



the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales

Bulletin 134 / December 2020 / www.rhodogroup-rhs.org



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

As always, Autumn/Winter is a time when few of the plants in our 3 genera are in flower and few of the others need any attention apart in my case from clearing up the *Magnolia sargentiana* that came down in the first gales. It is therefore the time to review the year that is ending and plan for the coming one.

Things this year were of course different because of the pandemic. It seems very likely that some form of restrictions will still be in place until at least the third quarter next year. The Group and the RHS are working on plans to be able to run the various shows in a safe way abiding by whatever rules are in place at that time. Hopefully that will enable us to enjoy these events albeit in a different form to previously.

Centenary Cup Photographic Competition

The Virtual Competition we organised was very successful and we will probably organise a similar competition next year. There will be some changes based on our experiences this year and hopefully we will be able to incorporate more entries from the Southern Hemisphere.

Garden visits and other activities

I am sure that most of you will have enjoyed the many videos that John Marston produced during the year. He and a number of others have been working ceaselessly behind the scenes to provide us with things to enjoy whilst our normal activities have been curtailed and I would like to thank all of these volunteers for their efforts.

We are looking at a number of possible ways to help our members to enjoy our favourite plants during 2021. One suggestion is in a form of garden visits organised by the Branch Chairmen whereby members could be put in touch with other local members who are happy to host a visit to their garden albeit allowing for whatever restrictions are in place at that time.

I would like to hear any other ideas that you might have that the Group either locally or nationally could promote in order to enable us all to enjoy the plants that we love.



Magnolia 'Lois' photographed on 5th May 2020. Photo: Richard Chaplin. See his report in this bulletin of his experience of growing magnolias.

Annual General Meeting

We finally held our AGM in September via Skype and just managed to achieve a quorum. The minutes of the meeting are available on our website www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/information/minutes

Website

The Committee has approved the construction of a new website. The objective of the new site is to have a brighter and more colourful appearance and be more image oriented. It will use a Content Management system which will enable changes to be made to the site more easily without knowledge of HTML.

Work has progressed quickly over the last two months and by the time you are reading this it should be live. We have plans to make further changes to the contents including a complete re-write

Continued overleaf

A new website is taking shape and your comments and suggestions for additions will be welcome

of the cultivation information. Do let me know your thoughts including any additions that you would like to see.

Archive

If you have looked at the list of Management Committee posts you will have noticed that we have a Group Archivist who has a collection of material comprising past yearbooks, copies of journals that we have received, various correspondence, minutes of meetings and tours, nursery catalogues etc.

It has been agreed that a list of the material will be loaded on our new website so that people can see what is available and arrange appropriate access. It is hoped in the longer term that we can arrange for some of the more important material to be digitised so that it can be made more widely available and provide a back-up in the event of any catastrophic loss of the original material.

Volunteers

We currently have a vacancy on the Committee for an Events co-ordinator. Whilst this is not urgent at the current time due to the lack of events, we need to find a replacement to leap into life when the current restrictions are lifted.

More urgently we need a new Membership Secretary. Rupert Eley has filled that role efficiently and without fuss for the last 15 years but he has indicated that he needs to step down at the AGM in 2021 and we appreciate his reasons. Therefore we need someone with reasonable administration and computer skills to take on this role.

If you think that you can help with either of these roles then please get in touch.

Graham Mills

01326 280382

chairman@rhodogroup-rhs.org

TREASURER'S NOTE

Membership Renewal

Just to remind you that it is the start of our new year for subscription renewals.

If you have not yet renewed, please visit our website and click on the 'Membership' button to pay by PayPal or Worldpay:

- 1 Year Mailed Bulletins £22.50
- 1 Year Emailed Bulletins £20.00
- 3 Years Mailed Bulletins £60.00
- 3 Years Emailed Bulletins £60.00

Or if you prefer to pay by cheque, then send to our Membership Secretary, Rupert Eley. Cheques to be made payable to The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group (RCMG).

Members who have signed up to pay by Direct Debit: your payment of £20 was collected on the 1st November 2020. (You will notice the incentive for paying by DD).

Amazon Smile

We have registered our Charity with Amazon Smile.

If you would like to shop on Amazon Smile at www.smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/1161254-0 Amazon will donate 5p out of each £ that you spend to The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group at no cost to you, so please give it a try!

I would like to finish by thanking you for your continued support through these difficult times.

With very best wishes

Jenny Fly

Treasurer

Tel: 01903 742350

Email: treasurer.for.rcmg@gmail.com

EDITOR'S NOTE

Copy date for the March 2021 Bulletin is Friday 29th January. It looks likely that the content of the bulletin will depend largely on Members' Notes for some time to come. I thank those who have contributed to this issue and ask more of you send in pieces. I am happy to offer advice and help. You will find my contact details in the 2020 (No.71) Yearbook on p. 131.

Peter Furneaux

peterfurneaux@gmail.com

Our New Look Website Is Here



Above is how the Website Home Page header was for many years.

In 2015 a Membership Survey of our website had 325 respondents. The question was asked how we could improve the overall appearance and what is of most interest to members. Our Webmaster tried to ascertain what changes were required, which was not an easy task!

Earlier this year the Management Committee agreed to embark on an upgrade to the website 'engine' and redesign the look and feel of the pages. Rather than 'reinvent the wheel' it was decided to stay with the original website designer, Bath IT, who knew our requirements inside out. The cost was a fraction of starting again with another design company. If we had changed companies, we would have had to specify exactly what we wanted, an even more difficult task!

We hope we have changed the appearance to be more appealing to you and easier to use. It is now more user friendly with mobile phones as well. We think you will find the Plant Directory easier and quicker to use. The contents are being inspected for missing photographs and captions which we will correct as soon as we can.

In the Publications section, the Branch Newsletters are portrayed in a format which we feel is more inviting. There are many more photographs to view as a result of the Centenary Cup Photographic Competition 2020 and there will be more this coming year.

