that I cover the flower with a plastic bag to see if that would work. It didn’t. He got pollen from a plant that he kept in the greenhouse. He stated, “I can swear to it pollen was running from the flowers an inch long. There were pollens enough to cross thousands of rhododendrons”.’

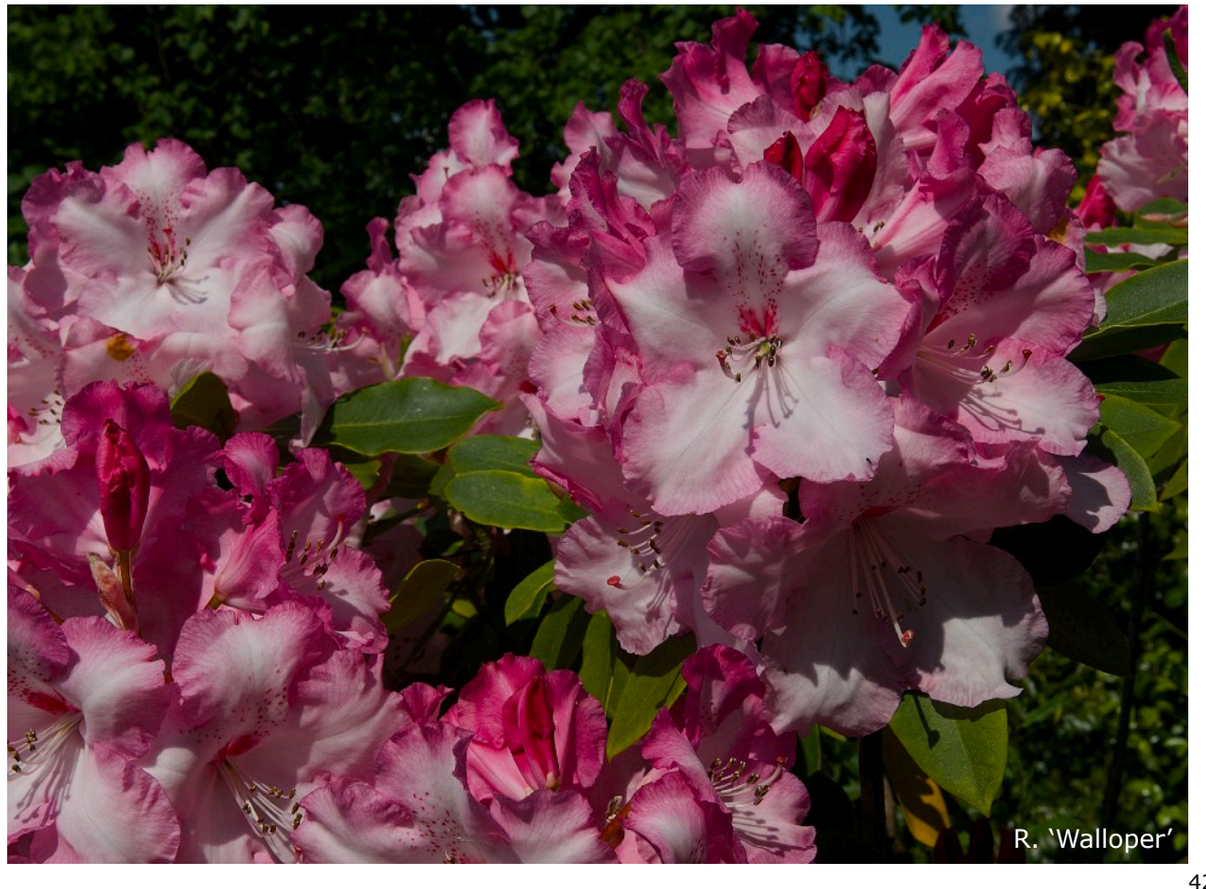
Halfdan Lem was Norwegian by birth and that last sentence - accurately recorded by Gwen Bell - is a warm-hearted dig at his English, which even fifty years after emigrating to America, was a language unto itself and the font of countless anecdotes amongst his friends, ‘Yingle Bells’ being just one such.

Morphologically, the ‘Walloper’ pride all have thick, matt, olive-green leaves, these ovate in shape, between 18 and 22cm long by around 8cm wide, with a deeply impressed midrib and primary veins, a flat profile and slightly wavy margins. The flowers borne by all nine clones are simply ginormous: widely funnel-shaped corollas each measuring an almost incredible 12.5cm across at the mouth; 5-lobed, these overlapping and with frilly margins; and up to sixteen individuals carried in each huge domed or conical truss. Moreover, they bud up as four-year-old youngsters, with the display increasing in grandeur every season until the quantity of bloom wreathing a mature shrub is literally gobsmacking. The flowers are also thickly textured and fleshy, which makes them fairly impervious to rain.

‘Walloper’ has deep pink or pink-and-white blooms.

Those opening on ‘Lem’s Monarch’ are vivid red in the bud, white, edged pinkish-red when fully expanded, with a thin pink line running down the centre of each lobe and the dorsal red-rayed and spotted. Its supposed mirror image, ‘Pink Walloper’, has a corolla puckered at the calyx, with a 5-10mm ring of purplish-red around the lobe margins, four narrow rays of vivid red spots on the dorsal and three very thin pink lines running along the centre of each lobe on the outside, the middle line the brightest. Which rather trashes the ‘one and the same’ argument elucidated on page 423, or so you would think, especially as Gwen Bell was responsible for logging both descriptions with the *IRRC* in 1995.

On ‘Point Defiance’, as the deeper purplish-red pigmentation around the lobe margins fades through lesser shades to settle near pale pink, the blooms adopt the palette of some exotic layered ice-cream dish, a knickerbocker glory or strawberry sundae perhaps, while ‘El Camino’ too has strong purplish-red blooms, but in addition, has been gifted an equally intense red blotch in the throat that extends out as spots onto the dorsal lobe.



R. ‘Walloper’

R. ‘El Camino’

Technically the ‘Walloper’ epithet is a coverall for the entire pride, except just like Leonardslee’s ‘Loderi’, plants will be found in British, American and many other gardens bearing only that ‘Walloper’ appellation, thereby mirroring the status of Sir Edmund’s premier cross. Moreover, the *IRRC* entry informs its readers that ‘Lem’s Monarch’ is actually a synonym of ‘Walloper’. A deeper dive through the registration listings will show the plant listed as the pollen parent in three successful pairings: producing ‘Canadian Beauty’ when ‘Mrs Horace Fogg’ matured the seeds; ‘KSW’ when ‘King of Shrubs’ took on that task; and ‘William Avery’ when our old friend R. ‘Gargantua’ accepted the role. That latter matriarch, selfed on an ailing specimen of *R. decorum* ssp. *diaprepes* that had been grown from the 1913 George Forrest F 11958 collection, has been visually identified through a microscope as being a triploid, a plant whose cells hold thirty-nine chromosomes instead of the standard diploid count of twenty-six, and the presence of those extra thirteen strands of DNA raises a barrier that prevents any successful matchmaking with another rhododendron unless it too has a corresponding compliment of those little worms. Which speaks volumes about the robust nature of the pride’s morphology, though scientific confirmation of the pride’s triploid status is currently lacking. ‘El Camino’ has weighed-in as a triploid when it was tested by Dr João Loureiro, Dr Silvia Castro, José Castro, and Mariana Castro, of the Plant Ecology and Evolution Group, University of Coimbra, Portugal, but the same team gave both ‘Lem’s Monarch’ and ‘Gargantua’ a *2n* = 52 tetraploid rating. Now, as we know from that earlier human eyeball count - reported in the 1950 RHS *Rhododendron Yearbook,* the submission titled *Chromosome Numbers in Species of Rhododendron* - the latter’s compliment of double helix strands totals 39, no more, no less, which must raise doubts over the accuracy of the flow cytometry results listed by the Coimbra Plant Ecology and Evolution Group (see Volume 7, page 30, for more detail).

