



the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales

Bulletin 138 / March 2022 / www.rhodogroup-rhs.org

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Perhaps unexpectedly, the period just after Christmas is one of my favourite times. The days are getting longer and our plants are beginning to get ready to burst into life with the coming of spring. As I walk around my garden I can almost feel the life there preparing for spring.

This winter has been very mild so far. The first of the rhododendrons to bloom, such as 'Seta', started flowering here in January, which is an early start even in Cornwall. The magnolias seem to be very full of buds so I am looking forward to a good season after two disappointing years.

However, February is usually our coldest month so things may still deteriorate as indeed they did in 2020 and 2021. I am just hoping for the best.

Seed list

Although we still have difficulty in obtaining wild collected seed the 2022 seed list is a very good one due to members who contributed seed from their gardens. If you have not done so already do look at the seeds available on our website.

Events

Last year we ran a number of very successful virtual events and more will follow this year. The pandemic is still with us but seems to be coming more normalised. As a result we and the RHS have plans for more events this year. There are shows and other face-to-face activities planned along, of course, with our AGM. See page 12 for the latest state of play and check our website regularly for updates.

Volunteers - Secretary

As I indicated in the last two Bulletins we need a new Secretary from May 2022.

*The Centenary Competition
with the Group AGM
is at Ramster - See page 2*

The role involves a number of administrative and communication activities. These include arranging our AGM and Management Committee meetings, taking minutes thereof and communicating with the RHS over awards, shows and other matters.

This is a very important role that can be considered to help keep the Group together. If you would like to be at the centre of Group activities then please contact me for more information.

Graham Mills



Rhododendron davidi EN 4213 Photo: Maurice Foster (See page 5)

SECRETARY'S NOTE

Annual General Meeting

Miranda Gunn has kindly invited us to join her in celebrating the Centenary of her family's ownership of Ramster Garden. Both the Group AGM and the Centenary Cup Competition will be held there on Sunday 15th May 2022. What a wonderful opportunity to get together, show some of our best plants to each other, enjoy a short talk given by Miranda about Ramster Garden and to round things off, an informal guided tour of the garden. It could be you that takes the Centenary Cup home for a year. The 20-acre Woodland Garden at Ramster is home to a fantastic variety of trees and shrubs including the Group Collection of Hardy Hybrid Rhododendrons. Over the past couple of years Miranda and her gardening team have developed a new Centenary Garden which you can see during the tour. Ramster Garden will still be open to the public on May 15th so our events will be held in separate areas.

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The plan for the day is:

- Morning: Centenary Cup Competition (in the marquee on the tennis court field)
- Lunch: 12.15 – 1.30pm in the Long Hall.
- Afternoon: AGM at 1.45pm in the Drawing Room
- Presentation of the Centenary Cup to the overall winner
- A short talk about the History of Ramster by Miranda Gunn
- Informal guided tours of Ramster Garden at approximately 3pm

There will be a charge of £20 per person for the day, including a buffet lunch with tea, coffee and soft drinks, and the guided tours. The tea room at Ramster will be open from 10am until 5pm for morning and afternoon refreshments at your own expense. If you only wish to attend the AGM, there is no charge.

Provisional Schedule for the Ramster Centenary Competition

Class 1

Any hardy rhododendron species, one truss or spray

Class 2

Any hardy rhododendron hybrid, one truss or spray

Class 3

Any tender rhododendron species or hybrid grown under glass or otherwise, including vireyas, one truss or spray

Class 4

Any deciduous azalea species or hybrid, one spray

Class 5

Any evergreen azalea, species or hybrid, one spray

Class 6

Any camellia, species or hybrid one bloom

Class 7

Any magnolia, one truss or spray

Class 8

Any flowering tree or shrub, other than roses, one spray

Provisional Timetable for the Ramster Centenary Competition

Staging in the Marquee

Saturday 14th May from 5pm until 8pm and Sunday 15th May from 8am until 10 am

Judging (the Marquee will be closed to all but the judges and stewards)

10am until 11.30am

Marquee opens: 11.30am and the eight Class winners will be presented with their certificates

Presentation of the Centenary Cup: after lunch, immediately following the AGM in the Drawing Room

Full details will be sent out by email with the finalised show schedule and entry form. Everything will also be available on the Group website. If you do not have email and wish to know more, please phone me.

Polly Cooke

EDITOR'S NOTE

The next issue of the *Bulletin* will be August (no. 139). Copy date will be Friday 24th June 2022. By then I hope to have received more reports from the Branches of visits and activities planned for the later spring. Members' Notes, especially with photos, are not only very welcome but they are the lifeblood of this publication. We love to read of your experiences of gardening with our three genera, not just in the UK but across the globe, and other news.