In time there will be certain pages, yet to be agreed, which will be accessible by members only. There will be a generic username and password sent to all members when this 'member only' feature is implemented.



As an interim measure we changed the header to brighten the look up a little (see above). Now we have completed the upgrade, the Home Page is, we feel, more enticing (see below), and the whole website is more intuitive and enjoyable.



Please visit and browse the revised website at www.rhodogroup-rhs.org and we hope you all derive more pleasure from it.

I notice that many RCMG members have their own website. If you would like to share it with other members and have the link inserted into our 'Links' page listed as 'Members' Websites', then please send details to Barry Cooke at vc2@rhodogroup-rhs.org

I think a word of thanks to our webmaster, Graham Mills, is in order, for all his hard work over the years. The amount of time and effort Graham puts in for what is most of the time a thankless and lonely task is much appreciated. Thank you, Graham, from all of us.

Barry Cooke

MEMBERS' NOTES

What's in a name?

I have been fascinated by the names that have been chosen for plants, either for binomials or varieties and have written before about some of these, for example, Jack Fogg and Harry Tagg. I was looking at my *Rhododendron dalhousiae* last month, and set to wondering how to pronounce the species name; does it rhyme with house/mouse or hoose/moose? I felt sure that there must be an authentic Scottish pronunciation, perhaps favouring hoose. Much like the debate over how to pronounce scone (Devon, the home of the cream tea, so relevant down here). I then fell to wondering who this 'dalhousie' was. Quite off the present subject, but it was interesting to me who admires the music of Haydn, that in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* there is a character Esterhase, anglicised from Esterhazy, Haydn's patron.

Anyway, research has revealed that the Dalhousie in question was Lady Dalhousie, wife of the 10th Earl of Dalhousie (later to become 1st Marquess) and Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856, who died in 1860 in his family home, Dalhousie Castle at the age of 48.



Rhododendron dalhousiae Photo: Jane Anderson



R. dalhousiae var. *rhabdotum* Photo: Angela Brabin

Continued overleaf

In 1847, Joseph Dalton Hooker, the botanist and future Director of Kew Gardens, travelled out to India with the Dalhousies at the start of his great three year excursion into the eastern Himalayas. He found a beautiful rhododendron growing as an epiphyte on mossy tree trunks in Sikkim, a rather straggly grower which had pale yellow fragrant flowers. Hooker considered this rhododendron the 'noblest species of the whole race' and dedicated it to Lady Dalhousie, perhaps out of genuine fondness, having spent a long voyage in her and her husband's company? During his expedition, Hooker sent back seed of a great number of rhododendrons from Sikkim, West Bengal and Bhutan, and the first flowering of *R. dalhousiae* was in a garden in Kirkcaldy, Fife in 1853 – a mere three years from seed. It is considered slightly tender, coming as it does from lower elevations of the mountains and is best grown in the milder areas of the UK.

A sad ending to the story, however, is that Lady Dalhousie's health deteriorated in India and she moved to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1852 in the hope that the climate might help. It did not, and so she took a ship back to England in 1853, but was taken ill and died on board before reaching home. She was only 36 years old.

John Marston

The Trials and Tribulations of Gardening on a Floodplain in the Peak District

In July 2007 we moved from our house in Reading, where we had about two thirds of an acre with sandy acid soil, to our current house on the edge of Bakewell in the Peak District. Due to commitments in Reading, gardening did not really get going in Bakewell until 2008, although we had been able to bring quite a lot of things from the Reading garden filling about one and a half removal vans!

In Bakewell our property covers one hectare. The house is in the corner of the plot which is bounded by the (Derbyshire) River Wye. The river flows from Buxton through the Peaks to Bakewell then joins the Derwent a few miles SE of Bakewell. Below Bakewell it meanders across a wide floodplain. It coils around our garden giving us some 350m of river bank, and coming quite close to the house as it heads down to its confluence with the Derwent.

So the garden is almost completely flat, though thankfully the house is built about 1.3m above the floodplain. The picture below shows what the garden looked like at the end of November in 2010, when we recorded a devastating (highly exceptional) minimum temperature of -18°C . More typical winter minimums in our valley bottom surrounded by hills are -10° to -6°C , which often seems about 3° lower than the minima given in local rural forecasts.



The garden in the 2010/11 winter with 600mm of snow

But, yes, it does flood. The first time this happened was rather traumatic, with about 75% of the garden under water. As well as coming directly off the river at the bottom, the water also comes through the gardens of adjacent houses to flow gently across the grass. We are now fairly relaxed about the river. Typically, it floods over part of the garden once or twice a year then goes down again reasonably quickly, but the groundwater level is never far below the surface. Last winter was very different in this respect, as described below.

When we do get a flood I often wander to the middle of the grass where the water is typically ankle deep. I bend down until my eyes are level with our ground floor. This tells me that the water would need to rise another metre to flood the house itself, and given the extent of the floodplain this would be far beyond any extreme I can visualise. Nevertheless it is a bit daunting, as the picture shows.



Flooding in February 2020 – the river should be behind the trees on the right

The soil is black alluvial with local beds of stones (former river bed) and clay underlying. The local geology and soil types are very complex with significant changes within short distances

(Cranfield University's Soilscales website is very informative). To the west the ground rises to the limestone of the White Peak, while across the river to the east the ground rises to the gritstone of the Dark Peak. Chatsworth is over the hill across the valley, where the abundance of rhododendrons is evidence of the acidity of their soil. Up the hill behind us going to the limestone, the pH rises, but in the valley there is a real mixture. When we looked at the property I did measure the pH and found it acid side of neutral at 6.5 to 6.8. So not a disaster but I knew rhododendrons and camellias would be a challenge and need a bit of alchemy to help them. We were heartened to see at least one healthy rhododendron and one healthy magnolia just a few yards up the road, though I now know the soil changes so locally hereabouts this should not have been taken as necessarily reliable.