Traditionally, doyens such as the American nurseryman Harold Greer, maintained the view that ‘Walloper’ was in fact ‘Red Walloper’, even though this plant was the product of an ‘Anna’ x ‘Burgundy’ cross made by Lem sometime before his death in 1969. To quickly dispel such an assertion, only the fleetest of glances at the true hybrid in flower will be needed to categorise the claim as fake news, but again, specimen plants with morphologic characteristics clearly matching the ‘Anna’ x ‘Marinus Koster’ horde will be found bearing ‘Red Walloper’ labels in rhododendron gardens worldwide.

Not helping - in fact muddying the waters even more - are ‘Walloper No. 6’, an accepted synonym for the ‘Gwen Bell’ registration, and ‘Walloper No. 10’, which is an actual named selection from the ‘Anna’ x ‘Marinus Koster’ germination with pale red, wavy-margined blooms, which have two deeper, maroon-coloured rays on the dorsal lobe along with some red flecking.

And then there is the ‘Lem’s Monarch’ equals ‘Pink Walloper’ conflab:

In the past, these two selections have been declared to be one and the same by none other than Gwen Bell, who corresponded with Halfdan Lem throughout the 1960s, was a frequent guest at his nursery and has written a number of well-received narratives about the hybridiser that have been published in various volumes of *JARS*. So from the same 1988 account as detailed above, we learn that:

> ‘one of his favourite hybrids was well named and widely distributed as ‘Pink Walloper’. According to the dictionary, walloper refers you to whopper, which is large or remarkable. ‘Pink Walloper’ is that and it is pink. After Mr Lem’s death, the same plant was re-named and widely distributed at another nursery under the name ‘Lem’s Monarch’. This has caused considerable confusion.’

Indeed it has, though chiefly because Gwen Bell herself supplied the descriptions for both epithets - outlined on page 421 - to the International Registrar in 1995. And they are clearly different.

Equally, there was uncertainty over which appellation took precedence. For instance, in the 1988 Peter and Kenneth Cox-written *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* ‘Pink Walloper’ is shown as a synonym of ‘Lem’s Monarch’ - albeit with a question mark trailing the entry - when in fact primacy should have gone to the name that was coined by Lem himself, as propagated material was first sold under this designation.

That Gwen Bell’s original reporting contradicts her later descriptions is clear, but which account documents the truth? We shall probably never know, but in British gardens at least, those plants bearing a ‘Lem’s Monarch’ label look pretty much identical to those tagged ‘Pink Walloper’. Whether this has come about through a nursery mix-up on this side of the Atlantic or an initial propagation-supply faux pas in the States, is anyone’s guess, but such is clearly the case.

The ‘El Camino’ clone also has a somewhat chequered history, for it was originally discovered in the garden of another hybridiser extraordinaire, Bill Whitney.

George and Anne Sather, who had taken on his nursery business in August 1970 when their friend’s health began to fail, were in the process of rescuing the rhododendrons, working along rows of plants over 3m high but with each individual set just 30cm apart from its neighbour, when an unlabelled plant was encountered. A stunner. So it was named and introduced as a Whitney hybrid by the Sathers in 1973, and then mass propagated using tissue culture.

Yet as those juvenile plants grew, other rhodophiles noticed the resemblance with ‘Walloper’, ‘Point Defiance’ and ‘Lem’s Monarch’, which became more and more obvious as:

The foliage was near identical - thick and leathery, dark olive green elliptically shaped leaves, with wavy margins.

The habit was vigorous, upright and spreading, with very stiff branches.

And the flowers, opening on shrubs no more than three or four years old, were huge, and carried in conical, flat-topped trusses, with each corolla 12.5cm wide at the mouth.

With wavy lobes.

That were purplish-red in hue and blotched deeper red in the throat, with that same tone extending to a fan of spots across the dorsal lobes.

At which point the only question left open to debate was did Bill Whitney duplicate the cross or was the plant a gift from his old ‘Rum Dum Club’ friend?

Current opinion favours the latter option, as both Lem and Whitney were longtime members of this casual grouping of Washington State hybridisers who ‘met at each other’s houses around a table piled with good food by their assembled wives, debating vigorously and vividly the merits of certain crosses, rhododendron parents to be used and the rewards which might result’ (Gwen Bell, quoted in *The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story,* 2001).

Thus ends our historical deep dive into the ‘Walloper’ pride, so it only remains to confirm that all its members are hardy enough to be planted in any UK garden where the soil is suitable for rhododendrons and that their blooms, opening in May, will only rarely be caught-out by a late frost. However, a full sun position is essential in the top half of the British Isles, not only to ensure a plentiful flower bud set, but to restrain that genetically enhanced triploid growth habit from too leggy an expression, at least, as far as possible without recourse to the secateurs. Shelter from the wind is equally critical wherever the plants are grown.