Peter Furneaux

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER'S NOTE

Thank you to everyone who has been getting involved and sharing their plants, thoughts and gardening experiences on the RCM Group's social media. A huge amount of wonderful content has been coming through to inspire and bring together our big international community.

I don't know about you but I've had another view of the superb talks on our YouTube channel and that's the beauty of it: you can view them at your convenience, with a cup of tea and even a slice of cake!

Our Facebook forum is really growing, with over 6000 members. Discussions, plant identification and generally showing off your plants are all in abundance in this forum and if you would like to join in then please do here:

www.facebook.com/groups/RhCamMagGrp/?ref=share

Instagram has been extremely busy showing the world about our group, with great communications and some exquisite photos. Here are three I'd like to share with you.



Magnolia 'Ruth' Photo: Paco Garin, Iturraran, Spain



Rhododendron 'Polar Bear' Photo: Mark Joel, New Zealand



Camellia taliensis Photo: Richard Baines, UK

If you would like to share any photos or even videos of your rhododendrons, camellias or magnolias please send them in to communications@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Mark Bobin

APPRECIATIONS



Barry Starling receiving the Loder Cup from Roy Lancaster in 2015
Photo: Sally Hayward

Barry Starling AOH

It is with great regret that we announce the death of Barry Starling AOH, a great plantsman, hybridiser, master of the Ericaceae and a legend in the rhododendron world. He leaves a legacy of both plants and words which will forever enrich our gardens and gardeners. (His final 'Member's Note' appears on page 6.)

To properly record the full extent of his work, and the sheer number and range of his plant introductions will take time and a full tribute is planned for the 2023 yearbook.

Pam Hayward

Richard Thornton

Richard Thornton, who passed away in December, was a member of the Wessex Branch and served on the Branch Committee for over 30 years. I first met him one May evening when we were with Lady Adam Gordon, visiting her lovely garden, Heathersett and admiring her great collection of rhododendrons. Later, over a relaxing glass of whisky, Richard and Pam (Gordon) held animated discussions about every aspect of the garden, and its upkeep, with Richard showing a great knowledge of horticulture and a passion for plants. Indeed over the years I was grateful to him for sharing his knowledge, and frequently his advice.

Artistically talented, he painted charming landscapes of the places he visited. The Swiss Alps and the Dolomites were favourites, where he could study the alpines he loved. Later trips were to Yunnan, Sichuan and the Himalayas, which led to his extensive collection of meconopsis, all grown from seed.

For many years Richard helped Arthur George with the Hydon Nurseries stand at the Chelsea Flower Show, which consistently won a gold medal for its outstanding display of rhododendrons.

He started the garden at Sandy Slopes from scratch in 1995. On a very steep slope and on sandy soil, it was not an easy site. But he and Susan created a charming garden, and Richard's passion for collecting plants soon filled it with many carefully chosen rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias, hydrangeas and mahonias. A seam of the local Hythe Beds soil running through the garden enabled his plantings of meconopsis, primulas, trilliums and alpines to thrive. He and Susan opened the garden for the National Gardens Scheme and once word got around about this little gem of a garden, the visitors crowded in.

He was a popular speaker to gardening clubs and specialist societies all round the South-East and, always enthusiastic, he was especially encouraging to new members, particularly those exhibiting in a show for the first time. Highly competitive himself, he loved being awarded a first prize for one of his beautiful blooms. A plant collector to the end, in his last few days he persuaded Susan to buy four more *Camellia sasanqua* varieties to add to his collection, and to plant them where he could see them in flower. Not an easy task for Susan, who is now most ably managing the garden, in a space already packed with treasures.

Miranda Gunn



Richard Thornton Photo: Susan Thornton

Continued overleaf

Trumpeting spring

Running up to mid-January, it is getting steadily lighter, and now light enough to garden for a bit after 4.30pm on a clear day. It's all downhill to spring. The buds are already beginning to push on four of my first choice rhododendron species, now full of promise and impatient for light and warmth in a few weeks; most widely planted but still special and all flowering in March. In spite of this early showing they seem to get away with it and I do not recall the plants having ever been frosted. They had more or less finished flowering last year when the persistent April frosts caused the 2021 spring damage.

Graham Stuart Thomas, when he managed the Sunningdale nursery way back, described *Rhododendron calophytum* as the 'most noble' of rhododendron species and it seems a most apposite adjective for this magnificent plant. It is bone hardy as well as beautiful and we saw some excellent specimens on the Group Tour in cold north Germany some years ago.