I did receive some very valuable advice from Rod Wild, fellow member of the Wessex Branch. In conversation prior to our move he told me of his early days in Sheffield, and that from visits to Bakewell he knew exactly where we were going, which in his opinion would be ideal for magnolias. I took him at his word, and have since planted over 70 magnolias, nearly all of which have survived, and the rest of this article is devoted to describing how they and other plantings have fared this spring.

First a comment on other plants I have found to grow well here. Foremost, and a new focus for me are *Betula*: an interesting range of species and hybrids from across the Northern Hemisphere can be obtained, all have interesting bark and foliage giving year-round value, but what is important for us here is they all seem tolerant of both wet soil as well as dry periods. Next on my list are walnuts, wingnuts and other compound leaved trees. I have also indulged in oak trees, most of which thrive here (my favourite is *Quercus dentata* 'Pinnatifida'). Other trees doing well here include poplars, alder, larch, *Taxodium*, *Metasequoia*, *Salix* and *Cunninghamia*.

I still have many rhododendrons and camellias, which with careful siting are "just about managing". The camellias are mostly on the drier side of the garden but do suffer from insufficiently acid soil. They were all badly affected by the severe 2010/11 winter and at first seemed a total loss. But John David (another Wessex Branch member) said "Wait 'til the end of August before cutting them", and he was right: all the camellias except one or two came back.

Frank Kingdon-Ward advised planting rhododendron "on" the soil, not "in" the soil and I now try to follow this advice especially as there seems to be a slight ridge across part of the garden about 10cm above the surrounds. This is now known as "rhododendron ridge" and is where most of the successful planting occurs. "Mound planting" though is almost impossible in a garden subject to periodic flooding as the water tends to wash away any loose soil or mulch.



M. sargentiana var. *robusta* – 25th March 2019

Magnolias, being fairly shallow rooting, are probably above the groundwater level for most of the year and also seem more tolerant of a slightly higher pH than rhododendrons and camellias. The risk for us in our frost hollow is that so many magnolias flower quite early in the year, and for this reason I have avoided most of the more tender trees, such as *M. campbellii*. Usually the first to flower here are the *M. x loebneri* ('Leonard Messel') and several of the *M. stellata*, but this year *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta* and

Continued overleaf

www. **LODER-PLANTS** .com

AZALEAS &
RHODODENDRONS





HYDRANGEAS



CAMELLIAS

01403 891 412

MARKET GARDEN, LOWER BEEDING, HORSHAM, RH13 6PP

We have an encyclopaedic website, which contains a wealth of information
We have something here for both connoisseur and absolute beginner.

OPEN: MONDAY. - SATURDAY 10 - 4

'Star Wars' were first in late March, quickly followed by *M. kobus* and *M. x kewensis* 'Wada's Memory'.



M. x kewensis 'Wada's Memory' 10th April, 2020 (note river in the background)



M. x loebneri 'Leonard Messel' 10th April 2020



M. stellata 'Dawn' – 19th April, 2019

'Black Tulip' also flowered early (for Bakewell), slightly touched by a light frost, and much earlier than 'Genie', but we had to wait a week for my current favourite, 'Daybreak', which has a long flowering season here, and 'Galaxy' flowered for the first time after several years acclimatising.



M. 'Daybreak' in bud – 27th April, 2020



M. 'Black Tulip' 20th March, 2019



M. 'Galaxy' – 27th April, 2020

This spring our yellow magnolias have been exceptional. As with all the magnolias here, colour, flower size and timing vary enormously and often conflict published guides. The younger plants seem to flower later than when mature, but further confusion arises from wrongly named plants. These include a 'Yellow River' which is *M. x soulangeana* 'Alba Superba', and an 'Elizabeth' also an 'Alba Superba'. Less easily understood was a plant labelled 'Gold Star' which I think is actually 'George Henry Kern'!

Here our best yellows are probably *M. x brooklynensis* 'Yellow Bird' and 'Lois', the latter being the most floriferous. But this year 'Sunburst' was good as well.



M. 'Sunburst' – 21st May 2018, but April in 2020



M. x brooklynensis 'Yellow Bird' – 21st May, 2018



M. 'Elizabeth' – 27th April, 2020



M. 'Gold Star' – 24th May, 2016 (but April in 2020)

Continued overleaf

Then disaster: two sharp frosts in quick succession on 7th and 9th May took out not only all the open flowers but also all the new foliage and all the buds which had shown such promise. My outside thermometer seems to have failed but others locally record -6 to -7°C , and generally considered one of the hardest late frosts in recent years. Of special regret were *M. wilsonii* and *M. x wieseneri* both of which had been covered in flower buds at a density they had never shown here before, but all were lost. We did get a few flowers before the frost on 'Ambrosia' and *M. x brooklynensis* 'Yellow Bird', but most were lost.



M. wilsonii – 23rd May, 2018



M. x wieseneri – 12th June, 2013



M. 'Ambrosia' – 14th June, 2013 (rather late that year)

All photos: Richard Chaplin

The frosts also took out early growth on all our acers, oaks, walnuts and indeed anything foolish enough to take advantage of the early warmth and come into leaf. It has been interesting that the frost damage was not all evident in the days immediately afterwards, but quite a few trees which had seemed to survive succumbed in the course of the next few weeks. The garden was a depressing sight, but in early June when I drafted this article it seemed most trees were recovering. But this is not the whole story and from the perspective of October, things have not worked out so well.

Quite a few shrubs were killed off by the winter flooding. Flooding is not unusual here, but usually the river rises and then falls in a few days. However this winter the river remained high from November through to the end of March, with most of the garden completely saturated for the best part of four months. Several rhododendrons have simply drowned. Two *Acer davidii*, *A. tegmentosum*, the rather unusual chimaera hybrid + *Laburnocytisus* 'Adamii', a *Decaisnea fargesii*, and several (but not all) *Cornus kousa* and a fine *Cornus contraversa* have also gone, despite most of these plants having been happy here for several years. *Sorbus* also suffered badly, especially Asian species, and we lost our *Cercis siliquastrum* while nearby *C. canadensis* and *C. chinensis* survive. About six forsythias have gone as well. I was a bit surprised, and relieved that we lost none of our camellias.