R. ‘Lem’s Monarch’

R. ‘Pink Walloper’

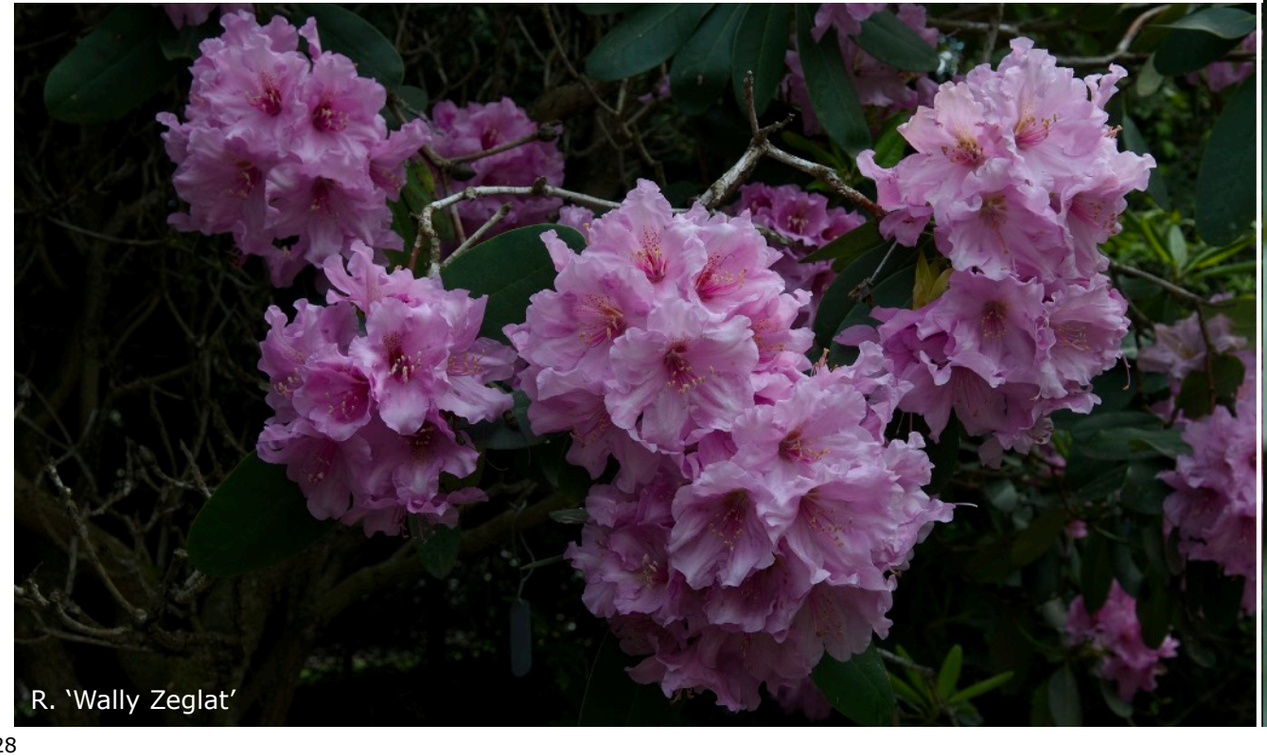
R. ‘Point Defiance’

R. ‘Point Defiance’

R. 'Wally Zeglat'
fortunei x Unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Mid May 2m x 3m

Founded in 1934, the Lushan Botanic Garden can be found some 350 miles to the southwest of Shanghai, in the Hanpokou Valley, on Mount Lu, which is in the north of Jiangxi Province. The area was favoured by Western missionaries as a summer retreat and described by them as 'a little bit of Switzerland grafted onto a Chinese mountain top', for a visit will reveal that the garden resides on the 1000m contour and has a climate perfectly suited to the native rhododendron species such as *R. fortunei, R. ovatum* and *R. simsii,* the elevation mitigating the stifling summer heat of China's eastern lowlands. At which point, historical reflections will be paused, because how or when a form of *R. fortunei* named for the botanic garden arrived in Vancouver, Canada, escaped those documenting such events, but arrive it did and that flowering specimen was thriving in one of the city's gardens during the early 1960s when the factual narrative resumes.

For it is chronicled in the records that a member of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society named Wally Zeglat, pollinated said rhododendron with an unknown hybrid to produce a plant that bore lacy, deep rose flowers with a speckled brown blotch. Fourteen campanulate bells are carried in each of those compact trusses, their hue technically a strong purplish-pink when they first open, but paling to light purplish-pink over time. The cross was unveiled in 1970 when the blooms won the top award at that year's VRS Flower Show, but their creator, for reasons unknown, later committed suicide. So John Lofthouse, another member of the VRS and a noted hybridiser in his own right, named and registered the plant in 1973 to honour his friend's memory. And as the accompanying images show, Wally Zeglat bred an absolute dazzler.


R. 'Wally Zeglat'


R. 'Wally Zeglat'

R. ‘Wally Zeglat’

R. 'W.F.H.'

R. 'W.F.H.'

haematodes x 'Tally Ho'

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Mid April-early May 1.3m x 2.5m

William F. Hamilton was head gardener at Pylewell Park, near Lymington, Hampshire, when William Ingham Whitaker II (1866-1936), was establishing a rhododendron collection around the banks of the estate's lake between 1912 and the early 1920s. Both men were also hybridising those rhododendrons, though despite Hamilton likely doing most if not all of the work, tradition at that time meant all the credit and the registrations - apart from one, 'Queen o' the May', a 'Pink Bell' x *griersonianum* cross, which the *IRRC* lists as being introduced by Hamilton - went to Whitaker, WFH's employer.

The rhododendron hybrid that bears his initials - 'W.F.H.' - emerged from a pairing made in the early 1930s, when 'Tally Ho' was used to pollinate *R. haematodes,* the match probably consummated the same year or shortly after the *facetum* x *griersonianum* hybrid was jointly introduced by J. J. Crosfield and Lady Loder in 1933, because it was named for Hamilton and introduced in the spring of 1941 by Whitaker's son, William Ingham Whitaker III (1910-1988).

'W.F.H.' has funnel-shaped, waxy corollas that are coloured brilliant scarlet, these held in a lax truss of around nine blooms, with the cross is highly floriferous. Its foliage is elliptic in shape, the blades medium-sized, pointed at the apex and tapering at the base, their hue mid to dark green, with a brownish-orange indumentum below, and they are retained on this low-growing bush for two years. Yet the cloak they provide is only sufficient to partially cover the upward-ascending and spreading branch framework.


R. 'W.F.H.'


R. 'W.F.H.'


R. 'W.F.H.'

R. ‘White Glory’

The ‘White Glory’ Pride

irroratum x ‘Loderi’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 Late March-early April 6m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Leonardslee White Glory	Lady Loder	before 1937	1938
Pink Glory	Lady Loder	before 1937	1940
White Glory	Lady Loder	before 1937	1937

As Frank Kingdon-Ward made clear seventy-five years ago, in the cold light of day very few rhododendron hybrids can truly be said to be better than their parents, which is of course the fundamental goal all who cross them strive to achieve.

‘White Glory’, from Leonardslee Gardens, would most definitely be amongst the select company gaining FKW’s approval despite its seed parent historically being considered ‘the least ornamental species of the genus’ - at least, according to Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker; and as quoted by J. G. Millais in his *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids* (Volume 2, 1924), the author then rightly demolishing the botanist’s observation. Yet remedying this supposed but actually delusive deficiency, was the pollen provider, the beauty of whose flowers few species or hybrids can surpass. And that pairing - *irroratum* x ‘Loderi’ - resulted in an exquisite allurement.

The match was made in the 1920s, and it was the Dowager Lady Loder, wife of Sir Edmund Loder’s only son, who applied pollen to style.

Muriel Rolls Hoare (1879-1955), had married Robert Egerton Loder in 1913, but their life together was cut short when in 1917 her husband succumbed to wounds he received in action, one of the 885,138 British military personnel needlessly slaughtered in the carnage of the First World War. A Captain in the 1st/4th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment, he died before assuming the baronetcy from his father, so a royal warrant - issued in June 1921 following Sir Edmund’s death fifteen months earlier - had been required before Muriel could claim the title. And its was the Dowager Lady Loder who, over the course of the next thirty years, preserved the gardens at Leonardslee, nurtured, named and introduced many of Sir Edmund’s crosses, and made numerous pairings of her own, later assisted by her son, the third baronet, Sir Giles Rolls Loder. Yet strangely, in an article he wrote that was published in *The Rhododendron Year Book 1950* - this titled *‘Rhododendron Loderi, its varieties and hybrids’* - Sir Giles makes not a single reference to his mother, though his grandfather’s name is quoted repeatedly. One suspects that had the #MeToo Movement arisen in the late 1940s, his text would have been substantially different.

