

# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales

Bulletin 139 / August 2022 / [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)



## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

In my previous notes I expressed my hope for the best with regard to the coming spring weather, and for the most part things turned out well for all three of our genera. The early magnolias had been hit in the previous two years by a combination of frost, rain and wind but on the whole, not this year and I was able to view my favourite *Magnolia campbellii* 'Princess Margaret' with pleasure. I was being shown around a member's garden earlier in the year and was asked which magnolia I would choose. My answer was almost instantaneous; indeed, I would recommend 'Princess Margaret' to anyone who has space for a large magnolia. It took me 20 years to acquire my specimen but it seems to be widely available these days.

The camellias were good this year, especially the *C. reticulata* hybrids; these work very well against a north wall (for me at least) but can get large so you need space or to be tough with the secateurs, but they are so impressive when they get into their stride and well worth the effort.

The rhododendrons have largely come and gone. 'Polar Bear', which normally blooms in August with me, this year started to come into flower on 26 June. We have clearly had a warm winter and spring and therefore, perhaps, an expedited season. One thing I have noticed this year is how big some of them have grown whilst I was not looking.

### Looking back and forward

I have been Chairman now for three years and looking back it is clear that we have been living in 'interesting' times through that period. This year things seem to have largely returned to normal and our members have enthusiastically enjoyed once again the opportunity to attend and participate in shows and events, as is evidenced by the reports in this bulletin.

### Annual General Meeting

This was held at Ramster Garden on May 15th. You can see the minutes of the meeting at [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/information/minutes](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/information/minutes)

### Centenary Cup Competition

After two years of virtual competitions, we were able once again to have an actual show and competition in conjunction with the AGM. Details of the winners can be found in the following pages.

### Secretary

Also at the AGM, after five years of impeccable work, Polly Cooke stood down from this important role. The Committee are very grateful for the assiduous work that she did. Polly will be a hard act to follow.

She gave us a year's notice of her intention and I must admit that I am disappointed that after many requests no volunteer has come



*Magnolia doltsopa* in Jill Carter's garden Photo: Angela Brabin (See page 12)

forward to take on the role. As a result, we have been forced to split the tasks up and spread them around the committee. That solution is neither very efficient nor sustainable so may I once again ask you to consider whether you can help.

Initially, we need someone to take minutes of our two-monthly committee meetings, the majority of which are held via Zoom and demand no travelling. Additional tasks could be added on as the volunteer felt ready to do so. Please contact me for more details.

### Joint Membership

offered from November this year!

### Membership

Starting from this November, we are intending to introduce a Joint Membership category. Philip Eastell our Membership Secretary provides details on page 2.

### Finally

You are reading a bumper edition of the bulletin. To the best of my knowledge it has never been 20 pages previously. I hope that you find it interesting.

Graham Mills

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The next issue of the *Bulletin* will be November (no. 140). Copy date will be Friday 30th September and I welcome contributions. Looking through your recent photos may remind you of interesting plants or places and we would love to hear about these. Send an email to [peterfurneaux@gmail.com](mailto:peterfurneaux@gmail.com)

Peter Furneaux

## MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S NOTES

### New Membership Category: 'Joint Membership'

With effect from November 1st this year (our traditional date for membership renewals) we are introducing a new category of membership: 'Joint Membership'.

This new category will allow partners living at the same address to also become members and enjoy all the benefits of membership, including voting rights at our AGM and their own e-copy of our bulletin issued three times a year.

Other benefits will be the option to join garden visits and tours together with other members and to receive information and news about events in their local region.

The cost of Joint Membership will only be £27.50 per year for 2 adults living at the same address or £75.00 for 3 years membership. Hopefully this new option will be welcomed by members with partners, who also want to enjoy all the same benefits of membership. For new Joint Memberships paid by Direct Debit taken out before November 1st, the new joint member will enjoy Free Membership until November 1st when the payment is taken.

Please complete a new Joint Membership Application Form and send to the Membership Secretary at [membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org) or post to 35, The Kiln, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 0LU.

If payment has been made by Direct Debit in the past, then please also complete and return a new Direct Debit mandate for joint membership and cancel your old Direct Debit.

The new Joint Membership Application Form is available on the website and can be either downloaded and printed or completed on-screen and emailed.

Should you require any further information or clarification please contact the Membership Secretary at [membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org)

### Email reminder!

Do please remember to let us know when you change your email address – you are missing so much if you don't!

Philip Eastell

## APPRECIATIONS

### Jim Inskip 1944–2022

Jim Inskip, best known to us all for his love and knowledge of deciduous azaleas, passed away on May 24th.

Jim followed a career as an electronics engineer, eventually running his own company selling broadcast electronics equipment. He was the son of a gardener but Jim had little interest in gardening. He did love plants though and his hobby for over thirty years was



Jim Inskip Photo: Barry Cooke

a quest to find the missing Ghent deciduous azaleas; over much of this time he was accompanied by Malcolm Nash and more recently he travelled with Andy Fly. His achievements in finding and propagating many of the missing Ghent azaleas is well known, resulting in Jim being awarded the A J Waley Medal in 2019. He also had in-depth knowledge about all three of our genera. A visit to Jim's Azalea Farm at its peak, demonstrated both his wide interest in plants and serious propagation skills.