Of the magnolias the only loss seems to be a *M. wilsonii* given to us at Trelissick on our Wessex Branch trip to Cornwall in 2013, otherwise they do not seem to have been permanently affected by the awful winter season. So thank you Rod: you got that (almost) spot on! Let's just hope the coming winter is a bit kinder to us here in the Peak District.

Richard Chaplin

A small garden revisited

About 10 years ago, as a fairly new member of the Group, I was encouraged to write a piece for the Yearbook about my experiences of growing large numbers of rhododendrons and other shrubs in a small suburban garden. My themes included growing for the short term, rather than for posterity, cramming plants in and not worrying about proper spacing, not limiting myself to small-growing plants, and generally bending or breaking many of the rules of “woodland gardening”. Looking back, I see much naivety in what I wrote then but, ten years on, I thought it worth having another look at some of the principles and reporting back on what went right and what went wrong.

To recap very briefly, my garden is about one third of an acre, near Poole, about 5 miles from the south coast of Dorset. At the last count, the garden contained more than 2000 different plants, including over 400 rhododendrons. To say my plants are crammed in would be an understatement. Conventional spacing requirements are ignored because I just want to grow as many plants as I can, to get the maximum enjoyment for the limited years I have available to me. I am assuming that after I have gone the garden will be destroyed, so there is no posterity to plant for. Of course, a more rational approach would simply be to grow fewer plants and allow them to grow properly. As an obsessive enthusiast for rhododendrons and many other kinds of plant this would not work for me so I have gone to the other extreme.

One of the photos used to illustrate the article was of *Rhododendron sinogrande*, which was captioned “a superb foliage plant for the small garden”. Was that a ridiculous approach, or has the passage of ten years vindicated it? I can report that the plant was indeed a superb foliage plant of about 1.5 metres then. It is now over 3 metres, a bit lopsided as it is close to a vigorous Japanese maple, but the leaves are still wonderful and I have even had some flowers from it. In my hungry, dry, root-infested soil, I deluge the plant with water in May and June when it is producing new growth.

I am thrilled to have it in the garden and regard it as a success. Similarly, 10 years ago I planted a small seedling of *R. sinofalconeri*, which has been an increasingly beautiful foliage plant but which finally rewarded me this year with its splendid yellow flowers. My theory is that these and my other large-leaved rhododendrons will tower over and protect smaller shrubs growing beneath – even if that is not the normally recommended practice. Not being completely delusional, I have over the years grubbed out one or two impossibly vigorous plants such as ‘Polar Bear’ and I am currently giving my ‘Loderi’ a nasty look. These are commonly grown plants which I can better enjoy in all their magnificence in other gardens.

One of my original assumptions was that, if rhododendrons outgrew their spaces, I would be able to move them. This turned out to be impractical because, by the time I realised there was a problem, the roots were so intertwined with those of neighbouring



Rhododendron sinogrande in Russell's garden at the time of his previous report.



The same plant ten years later

Photos: Russell Beeson

Continued overleaf

shrubs that separation would have been impossible without major damage. The plants by this time were also misshapen and drawn up (much as they often are in the wild), so this solution did not really work. One alternative was to cut them back to reduce their size and rejuvenate them, and in some cases that has been quite successful. However, I have now become accustomed to what that esteemed horticulturist Michael Haworth-Booth described as “close boskage” where shrubs just grow together and fight it out. It wouldn’t work well over a period of many decades but it works for me for the foreseeable future.

A transformational change, made last year, was to have had the tree surgeons in to remove several inherited large rowans, hollies and a huge birch – just wild trees native to the local heathland from which the garden was carved – and this has simultaneously let in more light and greatly reduced the competition for root space and water. The improvement in growth habit and flowering on the rhododendrons thus liberated has to be seen to be believed.

A closing thought: this season we had a virtually rain-free May and my thirsty soil was quick to dry out so, like most of us, I spent much time out with the hose. The advantage of having a relatively small garden is that I can water most of the important plants in a weekly cycle and it is particularly in these times that I am happy not to have too much space to deal with.

Russell Beeson

Notes from Glenarn

(Readers who are not already familiar with this may like to read about the history and delights of Glenarn at www.gardens-of-argyll.co.uk Editor)

R Gill and Son of Penryn was the very first nursery from where the Gibson brothers bought plants for Glenarn, when, in October 1928, they purchased *Rhododendron bullatum* (now *R. edgeworthii*). This is described on card no. 9 in the Glenarn records, the earlier numbers being assigned to rhododendrons, mainly of Victorian origin, that were already in the garden (or in the case of *R. ‘Pink Pearl’*, “*The only Rhodo we brought with us*”).

In December of the same year Gill supplied four more species rhododendrons including *R. fictolacteum* (now *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteum*) (card no.10) and *R. fulvum* (card no.12) which gave them a fright when the young growth of both plants was badly attacked by bugs. Subsequently, in the case of *R. fulvum* they also suspected an attack of honey fungus and trenched around the plant in 1937, only to realise that this was a false alarm, filling in the trench a year later. In 1949 it was blown over and set up again on its roots but did not survive. However, the day was saved by four good layers. The third plant in the consignment, *R. calophytum*, did not flower until 1951 and after this long wait was written off as a poor form. Archie Gibson’s notes on the fourth plant, *R. giganteum* (now *R. protistum* var. *giganteum*) read: “1929 hung fire. 1930 established a good leader and set good leaves. 1931 2 leaves. 1932-37 slow, but growing quite well and branching. First flowered about 1947 and again in 1950 but was frosted”; to which

Sandy Gibson added “*Surely not!*”. In these early records there is a sense of the two brothers gradually finding their feet in the world of rhododendrons.