As would the world. And for the better.

‘White Glory’ holds between fifteen and eighteen broadly funnel-shaped corollas in a tight, globular truss. These are pure white in tone with a smallish fan of crimson spots and streaks that spread across the dorsal lobes from deep in the throat. Each funnel is around 5cm long by 9cm across, has flushed-white stamen filaments and style, contrasting black anthers and a crimson stigma, and may be graced with five or six lobes. Foliage is elliptic through narrowly ovate in shape, the blades fairly rigid, 11cm long by 4cm wide, deep matt green above, glabrous below, but only held for one or occasionally two years. Habit is tree-like and spreading, mature plants attaining 6m in height with a canopy extending out 4m or more. Hardiness and flowering time are the hybrid’s only weak points, a -12ºC winter rating and a late March through early April bloom period dictating not only where the shrub can be successfully grown, but where it should be planted. Venerable specimens located in the woodland gardens of southern England and those close to the UK’s western seaboard, will be covered in hundreds of snowy-white balls most years, with a bumper season producing a near unbroken blanket of bloom.

Introduced by Lady Loder in 1937 and the recipient of an RHS Award of Merit when first shown, ‘White Glory’ was followed in 1938 by a second selection, ‘Leonardslee White Glory’, which has a larger but more compact flower truss and unspotted corollas flushed pink on the outside. Two years after that, a third clone was presented - ‘Pink Glory’ - with blush pink blooms stained rose madder in a more spherical truss. Each was also graced with an AM, a feat few other prides could claim despite a sometimes overabundance of near duplicate members.



Lady Loder *c.* 1933.




R. ‘White Glory’


R. ‘White Glory’


R. ‘Pink Glory’

R. ‘White Glory’

R. ‘Winsome’

R. ‘Winsome’

‘Humming Bird’ x *griersonianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late April-May 1.8m x 2.5m

If ever a rhododendron were required to illustrate the psychedelic side of life, the Neyron Rose flowers of ‘Winsome’ would likely top the list of possible candidates.

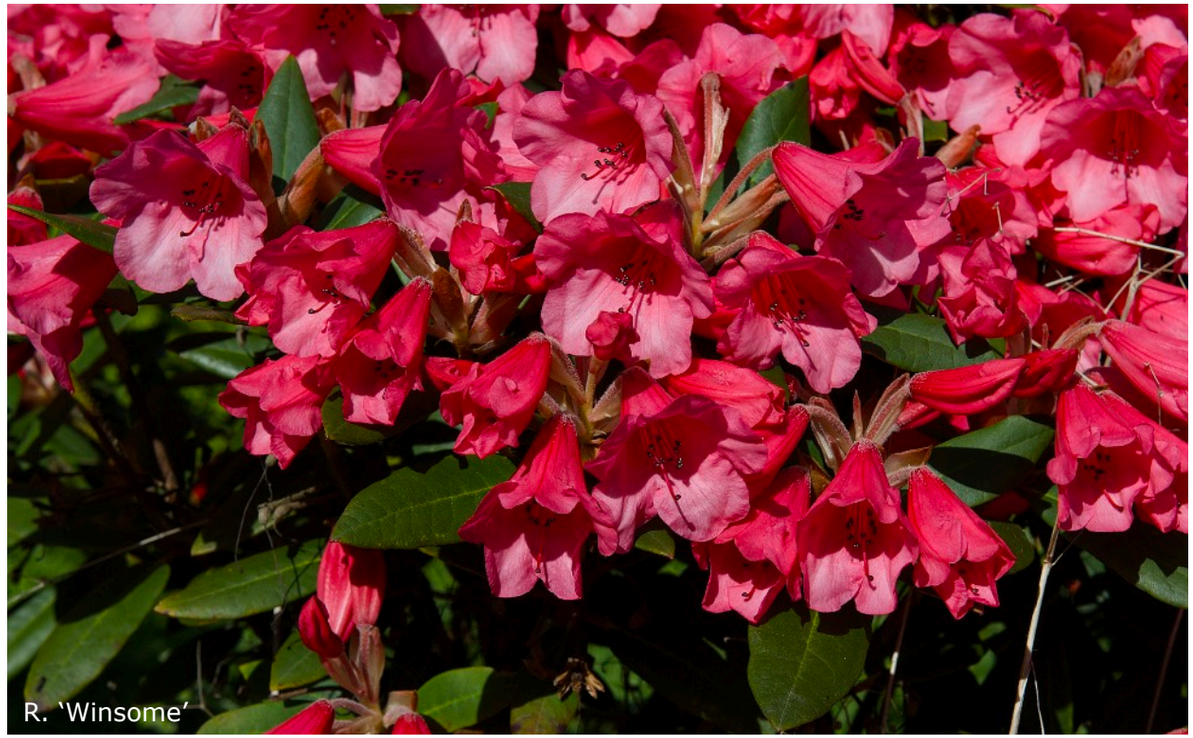
The cross is one of Henry McLaren’s hybrids, a ‘Humming Bird’ x *griersonianum* pairing that was made at Bodnant in 1930 and introduced in 1939, and to say that its corolla hue en masse can be visually disturbing - like much of the hallucinatory-influenced art and counterculture psychedelia produced back in the 1960s - would not be stretching the truth by as much as an iota. Especially when the blooms first open. Luckily, this dystopian effect wanes as the purplish-pink becomes a softer, purer pink, especially as the undertone recedes, but at first, the display is simply jarring.

Curiously, no other author has reported such feelings, so it may solely be this writer’s individual perception, but to my eyes, those blooms are mind-blowingly discordant.

They open at the end of April, four through six, funnel-shaped corollas carried in a loose, pendant truss, each trumpet with a bell around 6cm across when fully expanded, complete with wavy lobe margins. The dorsal is speckled with a fan of spots, but these are barely noticeable. Nor do the slightly darker, crimson-coloured nectaries really stand out. The stamen filaments and style tube are flushed with the same pigmentation as the corollas, so it is only the black anthers and stigma that provide a visual contrast. Flowering is profuse from an early age, with mature shrubs often producing an unbroken sheet of initially disorienting colour.

‘Winsome’ is also a rarity on another count, for the shrub is as equally attractive - if not more so - when out of bloom, the bronze-tinted juvenile foliage turning a dark, matt green above with age and sporting a thin, detersile, brown indumentum below. Those blades are basically elliptic in shape, about 9cm long and carried for two or three years, so they provide a fine and dense mantle across the framework. The plant’s habit is usually compact unless grown in too much shade, where the bush will then become quite open, but a position in light dappled shade will prove best for those whose gardens reside in the southern counties.

A commercial standard throughout the rhododendron world, ‘Winsome’, unlike most of Lord Aberconway’s other hybrids, did not immediately impress on the showbench and had to wait until 1950 before being gifted its Award of Merit.