Rhododendron calophytum SICH 1656

It will make a tree of some 7-8 metres in good conditions and I recall sitting alone on a damp moss-covered rock in a towering cool grove of these trees on Emeishan in Sichuan eating a cold Chinese sausage while contemplating the eternal verities, as one does; the trees shut out the light so that all below is boulders and moss and nothing but moss; and the light is a filtered semi-green seen through a glass darkly, the place hushed and slightly sinister, so I half expect a little green man to appear. Back in the outside world a few yards away and all was light and colour and the sheer magnificence of *Rhododendron calophytum*. Not surprisingly the species epithet means 'beautiful plant'. The plant figured is SICH 1656 at White House Farm, my home in West Kent.

The RCM Group visited WHF some 15 years ago and we organised a plant sale for the visit to raise funds. Tom Wood brought along a very nice plant of *Rhododendron sutchuenense* but for whatever reason no one bid for it and it remained unsold. It was from garden seed and perhaps in those days when there were plenty of collections from the wild, OP garden origin seedlings were thought to be not quite the thing. Tom left it with me and I planted it.



Rhododendron sutchuenense

It may well be a hybrid, but the image shows a bright fresh pink flower with nice spotting and a pale centre, atop a hanging ruff of dark green foliage, in flower on March 19 and an extremely effective flowering shrub, especially at this time of year. The plant is now about 2mx2m, clothed to the ground, very handsome and maybe a useful gentle reminder not to be too sniffy about OP seed of garden origin, especially since the seed list has now been 'Nagoya-d' of wild collected seed.

I find *Rhododendron lutescens* a superlative plant in foliage, flower and form, one of the classic plants of mid-March. I have what I bought as the FCC Exbury form many years ago and it never fails to shine every year with larger flowers than the type.

This form has great poise and colour as well as an open graceful habit and attractive bronze young growth; I have never grown 'Bagshot Sands', the Stevenson Tower Court form and wonder if any member grows both and has a view about which might be the more superior garden plant? I have raised seedlings, but all have been smaller flowered and inferior in quality.

There is a form now available with strikingly dark bronze growth which it keeps all through summer. A superb example of this luxuriates on the edge of the great grass bowl at Holker Hall, the wonderful Cavendish garden at Grange-over-Sands in Cumbria.



Rhododendron lutescens FCC Exbury Form

Finally, a species still rarely seen in gardens is *Rhododendron davidii*, but now generally available and so should become more widely planted. Discovered in 1886, and as it was named and described by Franchet, it seems likely that it was a David discovery. It was either never introduced as seed and only described as herbarium specimens or it was brought in and subsequently lost to cultivation, or it was some other plant masquerading under the *R. davidii* name. Whatever the reason, the real thing was not to be found in gardens until fortunately rediscovered and introduced by Edward Needham in the 1990s under EN 4213 – a bit over 100 years later. (See front cover).

Its campanulate purple/lavender flowers are freely borne and a pleasing colour which lasts well in the cool of March. It makes a bigger and more spreading bush than I had anticipated and now is growing embarrassingly freely, promising to outgrow its place. It is a nice complement to *R. grande* in flower and would look well with *R. ririei*.

Maurice Foster VMH

All photos by the author

An orphan looking for identity; the elusive 'Weeks'!

Not one of my usual bibliophilic contributions this time. For many years I have been growing the very dwarf *Rhododendron cephalanthum* ssp. *cephalanthum* Crebreflorum Group 'Weeks' Form'.

I am aware that it was available from Inshriach Nursery (Jack Drake) as far back as the very late 1960s and subsequently has appeared in various listings from Glendoick Gardens.

Despite all my attempts – every which way – I have never been able to trace any authoritative reference whatsoever to the elusive Mr/Mrs/Miss et al 'Weeks'. Does any member have recall or able to provide an authentic link and/or details?

Looking forward to being overwhelmed by replies.

John Sanders

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Rhododendron cephalanthum ssp. *cephalanthum* Crebreflorum Group 'Weeks' Form' Photo: Barry Starling

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Notes from Glenarn *Rhododendron dendricola* continued

The story so far. Pam Hayward has been reading Peter and Kenneth Cox's *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species* and notes on page 302 a photograph with the following caption: '*R. dendricola* Kingdon Ward 21512 from the Triangle N. Burma (formerly labelled *R. supranubium*) at Glenarn W. Scotland'. She emails to ask if we still have it. In response I wrote a note in Bulletin 135 March 2021 about initial investigations which narrowed the suspect down to two entries in our garden records, both under *R. supranubium*: one from Brodick in 1957 and the other from Arduaine in 1984. I said that I would report back.