Rhododendron sinogrande arrived from Gill at the end of 1929: “*Sandy’s Xmas present to me and a beauty. Made 3 leaders in 1933. About 1935 mysteriously lost all leaves save 1 on main leader – we suspected grey squirrels tobogganing. Happily leader didn’t die. This grows late and is quite hardy*”. By 1967 the plant had become a tree 6.6m high and 6m in diameter. Now it measures 10m high and 9m in diameter and last year was completely covered in waxy coloured trusses, resembling a bewigged opera audience in Mozart’s time.



Rhododendron sinogrande in flower at Glenarn, ‘resembling a bewigged opera audience...’ Photo: Sue Thornley

Not all the plants established themselves successfully and in 1931 another *R. edgeworthii* was purchased from Gill to replace the first which had been “*a straggly pot shrub. Cut off top and it tried to break away. RIP 1931*”. In July 1934 there was another single purchase as *R. ‘Cornish Cross’* arrived, followed in November when a larger order was delivered including *R. crassum* (now *R. maddenii* ssp. *crassum*) which “*flowered poorly in 1937; v. good in 1938. This is a good form*”. Previously, the Gibsons had obtained others from Rye at Lochinch and John Holms at Larachmhor and later wrote: “*Can’t be sure which is what*”, a common problem with *R. maddenii* and its tribe. Other rhododendrons in the order included a blood red *R. arboreum*, *R. barbatum* x *Aucklandii* (now *R. griffithianum*), *R. diaprepes* (now *R. decorum* ssp. *diaprepes*), and *R. hookeri* (described enticingly in the Gill catalogue as “*Dazzling crimson trumpets, rare*”) as well as *R. griffithianum* itself which Archie considered “*a good form but not the best*”. The Gibsons were getting into their stride.

In 1936 three plants of *R. manipurens* (now *R. maddenii* ssp. *crassum*) were purchased (to further add to their confusion). When the brothers passed the records between themselves during a major labelling exercise in 1963, Sandy asked if this was the rhododendron “in the lee of the old *R. falconeri*” (said to be from Hooker’s collection). He thought so and, if this was

the case, it is still there, now well over 3m high in an intractable thicket, and far too attractive for soft scale for my liking.

In October 1937 Gill supplied *R. sidereum* (to supplement two already in the garden, obtained from Magor in 1931 and John Holms in 1934). The other plant in the order was a large specimen of *R. venator*, “3ft high and 4 ft across”, which flowered a year later and was thought to be very good. As Archie wrote on record card no. 249 “*This is the plant HM King George VI asked to buy at the Rhodo. Show. Old Gill told him that it was already sold and going to Scotland*”. You would have thought that with that type loyalty to customers, the Gibson brothers would have continued to purchase from R. Gill and Son but this was the last rhododendron supplied by the nursery to Glenarn.

Mike Thornley

Rhododendron renschianum

Rhododendron *renschianum* is one of more than two hundred vireya rhododendron species found in Indonesia. It is endemic to a few mountains on the island of Flores in the Lesser Sunda Islands and is the emblem of the Kelimutu National Park. It was described taxonomically in 1940 by Carl Ludwig Blume from herbarium material of the original collection in 1927 from Mt Kelimutu by Mrs Ilse Rensch-Maier and she is commemorated in the specific name. It is a medium sized shrub with attractive orange and yellow trumpet shaped flowers. A detailed description is given by Argent (2015).

R. renschianum is epiphytic in the Casuarina forest (*Casuarina junghuhniana*) or on stony ground near the summit of Mt. Kelimutu. The local people call it Turuwara and regard it as the flower of their ancestors who, they believe, guard Mt Kelimutu. However, they and monkeys eat its fruit and birds drink its nectar.

Oki Hidayat, a researcher at BPPLHK, has recorded a Honeyeater (*Lichmera lombokia*) taking nectar from the flowers of this rhododendron. There are also bee keepers in this area and bees are probably the main pollinator.

Visitors to the Kelimutu National Park where the land rises to 1731m asl can enjoy the spectacular views including the ‘three colours lake’. This has been formed by volcanic activity which is also responsible for the colour changes of the water. The park is excellent for bird watching.

In the interests of conservation, the Kelimutu National Park and the Research Centre for Biology, Indonesian Institute of Science, collaborated to propagate *R. renschianum* by stem cuttings in 2008. The Bali Botanic Garden has also been growing *R. renschianum* as ex situ conservation. The IUCN Red List status of this rhododendron as Least Concern (LC) may need to be reappraised because of the popularity of its fruit to the local people and the increasing population of monkeys.

Yaspar Michael Mambrasar (Herbarium Bogoriense) and Yohanes Freadyanus Kasi



Rhododendron renschianum. Photo: Tri Warseno



The Honeyeater *Lichmera lombokia*. Photo: Oki Hidayat

Reference: Argent, G (2015) *Rhododendrons of subgenus Vireya*, 2nd edition. Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh/Royal Horticultural Society.

Hot Favourites

In his article ‘Rhododendrons that glow’ (RCMG Bulletin no 133) Brian Holt writes that ‘the word glow we associate with the red or orange of fire’ though he does mention that some other colours have that glowing quality.

Just a few of the red species, I believe, do have that characteristic, notably the one we now have to clumsily refer to as *R. forrestii* Repens Group of which Kingdon Ward describes seeing in the wild thus: “Even more wonderful are the creeping neriiflorums

Continued overleaf

of the Assam Himalaya which form sheets of scarlet on the rocks and hang down in curtains of fire visible a mile away”. Even one of these in the garden bearing just a few of its waxy, glowing corollas is enough to stop me dead in my tracks!

Rhododendron forrestii Repens Group has been used extensively by hybridists, perhaps most notably to produce ‘Elizabeth’ but also by Dietrich Hobbie to cross with a range of large red hardy hybrids. To me none of these hybrids have the glow factor, for although often of an intense red the colour recedes rather than impresses.