R. ‘Winsome’



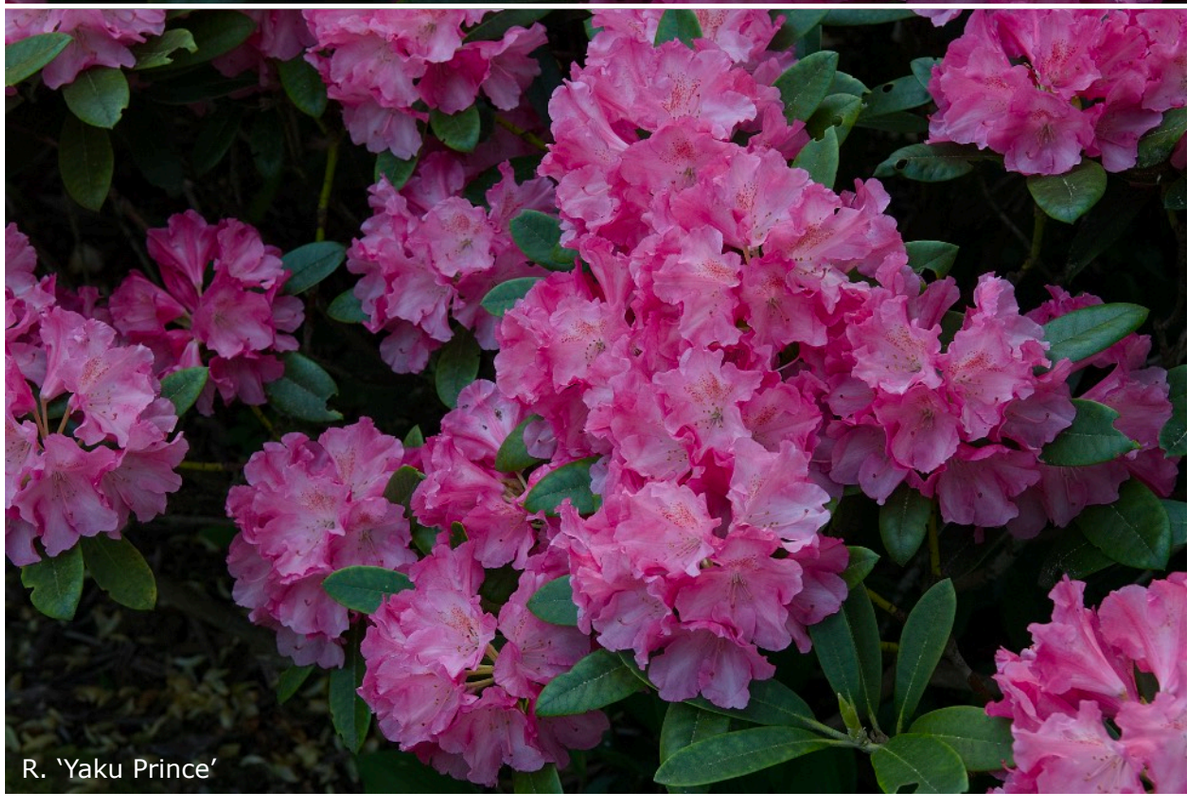
R. ‘Winsome’

R. ‘Winsome’

R. ‘Winsome’



R. ‘Yaku Prince’



R. ‘Yaku Prince’

The ‘Yaku Prince’ Pride

‘King Tut’ x *yakushimanum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 May 1.5m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Jane Martin	Orlando S. ‘Lanny’ Pride	1961	1988
White Bird	Orlando S. ‘Lanny’ Pride	1961	1975
Yaku Duchess	Anthony M. ‘Tony’ Shammarello	1960	1976
Yaku Duke	Anthony M. ‘Tony’ Shammarello	1960	1976
Yaku King	Anthony M. ‘Tony’ Shammarello	1960	1977
Yaku Prince	Anthony M. ‘Tony’ Shammarello	1960	1976
Yaku Princess	Anthony M. ‘Tony’ Shammarello	1960	1976
Yaku Queen	Anthony M. ‘Tony’ Shammarello	1960	1976

In amongst the ‘Yaku This’ or ‘Yaku That’ registrations - in the main, these joining an inordinate plethora of other F1 *yakushimanum* cabbages - one rather fine hybrid stands out from the morass: ‘Yaku Prince’. This is the star selection from a ‘King Tut’ x *yakushimanum* pairing, with another six named clones introduced, the best of these - ‘Yaku Princess’ - ok, but an also-ran. They were crossed by the American nurseryman Tony Shammarello (1903-1982), of Euclid, Ohio, and that location, despite it being close to the shores of Lake Erie, dictated that his hybrids had to have an ironclad constitution. In consequence, the two plants that are discussed here are winter hardy down to -26ºC, so they can be grown anywhere in the UK where the soil is right for rhododendrons, and where it isn’t, cultivated in containers.

‘Yaku Prince’ and ‘Yaku Princess’ share the same basic specification: balled flower trusses populated by up to 14 or 15 tubular-funnel-shaped corollas, each 5cm long by 6.5cm wide; purplish-pink in the bud, with wavy-edged lobes; leaf blades that are elliptic through narrowly elliptic, olive green above, with a yellowish-orange indumentum below; new growth that is covered in a silvery tomentum; and a dense and compact habit that builds-up into a medium-sized dome over time. Both plants are very free-flowering when older, but as youngsters, they are reportedly somewhat loath to set more than a few flower buds each year.

‘Yaku Prince’ is now widely regarded as being the best selection, having larger leaf blades - these up to 12.5cm long by 5cm wide - and flowers that fade to pink over time. In comparison, ‘Yaku Princess’ has leaves that are only 9.5cm long by 4cm wide, with blooms that age to white, and as can be seen from the table above, the four additional titles that have been registered span almost the entire aristocracy, so a full compliment of the Windsors can populate your garden if your taste in sitcoms so dictates.



R. ‘Yaku Prince’



R. ‘Yaku Princess’

R. ‘Yvonne’

The ‘Yvonne’ Pride

‘Aurora’ x *griffithianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 April-May 6m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Yvonne	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1925	1931
Yvonne Dawn	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1925	before 1979
Yvonne Opaline	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1925	1931
Yvonne Pearl	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1925	before 1941
Yvonne Pride	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1925	1948

Despite being conceived early on in the rhododendron breeding programme Lionel de Rothschild set up at Exbury - sometime before 1925, with the ‘Aurora’ x *griffithianum* cross designated LR 112 in the stud book - the seedlings that would eventually form the ‘Yvonne’ pride - the cover name for the selected progeny - took many years to begin blooming freely, with ‘Yvonne Opaline’, for instance, still only spasmodically setting flower buds when it became the first clone to be introduced in 1931, winning an Award of Merit in the process. Then, a decade later, following Lionel’s death in January 1942, all the juvenile plants were ‘lost’ in the estate’s woodlands, the reduction in experienced gardening staff due to the exigencies of World War II not helping matters. So it was not until 1948 when Lionel’s eldest son, Edmund, rediscovered the pride ‘tucked away in a distant corner’ of the estate - according to the entry in the 1967-published *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* - and introduced a second pick - ‘Yvonne Pride’ - which was also gifted an AM (and from which the group-grex replacement term used throughout this text and Volume 7 has been happily borrowed).