Attention had focussed on a thicket of tender rhododendrons, which included *R. lindleyi*, *R. excellens* and *R. maddenii* ssp *crassum*. It was here, many years ago, I had found an old label for *R. supranubium* under some rotting logs. Poking out from under this mass of plants is another rhododendron, its spindly trunk going back almost horizontally two metres into the dark, only a fringe of foliage in the light, with leaves distinctly different from the others. It is surviving rather than thriving but had a few flower buds this last spring.

As I said, the two suspects are *R. supranubium*, but I am looking for *R. dendricola*. When the plant flowered in early May it was a bit of a disappointment; not very showy, subtle rather than striking if I am being kind. Of course, there is a danger when keying out a rhododendron that you are wishing a species into existence.

Continued overleaf

Nevertheless, this plant appeared to be close to *R. dendricola* (I am using Davidian's taxonomic description as that is the most detailed I have) except that the petiole is up to 1.7cm and not 1.3cm. Also, the size of the corolla is at the lower end of the range given, but I am putting that down to the season which saw all the flowers of *R. lindleyi* smaller than usual. While fragrant, it is not obviously so. The rest apparently conforms, down to the bottom third to half of the style being glabrous. However, the flower colour has a yellow tinge, not white or flushed pink as described, and while it shares a yellow blotch it is not as spectacular as Kingdon Ward's description in *Return to the Irrawaddy* (1956): "large pure white, with a yellow plume like a candle flame, or a single Prince of Wales's feather". And there is another doubt: can *R. dendricola* survive outside in the garden?

Kingdon Ward found *R. dendricola* in flower at the end of April at his base camp (4556 ft) from which he collected seed seven months later as KW 20601 and 20651. Clearly this is a low elevation rhododendron: "one of the most tender species of subsection Maddenia" according to *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species*. Davidian thought it rare in cultivation, and then only under glass. I am bound to wonder how, even in the most protected part of the garden, *R. dendricola* could have survived for at least 35 years and a few cold winters (assuming it is the plant that came in 1984 from Arduaine "formerly labelled as *R. supranubium*" as in the Coxs' caption).

If this rhododendron is not *R. dendricola*, what else could it be? As he ascended the mountains in the Triangle, Kingdon Ward recorded other rhododendrons including one at "around 7000 ft [...] the flowers are comparable to *R. dendricola* in a general sort of way, but the leaves distinguish the two species; nor is this beauty



Flowers of the rhododendron discussed in this note. Photos: Sue Thornley

known as *R. ciliicalyx* usually an epiphyte [...]. Out of bloom, its shining plum-purple bark betrays it. This bark peels off in flakes as thin as gold beater's skin [...]. The flowers, three or four to a truss, have a distinctly yellow tinge like Devonshire cream".

As I wrote in the earlier note, in 1955 the Gibson brothers, our predecessors who created the rhododendron collection at Glenarn, had obtained seedlings from Brodick of KW 21512 under the name *R. ciliicalyx* (less than two years after the seed being collected). They did not survive. The following year *The Rhododendron Handbook* 1956 lists KW 21512 as Ciliicalyx Series. In December 1957 the Gibsons obtained another two seedlings from Brodick with no collection number which they recorded as *R. supranubium* (one of the two suspects in this investigation). The next edition of *The Rhododendron Handbook* in 1967 now listed KW 21512 as *R. supranubium* and this was maintained in *The Rhododendron Handbook* 1988, four years after Ed Wright gave us a plant of *R. supranubium* from Arduaine (the other suspect). However, by the time the most recent version of *The Rhododendron Handbook* was published in 1998, KW 21512 had changed again: to *R. dendricola*. It appears that not only is this a search for a lost plant but also for a lost name.

I concluded the previous note with Peter Cox's comment: that many of these so-called species are one and the same – or at least not so distinct from each other to merit specific status. Although not as striking as Kingdon Ward's description I can see in the flower that I am looking at hints of the Prince of Wales's feathers of his *R. dendricola*. Also, I can almost imagine that my plant has plum-purple bark on its straggly trunk and I can certainly recognise the flower as being the colour of Devonshire cream of his *R. ciliicalyx* (or is it *R. supranubium*, or is it *R. dendricola*?): all very un-taxonomic I know. What has been interesting in this investigation is the zig-zagging between Kingdon Ward's writing, our garden records, taxonomic descriptions and the changes in *The Rhododendron Handbook* and other reference books. In answer to Pam's question as to whether we have a plant of *R. dendricola* formerly labelled *R. supranubium*, I don't know. I have found a plant but I won't be putting a label on it. There are some more flower buds and I will look again next spring, perhaps even show it to an expert, and report back...possibly. In the meantime, any thoughts will be welcome.