Rhododendron forrestii Repens group

Many years ago I crossed *R. forrestii* Repens Group with *R. ‘Popacatapetl’* (Elizabeth Group x ‘Compactum Multiflorum’) and selected the most vivid red seedling to backcross with *R. forrestii* Repens Group. A further backcross of the brightest of these seedlings with the species yielded ‘Satan’s Cushion’ with the ‘repens’ glow but larger corollas and a mounded habit which after about ten years is a metre in diameter and 50cm high and regularly produces plenty of flowers.



Rhododendron ‘Satan’s Cushion’

Euan Cox, patriarch of the well known Cox family of Glendoick, Perthshire, saw *R. facetum* in Burma, describing it as the finest rhododendron species with scorching, red flowers. Kingdon Ward, in *Plant Hunting on the Edge of the*

World refers to it thus: “in fact the rainy season has well begun before *R. facetum* and its allies fire the hillside. In the damp gloom to come suddenly on a glowing flame such as this is a joy. It wrings from us shouts of delight. The ground beneath is red as though strewn with hot cinders”. He continues: “The chubby trusses pack more than a dozen flowers which blaze out fiercely among the dark green leaves”.

R. facetum and closely related *R. elliotii* are both species in which the red of the flower appears illuminated from within and both are good garden plants as well as being parents of a number of hybrids; but the hybrids although bright red lack the wow factor of their parents.



Rhododendron facetum x *R. griersonianum*. Photos from transparencies: Barry Starling

Seeking to produce late flowering hybrids a cross was made between *R. facetum* and *R. griersonianum*. When the seedlings first flowered I had been away from my garden for a few days. Returning and entering a wooded area where the hybrid seedlings were planted out my first impression was of a fiercely hot bonfire glowing among the trees. One well budded seedling was in full flower and this in mid June after the main rhododendron display.

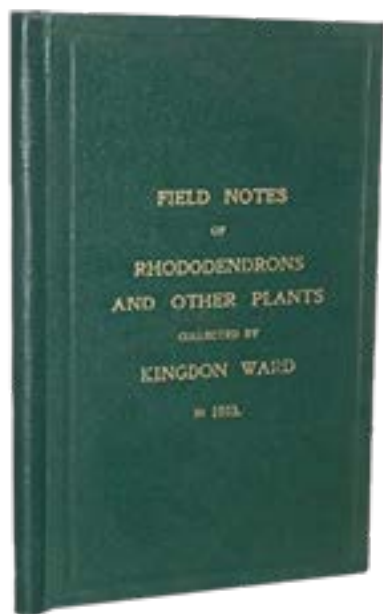
Perhaps my appreciation of ‘rhododendron glow’ does not, like Brian Holt’s, extend to a wide range of colours but there is no doubt that many rhododendrons do have that glow factor.

Barry Starling

Something for the darker evenings!

Many readers will be aware of the series of small format Field Notes booklets that were ‘privately published’ during the early part of the 20th century. The informative contents detail allocated collectors’ numbers together with brief details of site, altitude et al. Those that are generally most readily available refer to the Forrest, Kingdon-Ward and Rock collections. (To my knowledge, similar style copies for Comber’s Tasmanian [1929/30] and Andean [1925/26

and 1926/27] collections – can be added to the list). There is some debate as to whom was responsible for their binding, publication and distribution; the most common suggestion is that Lionel de Rothschild was the main instigator but I have read other references to include the RHS and J C Williams. However there do appear to be degrees of similarity to leather bindings, text layout and fonts. No record seems to exist for the numbers published for any of the titles! In just one or two cases the printers are identified.



My main incentive in bringing this to the attention of members is in trying to establish a comprehensive reference list of known Field Notes editions (with dates) for these three plant collectors. I include a list of titles of known provenance to date from various sources and would welcome any leads or references to additional dates and/or titles or other useful comments.

Kingdon Ward booklets:

- **KW (1913-1922) : Rhododendrons** (records confirm this issue was compiled by J B Stevenson in 1923 [for private circulation] with access to KW's original notes – unusually a card cover binding)
- **KW (1924/25) : Rhododendrons**
- **KW (1924/5) : Plants, Shrubs & Trees other than Rhododendrons**
- **KW (1926) : Rhododendrons**
- **KW (1926) : Trees, Shrubs & Plants other than Rhododendrons**
- **KW (1927/28) : Rhododendrons & other plants**
- **KW (1931) : Rhododendrons & other plants**
- **KW (1933) : Rhododendrons & other plants**
- **KW (1935) : Rhododendrons & other plants**
- **KW (1937) : Trees, Shrubs & Plants incl some Rhododendrons**
- **KW (1938) : Trees, Shrubs & Plants** (text includes various Rhododendrons!)

Rock booklets:

- **R (1923/24) : Rhododendrons**
- **R (1925/26) : Some Rhododendrons**
- **R (1925/26/29) : Rhododendrons**

Forrest booklets:

- **F (1917/19) : Trees, Shrubs and Plants other than Rhododendrons collected in Western China** (Introduction by F J Chittenden – published by RHS 1929) (also includes expedition supporters)
- **F (1918) : Details of Specimens of Rhododendrons**
- **F (1921) : Details of Specimens of Rhododendrons**
- **F (1922) : Details of Specimens of Rhododendrons**
- **F (1924) : Rhododendrons**
- **F (1925) : Rhododendrons**
- **F (1925) : Some Plants, Shrubs & Trees**

I do have limited details (personal correspondence) of several additional Forrest Field Notes but have not actually had sight of them to authenticate – consequently not so far included.

Web searches regularly offer issues for sale – some considerably more elusive and expensive than others. Over the years Kingdon-Ward and Rock appear more regularly than Forrest – perhaps suggesting that less numbers of his were initially published? For what it is worth it is the heavily annotated copies that often

Continued overleaf

MILLAIS NURSERIES



By Appointment to
His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales
Supplier of Rhododendrons and Magnolias



Specialist Growers of Rhododendrons and Azaleas

Growers of the finest range of Rhododendrons and Azaleas in the country. Everything from historic varieties rescued from some of the great plant collections, to the latest introductions from around the world.