The four shrubs that make up that association display their blooms in April through May, with the exact timing dependent on the weather. They carry around eleven bells gathered together in each very large, flat-topped, domed or globular truss, with these widely funnel-campanulate corollas some 8cm long by between 10 and 12.5cm across at the mouth. All are pink in the bud, but on ‘Opaline’ they open ivory-white flushed pink; ‘Pride’, pale pink; ‘Pearl’, pearly pink; and ‘Dawn’, which did not begin flowering freely until around 1979, flesh-pink.

The pride’s leaves are basically elliptic in shape and vary from 15 to 17.5cm in length, averaging 7.5cm in width. They are dark green and matt above, paler and glabrous below, with each retained for two years. Borne on shrubs that will ultimately attain a tree-like stature, though as juveniles they remain fairly compact for many years, their hosts will require a woodland setting to thrive, especially as they are only rated winter hardy down to around -12ºC. Lionel himself is reported to have said that they were tender at Exbury, but the mature specimen of ‘Yvonne Pride’ that may be found in Ray Wood at Castle Howard, North Yorkshire, would suggest that statement be taken with a fair dollop of salt.



R. ‘Yvonne Pride’

R. ‘Zelia Plumecocq’

R. 'Zelia Plumecocq'
'Rosy Morn' x 'Crest'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 Late April-May 4m x 6m

'Zelia Plumecocq' pairs together two superb rhododendron hybrids, with Harry White's 'Rosy Morn' pollinated by Lionel de Rothschild's 'Crest', and though the cross has yet to win any floral awards, the blooms surpass in beauty those borne by both its parents.

The closing pages of the 2005 *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* tell us who brought about the conception of this fabulous creature - Edmund de Rothschild, a decade or so before its introduction in 1962 - but the entry is bereft of any information detailing the choice of its exotic appellation.

Luckily, Mr Eddy himself has provided the answer:

> 'It so happened that I was asked to represent Great Britain in the Valenciennes International Flower Show in 1962. To our surprise we were awarded first prize and the Gold Medal, known as The Premier Grand Prix D'honneur.
>
> Another competitor lodged a protest, and claimed that the Exbury stand did not have two separate groups, his group had shown both azaleas and cymbidiums. Now the President of the show was a lady called Madame Zelia Plumecocq. Peter Barber, the Agent at Exbury in those days and one of the authors of *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* came up to me and told me what had happened and then said there is a new rhododendron flowering for the first time - it is a *R. souliei* hybrid, 'Rosy Morn' x 'Crest', it is very marked in the large open saucer-like flowers of yellow tinted with pink which are held up in a big, well-built truss, while 'Crest' is evident in the foliage and the upright carriage - do you think you could go and see Madame Plumecocq and name this plant after her. So I went to the President's Suite and saw Madame Plumecocq and told her I had a most unusual plant and as she had been very kind to us and invited us to participate in the flower show, would she do the honour of letting me call this plant after her. She came down to look at it, and was highly delighted.
>
> The award stood and thus we kept the 1st prize and the Gold Medal.'
> Edmund de Rothschild, *The Living Garden,* in *JARS,* Volume 43, Number 4, 1989.

The 'Zelia Plumecocq' technical specs detail a morphology consisting of ten corollas in each truss, these 7-lobed, 5cm long by 7cm across, the flowers deep pink in the bud, but opening pale greenish-yellow with a pink tinge. The shrub's elliptic leaf blades are 14cm long by 5cm wide, dark green and shiny above, glabrous below. Mature specimens will develop into a dome some 4m high and wide over time, but the sheer quantity of bloom they carry often weighs down the branches, which results in the plant spreading out further, in a very open and droopy mien, a state that one would hope, was not mirrored by its honoree.



R. 'Zelia Plumecocq''

R. ‘Zelia Plumecocq’

R. ‘Zelia Plumecocq’

Photographic Acknowledgements:

Details of where each of the plant portraits was photographed is set out below, along with the website details of those collections visited. Thanks is again extended to each establishment for allowing images taken in a private-use capacity, to be reproduced here. Gratitude is also due the institutions, organisations and individuals who allowed the portrait photographs of historical and noted figures associated with the genus to appear alongside the text.

Key: AL - above left; AC - above centre; AR - above right; BL - below left; BC - below centre; BR - below right; L - left; R - right.

American Rhododendron Society:
https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/v41n4/v41n4-prince.htm
p. 193-AR - John S. Basford at Brodick, examining R. 'Fortune', May 1987, photo by Martha Prince, published in the *Journal American Rhododendron Society,* Volume 41, Number 4, Fall 1987.

Arduaine Garden, Oban, Argyll:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/arduaine-garden
p. 55-BR; p. 92-BL, AR, BR; p. 115-AL, R; p. 228-BL; p. 348-L.

Gwen Bell:
p. 139-R - Hjalmar Larson, photographed by Gwen Bell, the image published in *The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story*, 2001.

Benmore Botanic Garden, Argyll:
https://www.rbge.org.uk/visit/benmore-botanic-garden/
p. 5-Title Page; p. 18; p. 19-BR; p. 20-AL; p. 46-R; p. 47; p. 66; p. 67-BL, AR, BR; p. 90-BL, R; p. 91; p. 108-L; p. 111; p. 116-BL; p. 134-BL, AR, BR; p. 135; p. 168; p. 169-BL, R; p. 200; p. 201-AR; p. 232-BR; p. 233; p. 248-BL, AR, BR; p. 258-AR; p. 302-AR; p. 303-L, AR, BR; p. 304-BL, BR; p. 348-AR; p. 441-R.

Bodnant Garden, Conwy:
https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wales/bodnant-garden
p. 149-ARL - Frederick C. Puddle, courtesy of Bodnant Gardens & The National Trust.

Brodick Castle Garden, Isle of Arran:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/brodick-castle-garden-country-park
p. 53-AR; p. 76; p. 77-AL, BL, BR; p. 104; p. 105-R; p. 116-AL; p. 117; p. 172-; p. 173; p. 175; p. 192; p. 193-BR; p. 234; p. 235-BL, AR, BR; p. 342; p. 345-AR, BR.

Camera Press, London:
https://www.amazon.com/Vintage-photo-Portrait-Edmund-Rothschild/dp/B01B5F5AV2
p. 147-R - Edmund de Rothschild, photographed by Eric Coop, Camera Press, London, courtesy of PickYourImage.

Centennial Photographic Co:
https://libwww.freelibrary.org/digital/item/89
p. 381-BC - Anthony Waterer's Knap Hill Nursery display of rhododendrons & azaleas inside a greenhouse in the Horticultural Hall at the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, Pennsylvania, USA. Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia, Digital Collections.

Crarae Woodland Glen, Inveraray, Argyll:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/crarae-garden
p. 50-AR; p. 257-BR; p. 292-AR, BR; p. 372; p. 373-BL, R.

Crown Estate, Windsor:
https://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/windsor/parkland/windsor-great-park/
p. 62-R - Thomas Hope Findlay and Sir Eric Savill.