Mike Thornley

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A Plea for Peat

My first experience with peat was when my parents ordered some to be delivered and the wire-bound, chestnut staved bale was thrown onto our drive by a hefty delivery driver. They were men in those days but I wasn't! I was just fifteen and struggled mightily to move the two hundredweight of German Sorbex peat from the drive. Sorbex was the Rolls Royce of peats and was always recommended for composts.

However it was not until 1961, ten years later that I focussed more specifically on peat in horticulture. I successfully grew my first rhododendrons from seed in a 50/50 mix of peat and sand compost and have used the same ever since, always coming back to that after experimenting with peat alternatives. The process of germination was followed by pricking out and subsequently

potting into a peat compost containing fertiliser. Comparisons were made with other products and peat grown plants seemed to have the most balanced and healthy growth. They were not necessarily the tallest or the lushest but the ones which would ultimately adapt best to the garden environment.

Conservationists have targeted gardeners and blamed them for the destruction of peatland habitats. Now the threat to supplies of this fine product is looming, but use of peat by amateur gardeners and specialist growers accounts for just a tiny fraction of the worldwide use. Large quantities are still used as fuel to generate electricity in countries lacking coal, oil or gas but this is steadily being replaced by renewables. Large amounts are also still used in agriculture, for turf improvement on golf courses and in the horticultural industry, sometimes inappropriately for bedding plants and herbaceous perennials because it is lighter to handle by workers and customers than conventional loam-based composts.

Peatlands are certainly of huge importance as a carbon sink. So their destruction leads to CO₂ release and accelerates global warming. However the use of peat by gardeners must be trivial in comparison to the major uses noted above. Sadly peat has become a dirty word, but hopefully, providing misinformed bureaucracy can be overcome, peat may continue to be used in ericaceous composts and as an aid to soil acidification by enthusiasts who enjoy cultivating rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias, pieris, enkianthus, vaccinium, heathers and many other garden-worthy plants.

Barry Starling AOH



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The confessions of an impatient gardener – a story of Manganese Sulphate

As I wrote in Bulletin 134, December 2020, in July 2007 we moved from our house in Reading, where we had sandy, slightly acid soil, to our current house on the edge of Bakewell in the Peak District.

Here in the valley of the Derbyshire Wye the soil is very variable. 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 about a mile east in the Derwent valley and there on the hillside the soil is clearly acid with our three genera thriving. Up the hill behind us the pH rises, but in the valley there is a real mixture. Before moving here I did measure the pH and found the soil to be the acid side of neutral at 6.5 to 6.8. This has been fine for the magnolias, which also seem to tolerate the occasional flooding from the river which runs round the garden, but it had been clear that rhododendrons and camellias would need a bit of alchemy to help them.



Camellia japonica 'Sundae' April 2020, with a nice flower but foliage yellowing

We had brought a lot of plants to Bakewell from Reading including rhododendrons, magnolias and camellias. When they were planted I mixed sulphur pellets and slow release ericaceous fertilizer into the soil. This helped a bit but few of the plants really thrived: it was more a matter of survival. But we persisted.

In 2009 we bought a 'job lot' of a dozen large but discounted camellias. By this time I had read Colin Mugridge's article in the 2009 Yearbook: 'Growing rhododendrons on limestone – a personal experience.' This article described the value of manganese sulphate to counter the high pH in the soil associated with the limestone. So when planting the camellias, in addition to the sulphur pellets and ericaceous fertilizer, I sprinkled about a heaped teaspoonful of fine powdered manganese sulphate [aside: try explaining to an assistant at a garden centre that magnesium sulphate is not manganese sulphate, even if it might temporarily lower pH]. I also adopted the same strategy when planting new rhododendron acquisitions, or moving other plants. Adopting the Kingdon Ward advice to plant on, not in, the soil is difficult here, since when the river floods soil and even actual plants can be washed away – I just do what I can by selecting plant positions very carefully.