Schlippenbachii

Outstanding and fragrant azaleas



Olivia

New and floriferous rhododendrons



Black Tulip

Fantastic range of magnolias

Fantastic new searchable website with secure online transactions for fast and acclaimed delivery.
Quality specimen plants up to 1.2m high.

Recent RHS Chelsea Flower Show Gold Medals

Plant Centre Open: Monday to Friday 10am-5pm
See website for Saturdays in April and May

900 different Rhododendrons, Camellias, Magnolias, Cornus and Acers

Crosswater Lane, Churt, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 2JN 01252 792698
sales@rhododendrons.co.uk www.rhododendrons.co.uk

provide additional informative clues together with subsequent name changes and other interesting facts and updates.

Please check your bookshelves. Looking forward to maybe receiving a response or two (anonymously if preferred) in order to further enhance the database!

Postscript:

Wilding : Rhododendrons – Their Names & Addresses (1923 – not strictly Field Notes but a worthy addition)

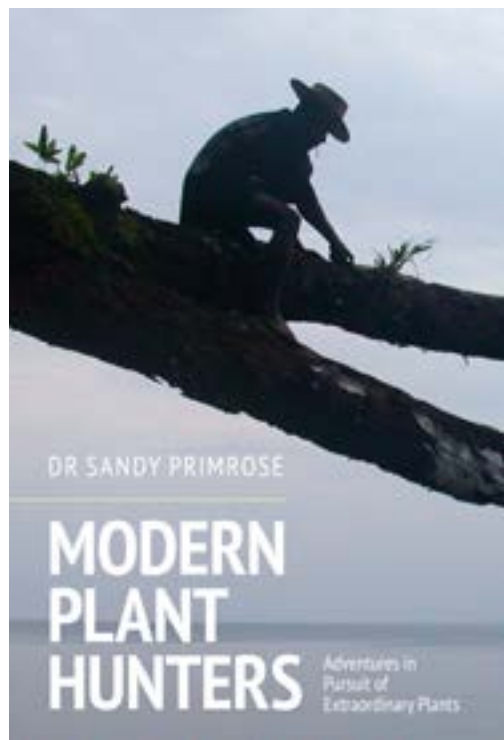
Forrest, Rock & Kingdon Ward : Rhododendrons in cultivation in Great Britain and Ireland. (undated) Editorial introduction by Lionel de Rothschild. List of species' numbers and plant heights; no collection site data. Slightly larger format than the Field Notes series.

Sometimes different results stem from web searches according to the spelling of Kingdon Ward versus Kingdon-Ward

John Sanders

ewenique@eclipse.co.uk

Modern Plant Hunters



Adventures in Pursuit of Extraordinary Plants

Author: Dr Sandy Primrose

ISBN: 978-1-910258-78-1

Publisher: Pimpernel Press Ltd

Publication Date: 23rd January 2020

272 pp

RRP: £30

This well proportioned (24cm x 17cm) hardback volume, published early this year, is a very welcome addition to previous works on the subject of the 'great plant hunters'. Beautifully bound and printed on good quality paper, with excellent colour photographs throughout, my initial flick through its pages was enough to pique my interest in what

promised to be an interesting new angle on a subject which has long fascinated me.

Much has been published about plant hunters and collectors, particularly those of the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Whilst there are notable examples such as Richard Spruce and Frank Meyer who collected primarily for the purposes of scientific research or the introduction of economic crops, most plant hunters of this period focussed their efforts on the discovery and introduction of new and desirable ornamental garden plants, for which there was an insatiable appetite back home. Whilst the search for ornamentals is still the main motivation for some of the plant hunters considered in this book, Dr Primrose also seeks to expand on the subject and investigate the many other reasons why collectors continue to endure danger and hardship in pursuit of plants in the wild.

Early chapters consider the practicalities of modern-day plant hunting, including where to go, the logistics involved and of course, why to do it in the first place. Dr Primrose then moves on to chapters dedicated to particular collectors or institutions, grouped together in sections covering collectors of ornamental plants, collectors working for institutions, orchid hunters and lastly, those hunting for medicinal plants. The section covering ornamental plant hunters discusses characters whom I am sure many of our members will know or be familiar with: Roy Lancaster, Peter & Kenneth Cox and Sue & Bleddyn Wynn-Jones to name but a few. Some of the names mentioned in subsequent chapters, I must confess, were new to me and I enjoyed learning more about the search for 'crop wild relatives': the species from which domestic crops were bred, often hundreds of years ago; or the work of Christine Leon, building an herbarium collection of plants used in traditional Chinese medicine.

Although I largely enjoyed this book, I felt that some chapters were more successful than others. I found those which covered a specific topic or discipline of plant hunting very interesting and engaging, whilst others which focussed on a particular individual often read as a succession of short anecdotes of little real substance. I was also frustrated by the occasional repetition of information within or across chapters, which rather broke the flow of the text at times.

An interesting theme which unifies many of the chapters is that of the importance of ex-situ conservation and the vital need to discover and collect plants at risk of extinction through habitat loss. The plant hunters of the nineteenth century may have had to obtain permission from local government officials, or even warlords, in order to facilitate their travels, but rarely was consideration given to the actual plants they collected. The accounts of the collectors in this book show that this is clearly no longer the case and that legitimate collecting in the wild is restricted almost so much as to make it impossible. The author's pragmatic consideration of the Nagoya Protocol in particular is balanced and thought provoking and will, I think, be of interest to the many of us who still crave new or novel plants for our gardens.

Ned Lomax

Experiences of Growing Magnolias from Seed

It was back in 2003, after Mike Robinson's propagation day, when I had my epiphany moment! I had always planned to retire in 2009 and was starting to worry about what I would do with all the spare time. Helen and I went to the day to have a go with the camellia cuttings, as she had grown up with a very old one in her mother's conservatory; I just knew how to grow vegetables on my allotment.