Dawyck Botanic Garden, Stobo, Peebles:
https://www.rbge.org.uk/visit/dawyck-botanic-garden/
p. 118-AR.

Exbury Gardens, Hampshire:
https://www.exbury.co.uk/
p. 12; p. 13-BR; p. 14-L; p. 17-R; p. 23-BL, R; p. 24; p. 25; p. 30-BL, R; p.33-BL, R; p. 38; p. 39-R; p. 40-BL; p. 50-L, BR; p. 59; p. 65-BR; p. 69; p. 70-BR; p. 74-BR; p. 84-L, AR, BR; p. 85; p. 88-R; p. 89-AR; p. 94-L; p. 95; p. 96; p. 100; p. 101-BL, R; p. 131-AR, BR; p. 136-L, BR; p. 137; p. 142-AR, BR; p. 143-L, R; p. 146-AL, BL, R; p. 148; p. 151; p. 158-BR; p. 170; p. 174-R; p. 177-BR; p. 179-AL, AR, BL; p. 180; p. 181; p. 210-AR, BR; p. 214-AR, BR; p. 218-BL; p. 219-AL, BL; p. 220-BR; p. 229; p. 236; p. 250; p. 251-R - Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, photograph published in *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* 1967; p. 252; p. 253; p. 261-AR; p. 274-BR; p. 291-BR; p. 292-L; p. 297-BR; p. 328; p. 330-AL, BL; p. 331; p. 341; p. 362-BR; p. 363; p. 367-BR; p. 403-BR; p. 405-AL, BL; p. 407-BR; p. 414-AL; p. 415; p. 425; p. 442.

Geni World Family Tree:
https://www.geni.com/people/Marie-Rothschild/6000000002764690465
p.291-AR - Marie Louise Eugénie Beer (Mrs Lionel de Rothschild), photo published on and courtesy of the Geni website.

Glendoick Gardens Ltd, Perth:
https://glendoick.com/
Front Cover; p. 32-L, BR; p. 98-BL, R; p. 99; p. 118-BR; p. 119-BR; p. 156; p. 157-AR, BR; p. 166-AR, BR; p. 190-BL; p. 197-AL, BL; p. 204-BR; p. 304-AR; p. 305; p. 320; p. 321-AR, BR; p. 379; p. 398; p. 399-BL, R; p. 406; p. 408-L, R; p. 409; p. 410-L; p. 418; p. 419-R.

Heritage Museums & Gardens, Sandwich, Massachusetts:
https://heritagemuseumsandgardens.org/about-us/heritage-history/
p. 387-R - Charles Owen Dexter, photo by W.I.P. Campbell, posted online and courtesy of Heritage Museums & Gardens.

The Huddersfield Daily Examiner:
https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/new-book-reveals-ramsden-family-13929822
p. 317-L - Sir John Frecheville Ramsden, 6th Baronet, photograph published in the 2017 book *Poverty Is Relative* by Meriel Buxton, and online by *The Huddersfield Daily Examiner*.

Inverewe Gardens, Poolewe, Wester Ross:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/inverewe
p. 7-R; p. 52; p. 53-L, BR; p. 56; p. 57-AL; p. 114-BR; p. 115-BL; p. 228-R; p. 261-BR; p. 282; p. 283-R; p. 284; p. 285; p. 334-L, BR; p. 335; p. 336; p. 337; p. 393-BL.

Lakeland Horticultural Society, Holehird Gardens:
https://holehirdgardens.org.uk/the-society
p. 9; p. 44; p. 45-BR; p. 49-AL, AR, BL, BR; p. 430; p. 431-BL; p. 440-AL, BL; p. 441-L.

Leonardslee Gardens, Horsham, West Sussex:
https://www.leonardsleegardens.co.uk/about-us
p. 432; p. 434-L, AR; p. 435.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Man%27s_shot_silk_suit_c._1790_altered_c._1805.jpg
p. 396-L - Shot silk man's suit, *c.* 1790, altered *c.* 1805, the coat and breeches of shot silk (changeable taffeta), with a purple warp and green weft, trimmed with sequins and metallic-thread embroidery, the waistcoat of silk satin, with sequins and metallic-thread embroidery, photo courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Image Library via Wikipedia Commons.

The Mail in South Cumbria, Newspaper House, Kendal:
https://www.nwemail.co.uk/news/17462027.take-a-look-inside-the-splendid-muncaster-castle/#gallery2
p. 223-BL - Iona Frost Pennington, on the front drive steps with the castle as backdrop, February, 2019, photograph by Phil Rigby, courtesy of *Cumbria Life* and *The Mail*.

Muncaster Castle Gardens, Ravenglass, Cumbria:
https://www.muncaster.co.uk/
p. 9; p. 10-AR, BR; p. 11; p. 16; p. 17-BL; p. 26; p. 27-R; p. 34; p. 35-R; p. 36; p. 37; p. 42-BR; p. 48-AR, BR; p. 58-AL, BL; p. 60; p. 61-AL, BL, BR; p. 68-L; p. 75; p. 78-BL, R; p. 79; p. 110; p. 122-AR; p. 125; p. 150-BL, BR; p. 152; p. 153-BR; p. 154; p. 155; p. 161-BR; p. 162; p. 163-AR, BR; p. 164-AL, AR, BL, BR; p. 165; p. 174-L; p. 176; p. 178; p. 179-BR; p. 182; p. 183-R; p. 184; p. 185; p. 188-AR, BR; p. 189; p. 190-AL; p. 191; p. 198-AL, BL; p. 199; p. 203; p. 206; p. 210-L; p. 221-L, BR; p. 222; p. 223-AR, BR; p. 226; p. 227-BR; p. 228-AL; p. 232-AR; p. 238; p. 239-BR; p. 240-L, BR; p. 241; p. 246; p. 247; p. 255; p. 259; p. 272-BL, AR, BR; p. 277; p. 279-BR; p. 281; p. 288-BL, R; p. 289; p. 293; p. 294; p. 295-BL, AR, BR; p. 298; p. 299-BL, R, BR (inset); p. 300; p. 301; p. 306; p. 307-AR, BR; p. 308; p. 309; p. 311; p. 312; p. 313; p. 314-L, BR; p. 315; p. 316; p. 317-BR; p. 319; p. 346; p. 347-BR; p. 348-BR; p. 349; p. 350; p. 352-R; p. 353; p. 354-BR; p. 355; p. 356; p. 357-BR; p. 358; p. 359; p. 367-AR; p. 368; p. 369; p. 370-AR, BR; p. 371; p. 380; p. 382-BR; p. 383; p. 384; p. 385-AL, BL, R; p. 391; p. 392; p. 393-R; p. 396-BR; p. 397-L, AR, BR; p. 401; p. 420; p. 421-BR; p. 424; p. 425; p. 431-AR, BR; p. 437-AR, BR; Back Cover-AL, AR, BL, BR.

Nymans Garden, Handcross, West Sussex:
https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/nymans
p. 268; p. 270; p. 217.