The benefits were not outstanding, and at best could be described as marginal. However I persisted and continued to use the 'white

Continued overleaf

powder' in this way. New foliage on the camellias would look fine at first but as the year progressed they would slowly turn a yellowish green. Liquid ericaceous fertilizer was applied, but again with just marginal benefit. Then I picked up from somewhere in 2019 that the way the manganese was applied to raspberries was as a foliar spray, and then there came further specific and detailed support for this method in the excellent article by Colin Mugridge and David Rankin in the 2021 Yearbook.

So in autumn 2019 I mixed up a solution of manganese sulphate and sprayed all my camellias. I impatiently waited to see the benefits, but after a few weeks there seemed to be no change so I decided I had not been generous enough and gave them another dose. In early spring 2020, and with the additional encouragement of the Yearbook article, but still with no obvious benefit I gave them another dose. Disaster. Within a few weeks all the leaves started to turn brown, and most of them dropped off. Soon all my camellias had lost nearly all their leaves.

Remembering advice from John David after the -18°C we had in late 2010: 'Don't cut anything until the end of August', I waited. Then the new foliage started to come and has never been so green and shiny. Wonderful. The plants were not only recovering but seemed to be far healthier than before.



Healthy new, glossy green leaves and some remaining brown and yellow foliage which had an overdose of manganese, photographed in early summer 2021

So the regime I am now adopting is to take a 15ml scoop of manganese sulphate powder, dissolve this in about 1 litre of warm water, make this up to 2.5 litre with cold water, and use this as a foliar spray. I find that 2.5 litre is sufficient for about a dozen medium sized plants (say 1.5m tall by 1m wide), and I apply this twice a year in early spring, and again in the autumn.

Note that due to periodic flooding from the river we cannot rely on leaf mulch as an alternative to the foliar feed. Nearly all those dead leaves which had been given three doses of a stronger solution than I now use, were dispersed by a flood late in 2021.

So my conclusion is that the manganese treatment works on camellias – but don't be impatient (it could be terminal) and don't overdo it! Obviously I am trying the treatment on my rhododendrons, and it seems to help but they have not been through the drama of the camellias so the impact is not (yet) so startling.

Richard Chaplin

Photos by the author.

BOOK REVIEW

The Eighth Wonder of the World – Exbury Gardens and the Rothschilds

Authors: Lionel de Rothschild and Francesca Murray Rowlins

ISBN: 978-1916040205

Paperback: 200pp

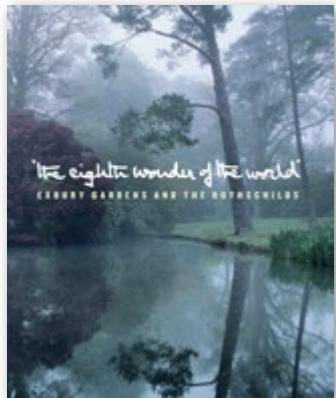
Format: Portrait (266mm x 222mm)

Publisher: Exbury Gardens Ltd

Publication date: July 2021

Price: £30

Available at a discount through Amazon



Many of us have memories of visiting The Rothschild Archives in London in 2019, when we were regaled with stories of the family and their gardens and viewed priceless artefacts, documents and photographs. Now there is an opportunity to learn about one of their most famous gardens – Exbury – which is celebrated in this beautiful publication.

The story of the garden from the beginning to the present day is told through historical facts, delightful anecdotes and stories, revealing a family passion for plants that began when Amschel Mayer Rothschild first bought a garden outside the Frankfurt ghetto in April 1816, and establishes the family's genetics as plantspeople and gardeners through the great gardens at Waddesdon Manor, Mentmore and Ascott House which, along with Gunnersbury Park in West London, became the envy of the horticultural world.

Then comes the indomitable Lionel de Rothschild and the development of Exbury from its beginnings to the present day. Chapters covering 'Lionel before Exbury' and 'Exbury before Lionel' when the property belonged to the Mitford family, lead to April 1919 when he bought the house plus 2600 acres of land, several farms and the hamlet and set to work. That his gardening consultants, ('his gardening godfathers') PD and JC Williams, had already created Lanarth and Caerhays indicate the intended scale of his project. To mitigate drought he sank boreholes, laid an elaborate irrigation system, comprising 22 miles of water pipes and 150 men double dug acres of land two spits deep. Lionel de Rothschild turns out to be a remarkable man and a remarkable gardener who, supported by skilled Head Gardeners, loyal staff and deep pockets, channelled his dynamism, vision and passion to establish his garden, and then shared his passion and plant material with his friends. By the conclusion of his life, you understand and admire the man and his motives and are carried along with his irrepressible enthusiasm and love of plants. It is not for nothing that his wry self-description 'a banker by hobby but a gardener by profession' resounds through the garden to the present day.