It was both a very enjoyable and profitable day because we ended up with a 50% success rate! It was this encouragement that made me decide to make my own garden once I retired, and populate it with plants I had grown. My thinking was that it must be a very healthy hobby, judging by the ages of many of the Group, and you should be able to continue until you drop?

We noticed that we were almost the only ones interested in the camellia material, everyone else was focused on rhododendrons and magnolias. So, I decided to investigate these other plants and was very taken by the variety and beauty of both. Reading the notes on propagating magnolias, it did seem very straightforward:

- Collect fresh seed just as they were hanging by their silken thread
- Soak them for a day or two in water
- Squidge the outer covering off the black seed (nice scent!)
- Wash the seeds in water with a bit of washing-up liquid to remove the oil
- Sow each collection in bulk in a mixture of ericaceous compost and perlite
- Place pot in a sealed plastic bag to keep it moist over winter in the unheated greenhouse. I think it is important that the seed experiences some days of sub-zero temperatures
- In the Spring moisten again and allow to warm naturally in the unheated greenhouse. You should get 100% germination!
- Pot on into individual pots as soon as seedlings are about an inch high, the root will be much longer

When I told friends in our group of my plans, I got some funny looks, along with comments like "it could take 30 years to flower"! This obviously worried me, but the plan was in action and I thought I might as well see how lucky I might be.

On retirement we moved to the Wirral and bought a house with enough land to make a reasonable size garden. At this point there were not many seedlings that I considered large enough to plant out. I had already realized that it is important for all our three genera not to plant out until they are "big enough".

Four of mine I considered worthy of planting out and was "made up", as they say in these parts, when one seedling of *M. x soulangeana* 'Lennei' flowered that first spring at 6 years old! Its sibling took 3 years longer. My *M. grandiflora* flowered at 10 years, which I was exceedingly pleased by, as the "30 year" quote concerned these evergreens. I lost the other two, one in the bad winter of 2011 and the other drowned, which is another story.

Now that I have a 10-year-old garden, most of my seedlings are in the ground, as I follow Russell Beeson's planting philosophy. They may be too close together, but that's not going to be my problem! I have 27 planted out, with three new young ones still in pots. Each year I get some excitement when another decides to flower for the first time.

Once I got serious, I joined the Magnolia Society International (MSI) and took advantage of their amazing seed offerings. You are able to acquire seed from hand pollinated crosses of fascinating magnolias. The ones I have that are particularly exciting are 'Silk Road' x *M. insignis* (i.e. deciduous x evergreen Michelia) and 'Red Baron' x 'Blushing Belle' which I now see has been named 'Cotton Candy'. The former had problems germinating, only four of the six seeds I received germinated and two of them had weird seed leaves, one of which was a complete disc like a lotus leaf. Needless to say, neither of the mutations grew on as there was no "tip/leader". I only managed to keep one of the two normal seedlings alive to plant out, but it looks very happy, is 8ft tall, and loses all leaves apart from the one on

Continued overleaf



The Rhododendron & Azalea Centre

Visitors welcome

Mon-Fri 9.00am-4.30pm March-October • 9.00am-4.00pm November-February
Saturdays 10.00am-4.00pm April-May

Specialist growers of Rhododendrons & Azaleas

KOIRIN, CROSSROADS NURSERY, WOODLANDS, WIMBORNE, DORSET BH21 8LN
(Near Verwood)

MAIL ORDER AVAILABLE

Tel: 01202 824629 enquiries@azaleacentre.co.uk
www.azaleacentre.co.uk

SORRY, WE DON'T ACCEPT CREDIT/DEBIT CARDS

the leader each winter. My 'Cotton Candy' is also looking very good and is 10ft tall. Neither have flowered yet.

The other interesting group of seedlings were all acquired from Mike Robinson's garden in 2009. I had called in to pick up a rhododendron graft he was looking after for me and this visit coincided with another friend who had come with the express purpose of collecting seed. Mike encouraged me to follow on, so I ended up with every pocket filled with seed pods and none named. I assumed I would be able to ask him to name them once they had grown a bit, how wrong I was! So, I have seedlings labelled MLR1 to 8. There has been an occasional flower, maybe a 'Jane Platt' and a multiple tepalled *M. stellata*?

Have I encouraged anyone else to follow this route? Potting on is a real treat for one's scent glands!

Steve Lyus

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome new members and hope they will enjoy the benefits of membership of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group.

Rupert Eley

UK

Mrs Helen Eager Dunoon, Argyll and Bute

Mr Robert Gamble Leyland, Lancashire

Mrs Christiana Holmes Lynton, Devon

Leonardslee Gardens c/o Mr Stephen Herrington Lower Beeding, West Sussex

Nymans Gardens c/o Mr Joseph Whelan Handcross, West Sussex

Mary Broadfoot Ardrishaig, Argyll and Bute

Reuthe's Nursery Seal Chart, Kent

Bryony White Isle of Gigha, Argyll

Mr Christopher Clarke Chelmsford, Essex

Mr Francois Gordon East Malling, Kent

AUSTRALIA

Mr James Robertson Hoppers Crossing, Victoria

**To advertise in
this publication
call 01568 780828**

Dates for 2021

Confirmed dates

Rosemoor Spring Competition

March 13th/14th

Rosemoor Rhododendron Competition

April 24th/25th

**AGM, North West Branch Show & Centenary
Cup Competition at Ness Botanic Garden,**

Saturday May 8th

Unconfirmed events

**Savill Show (RHS Early Rhododendron,
Main Camellia and Spring Ornamental
Competition) normally in early April**

**Harlow Carr Show (RHS Late Rhododendron
Show) normally in early May**

Further news in March 2021 Bulletin

Event updates to Christopher Legrand please:

24 Riverside Road, West Moors, Dorset BH22 0LQ

Email: clegrand@pirltd.org.uk Tel: 01202 873344