Public Domain:
p. 133-ARL - John Thomas North (1842–1896), engineer and entrepreneur, popularly known as the 'Nitrate King' for the fortune he made mining the fertiliser in South America, available via Wikimedia Commons; p. 133-ARR - Caricature of "Colonel" John Thomas North, captioned "The Nitrate King", by Leslie Ward (1851-1922), published in Vanity Fair, on November 2nd, 1889; p. 254-L - Sir Edmund Giles Loder, from a portrait by H. J. Hudson, reproduced in *Edmund Loder, naturalist, horticulturist, traveller and sportsman: a memoir,* written by Sir Alfred Pease, 1923; p. 390-L - Richard Gill, in the garden at Tremough, image posted online at Prezi.com, within the text 'A brief history of the Penryn Campus' by Sarah C Jane, Archivist and Special Collections Officer, Combined Universities of Cornwall; p. 433-R - Muriel Rolls Loder, The Dowager Lady Loder, President of the Southdown Sheep Society, 1933, photograph posted on Pinterest by Stephanie Ransom.

Ray Wood, Castle Howard, North Yorkshire:
https://www.castlehoward.co.uk/visit-us/the-gardens/the-woodland-garden
p. 63-AL; p. 89-L, BR; p. 129-L; p. 161-L; p. 322; p. 394; p. 416; p. 417-R; p. 443-R; p. 444; p. 445-R; p. 446; p. 447.

Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh:
https://www.rbge.org.uk/visit/royal-botanic-garden-edinburgh/
p. 122-BR; p. 123.

Royal Botanic Garden, Kew:
https://www.kew.org/
p. 275-AL.

Royal Botanic Garden, Wakehurst Place:
https://www.kew.org/wakehurst
p. 20-R; p. 21; p. 243-R; p. 244; p. 245; p. 273-L; p. 274-AR.

Royal Horticultural Society, Wisley:
https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley
p. 14-AR; p. 63-BL, R; p. 82-L; p. 83; p. 97-AL, BL, R; p. 149-ARR - Henry Duncan McLaren, Lord Aberconway, photograph published in *The Rhododendron And Camellia Year Book 1954;* p. 214-L - Arthur George, photograph by Russell Beeson, published in *Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias 2011;* p. 216; p. 218-AL, R; p. 219-AR, BR; p. 237-AR, BR; p. 257-AR; p. 260-R; p. 261-L; p. 262; p. 263; p. 266; p. 286-BL, AR, BR; p. 302-BR; p. 329; p. 376; p. 377-AR, BR; p. 386-L; p. 388; p.389; p. 400-AL; p. 414-BL.

Savill Garden, Windsor Great Park:
https://www.windsorgreatpark.co.uk/en/experiences/the-savill-garden
p. 72-AL; p. 93-AL, BL; p. 103-BL, R; p. 106; p. 107; 126-L; p. 127-R; p. 128; p. 144-BL, R; p. 145; p. 186; p. 187-AR, BR; p. 211-AL, BL; p. 212; p. 213-BL, R; p. 217-AL, BL; p. 258-BR; p. 267-R; p. 275-R; p. 327-R; p. 338; p. 339-R.

Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, Ampfield, Romsey:
https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/hilliergardens
p. 14-BR; p. 15-AL, BL, R; p. 20-BL; p. 22-L, BR; p. 28-L, AR, BR; p. 29; p. 40-AL, R; p. 41; p. 43; p. 46-AL, BL; p. 51-AR, BR; p. 57-BL; p. 64; p. 71; p. 72-R; p. 73; p. 80; p. 81-BL, R; p. 86-R; p. 87; p. 90-AL; p. 102-L; p. 103-AL; p. 113; p. 118-AL, BL; p. 120-BR; p. 121; p. 122-L; p. 129-R; p. 130-AL, BL; p. 132-L, BR; p. 159-BR; p. 160-L; p. 161-AR; p. 194-BL, R; p. 195; p. 196-AR, BR; p. 204-AR; p. 205; p. 208-AR, BR; p. 209; p. 211-R; p. 220-AR; p. 224-L; p. 225; p. 230; p. 231-BR; p. 232-AL, BL; p. 258-L; p. 260-L; p. 264; p. 265; p. 275-BL; p. 278; p. 280; p. 296; p. 297-AR; p. 324; p. 325; p. 326-L, AR, BR; p. 327-AL, BL; p. 340-L, BR; p. 360; p. 361-AR, BR; p. 364-L, AR, BR; p. 365; p. 374-L; p. 375-AL, BL, R; p. 395; p. 400-BL; p. 402; p. 404-L, AR, BR; p. 405-R; p. 412; p. 413-AR, BR; p. 436; p. 438; p. 439.

Trelissick Garden, Feock, Truro:
https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/cornwall/trelissick
p. 65-AR.

Valley Gardens, Windsor Great Park:
https://www.windsorgreatpark.co.uk/en/experiences/the-valley-gardens
p. 31-AL, BL, BR; p. 42-AR; p. 54; p. 55-AR; p. 68-BR; p. 72-BL; p. 112; p. 132-AR; p. 138-L, AR, BR; p. 140; p. 141; p. 149-BR; p. 158-AL; p. 160-R; p. 167-AL, BL, BR; p. 201-BR; p. 249-AL, BL, BR; p. 287-AL, BL; p. 290-L, BR; p. 318-L, AR, BR; p. 332; p. 333-AR, BR; p. 352-BL; p. 411; p. 422; p. 427; p. 428-BL, R; p. 429; p. 434-BR.

Ted Van Veen:
p. 242-L - Halfdan Lem, photographed by Ted Van Veen, the image published in *The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story*, 2001.

Anne Walker:
p. 109-R - Samuel Smith, photo included within the article *Penjerrick Garden and the Legacy of Samuel Smith,* by Ned Lomax, which was published in *Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias 2019,* and is reproduced here courtesy of Anne Walker, great granddaughter of Samuel Smith.

G. Donald Waterer:
p. 343-BR - the original plant of R. 'Pink Pearl' around 1890, and Charlie Rose, the Bagshot nurseryman entrusted with its care, photograph reproduced in *The Rhododendron Story,* edited by Cynthia Postan, and published by the Royal Horticulture Society, in 1996.

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About the author:



Julian Taylor-Whall was born in Lowestoft at the end of November, 1957. He received a grammar school education before beginning a three-decades-long career with the BBC at Television Centre in West London. During that time he worked on many of the now classic shows made in the production facilities there, the studios at Lime Grove and Elstree, and at the Television Theatre. He retired early in 2008, moving to a small village in West Cumbria, just outside the Lake District National Park.

Twenty years earlier, in late April 1988, on a day when the hills of Torridon and Applecross were hidden in cloud, a visit to the nearby Inverewe Gardens offered an alternative distraction. By chance, it took place at the peak of the flowering season, during a particularly profligate year for bloom, and turned into an encounter never to be forgotten. Thus did the species and hybrids of Genus *Rhododendron* become yet another enduring passion, along with music, film, photography, and concocting the occasional science fiction novel.

- above -
Observed in the woodland at Muncaster,
any resemblance to the author is strenuously denied.

- back cover -

R. ‘Polar Bear’	R. ‘Cornish Cross’
R. ‘Margaret Findlay’	R. ‘Fulgarb’