What of the plants? He planted a vast array of rhododendrons and other 'woodlanders' sourced from Sir Edmund Loder at Leonardslee, his Cornish contacts and hybrids from nurseries, including Knap Hill and Waterers, placing them carefully to avoid clashes of colour. He recorded everything meticulously in a card index, noting flowering time and plant associations

– like *Magnolia stellata* underplanted with grape hyacinth – and he built great glasshouses which he filled with orchids, nerines, clivias and tender rhododendrons. It was gardening and plantsmanship on a grand scale.

The book also tells the story of his involvement with the great plant collectors, told primarily through his passion for rhododendrons. Lionel acquired plants from EH Wilson (though his Kurume azaleas came direct from Yokohama Nursery in Japan), Joseph Rock and Reginald Farrer, who proved to be particularly successful. George Forrest also provided many choice plants. After his untimely death in China, Lionel arranged for the completion of his collecting and the return of his film plates and seed samples to Edinburgh and for his burial overlooking Tengchong but his ‘living memorial’ lies at Exbury. The plant hunter with whom he had the closest connection was Frank Kingdon-Ward, whom he sponsored for 20 years, distributing his collections to members of the Rhododendron Association and publishing his field notes.

The inevitable section on rhododendron hybridisation includes a wry cautionary note from JC Williams: ‘You get ten, fifteen, perhaps twenty years of pleasurable anticipation, and only *one* day of disappointment – the day your seedlings open their first flowers!’ Undeterred, Lionel sought to refine the flower colour or extend the flowering season or, in a few cases, grew rhododendrons purely for their leaves, removing the flowers. (Most rhododendrons are mentioned only in passing, so those seeking greater detail on the Exbury hybrids should have their copy of Peter Barber’s *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* to hand).

The history of the gardens during the war and its post-war revival, initially overseen by Lionel’s wife, Mariloo, is equally engaging, as is the enthusiasm and knowledge of his son Eddy and others who have constantly revitalised and refreshed the vision up to the present day. There are also specific sections on the Rock Garden, Knap Hill azaleas and orchid experiments among others, to enthrall and inform.

As you would expect, this quality publication is rich in detail, meticulously researched and beautifully presented. The text is complemented by clear, informative images, many of them published for the first time and is a ‘must read’ for anyone interested in the history of plants and gardens. A visit to Exbury



Rhododendron 'Augustinii' in Witcher's Wood Photo: Marie-Louise Agius



Rhododendron Naomi Group – a cultivar from one of the most famous Groups of hybrids raised at Exbury Photo: John Anderson

will inevitably follow. The only minor quibble is that, given the volume of information, a detailed index would have been helpful, particularly to those who are interested in the plants.

The title comes from a line in a letter penned by Frank Kingdon-Ward to the Keeper of Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, dated 24th April 1923: ‘I have just spent a very delightful weekend at Mr Lionel Rothschild’s place – he has a marvellous display of Rhodos. Within 5 years it will be the eighth wonder of the world.’ This is a colourful reminder for all who love rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias and gorgeous plant-filled gardens that this prediction has come to pass.

Matthew Biggs

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BRANCH NEWS

Irish Branch Visit to Mount Congreve

This is a reminder that bookings are now open for our Group visit to see the world famous Magnolia Collection (over 400 species, subspecies, varieties and cultivars) at Mount Congreve, Co. Waterford on March 18th. There will of course be lots of camellias and early rhododendrons in bloom, but the magnolias are incredibly impressive at this time of year. The tour will depart at 11am from the garden entrance by the walled garden, however, entry is strictly by pre-booking and open to members only, so if you plan to attend remember to send me your names and also bear in mind there will be a charge on the day. Several members have already booked so to avoid disappointment please do get your names to me on time.

Seamus O'Brien

MEMBERSHIP

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

UK

Henry Welch Richmond, Surrey
 Andrew Leverton Watford, Hertfordshire
 Jeanette Bristow Worth, West Sussex
 Philip Wiltshire Balcombe, West Sussex
 Daphne Halfpenny Ambleside, Cumbria
 Emma Page Lepe, Hampshire
 Mike Ross Trinity, Jersey, Channel Islands
 Michael Marsh Hay-on-Wye, Brecknockshire
 Martin Brown Ringwood, Hampshire
 Alan Elliott Penicuik, Midlothian
 Misako Kasahara Sevenoaks, Kent

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 Henri Speelman Gieterveen, Drenthe, Holland
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CANADA

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SEED LIST

An early call for donations!

As we look forward to the main flowering season for our three genera, may I make an early appeal to all members to think hard about seed collecting in their gardens this year. Make a note of those special varieties and species putting on an impressive display and mark your calendars to remind you to revisit those plants in August and September to see if they have set seed. Keep an eye on the pods and harvest them when ripe and almost fit to burst, package them carefully, remember to name them and send them off to our Seed Convenor when ready. Better still, with rhododendrons why not set about hand pollination? It's really not difficult and can be so rewarding. Hand pollinated seed is always sought after and brings a whole new perspective to gardening!

Pam Hayward

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Japanese Garden Society



Clipped evergreen azaleas at Keisuen garden

(Photo Graham Bowyer - japanesegardens.piwigo.com)



To find out more about the
Japanese Garden Society
please look at our website
www.jgs.org.uk



the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Group and Branch Meetings and Events

Members are more than welcome to attend events at any branches

MARCH 2022

Sat 12th / Sun 13th

RHS & South West Branch

RHS Garden Rosemoor
Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH

RHS Early Camellia Competition and the SW Branch Magnolia, Rhododendron and Spring Ornamental Competitions

Georgina Barter
020 7821 3142
georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

Dr John Marston
01271 267091
artavianjohn@gmail.com

Sat 12th

North West Branch

Ness Botanic Gardens

Annual Social Meeting, Quiz & Book Auction

Ted Brabin
0151 353 1193
angela.brabin@btinternet.com

Fri 18th

Irish Branch

Mount Congreve

Garden Visit

Seamus O'Brien
ireland@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Tues 22nd

New Forest Branch

Exbury Gardens

Exhibiting Blooms at Shows – A Demonstration by Tom Clarke, Head Gardener

Martin Gates
mgates@talktalk.net

APRIL 2022

Sat 2nd – Sun 10th

Irish Branch

National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh

Rhododendron Week

Seamus O'Brien
00353 (0)87 6298200
ireland@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Tues 5th

South West Branch

The Lodge, Fletchersbridge & NT Lanhydrock, Bodmin

Garden Visits

Dr John Marston
01271 267091
artavianjohn@gmail.com

Wed 6th

Irish Branch

National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh

Tour of the Gardens

Seamus O'Brien
00353 (0)87 6298200
ireland@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Sat 9th / Sun 10th

RHS

The Savill Garden, Windsor
TW20 0UU

RHS Main Camellia, Early Rhododendron & Spring Ornamental Plant Competitions

Georgina Barter
020 7821 3142
georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

Thurs 14th

Irish Branch

Dargle Glen, Enniskerry

Tour of the Garden led by David Koning

Seamus O'Brien
00353 (0)87 6298200
ireland@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Sat 23rd / Sun 24th

RHS and South West Branch

RHS Garden Rosemoor Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH

RHS Main Rhododendron Competition and the SW Branch Camellia, Magnolia and Floral Display Competitions

Georgina Barter
020 7821 3142
georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

Dr John Marston
01271 267091
artavianjohn@gmail.com

Sat 30th / Sun 1st May

RHS

RHS Garden Harlow Carr

Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition

Georgina Barter
020 7821 3142
georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

MAY 2022

Sun 1st / Mon 2nd

North West Branch

Ness Botanic Gardens

Branch Show (Bulley Room)

Ted Brabin
0151 353 1193
angela.brabin@btinternet.com

Wed 4th

New Forest Branch

The Savill Garden, Windsor

A Tour of the Garden with John Anderson, the Keeper

Martin Gates
mgates@talktalk.net

Wed 4th

South West Branch

Chevithorne Barton, Tiverton

Garden Visit

Dr John Marston
01271 267091
artavianjohn@gmail.com

Sat 7th

South East Branch

Hoards Cottage, Ashford

Garden Visit

Barry Haseltine
01342 713132
bhaseltine@btinternet.com

Sun 15th

RCM Group

Ramster

AGM and Centenary Cup Competition

Polly Cooke
secretary@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Thurs 26th

South West Branch

Dartington Hall & Avenue Cottage, Totnes

Garden Visits

Dr John Marston
01271 267091
artavianjohn@gmail.com

OCTOBER 2022

Sat 29th

South West Branch

RHS Rosemoor
Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH

Branch AGM & Autumn Meeting Plant Sale, Quiz, Bring & Tell Lecture by Tony Kirkham 'Wilson's China, A Century On'

Dr John Marston
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Members are more than welcome to attend events at any branches

Please send event updates to Wendelin Morrison
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