We first met Jim on a Wessex Branch visit and soon became friends. After-dinner conversations between us could be varied, ranging from azaleas through to specific pieces of broadcast electronics equipment, all in one evening. We owe Jim a great deal. He involved us with the Isabella Plantation for the Wilson Fifty project, taught us propagation by seed and cuttings, and took us to gardens we could only have dreamt of visiting. Occasionally, Jim would turn up on our doorstep unexpectedly with a plant in his hand saying 'just been to the field and found this, thought you might like it'. The last time he did that, he gave us an Occidentale seedling of SM 502 ('Humboldt's Picotee'). Jim was anxious to discover if it flowered true to form; regrettably it didn't flower this year.

His contributions to the Wessex Branch are best summarised by Miranda Gunn, who wrote, after a recent Wessex Branch committee meeting:

"Tributes were paid to Jim Inskip, a committee member for five years, who sadly died in May. His knowledge of deciduous azaleas was legendary, and the Branch benefited greatly from this, and from his many contacts with the important collections throughout the country. His partnership with Malcolm Nash provided world class expertise in their field."

Jim had a long list of international contacts and many acquaintances from his interest in deciduous azaleas. The photo credits in Jim's two most recent articles for the Yearbook show just how well-connected and respected he was. A capable photographer, many of Jim's own photographs were published in specialist books.

Barry and Polly Cooke



I got to know Jim at the Wessex Branch events. He was great mates with Malcolm Nash, who at that time was on the Branch Committee. Together they went all over the UK and Europe looking for rare or lost deciduous azaleas. Malcolm had the knowledge and scientific nous in knowing what was what. Jim told me that Malcolm seldom got things wrong, in fact according to Jim he knew more than many other so called experts on the subject. For his part Jim kept meticulous records and data, including photographs of all they discovered for over 20 years.

After Malcolm passed away, he left me his collection of azaleas. Most I managed to save, and it was at this time that Jim spotted I had become very interested in the Ghents and asked me if maybe we could visit gardens together. We did this up until Jim's health started to deteriorate. I was forever in trouble for not making notes!

Knowing Jim has made me realise the importance of spreading plant material around. Don't expect our nurserymen to grow everything. It is also up to us to ensure there will always be a constant pool of plant material correctly labelled to share with other enthusiasts.

Andy Fly

### Lawrence Banks CBE, VMH

**N**ews of Lawrence Banks' death came too late to prepare a proper tribute which we hope can be published in a future edition of one of our publications. Rowan Griffiths' final article describing the rhododendron collection at Hergest appears later in this issue. (Editor)

## SHOW REPORTS

### The RHS Early Rhododendron, Main Camellia and Spring Ornamental Plant Competitions

9th-10th April 2022 at Savill Garden

**I**t was good to be back at the Savill Garden in Windsor Great Park after a gap of three years, and it was as if we had never been away. All our usual exhibitors, with a few new ones, resumed normal activities, old friendships were renewed, and the excitement and anticipation we have come to expect were well in evidence.

The one thing everyone remembered about the 2019 show was the bitter weather that hit the venue on both the Friday and Saturday nights, resulting in many frozen exhibits – a shocking experience for exhibitors and visitors alike – so we were all hoping there would be no repeat. In the event, the issue this year was a nasty cold and



*Rhododendron kesangiae* exhibited by the Crown Estate at the Savill Show



*Rhododendron augustinii* exhibited by Brian Wright

windy spell in late March which resulted in fewer exhibits than would normally be expected, but at least nothing was spoilt in the marquee, where heating had been installed to keep the frost out.

The rhododendrons had, perhaps, been the worst affected by the recent adverse weather. In the six species class, usually a show-stopper, I felt the overall standard was a bit below par, though there were some nice individual blooms. For example, in the Crown Estate's winning entry, the highlight for me was a sumptuous deep pink *R. kesangiae*, the flowers set off beautifully by a rosette of 11 unblemished leaves. In Exbury's second-placed set, a straightforward blood-red *R. arboreum* was perfect of its kind. Generally, I felt that even these great gardens had struggled to find sufficient fine trusses.



*Camellia japonica* 'Arciduchessa Augusta' exhibited by the Crown Estate

In the three species class, Hergest Croft (exhibiting here for the first time) received second prize, though their *R. falconeri* ssp. *eximium* was an outstanding example of a plant rarely seen at its best. Other rhododendrons which stood out for me were a green-eyed *R. augustinii* from Brian Wright, and three colourful Vireyas from Andy & Jenny Fly, who swept the board in that class, demonstrating their mastery of these tricky plants.

There were some really excellent exhibits in the Main Camellia Competition, and I was particularly impressed by the high standard of the challenging 12 cultivar class, where the judges must have

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found it difficult to choose between the three entries. In the event, Botallick gained first prize, along with the Leonardslee Bowl. The best bloom in the show was judged to be the rightly well-known *C. reticulata* hybrid 'Francie L.', exhibited by the Crown Estate. Another of their exhibits which created considerable interest was an ancient *C. japonica* hybrid, 'Arciduchessa Augusta', with remarkable imbricate flowers of an indescribable shade of mauve.

In the Spring Ornamental Plants Competition, as well as some fine magnolias, there were many impressive and unusual flowering shrubs on display. The Charles Eley Centenary Bowl, for four vases of different trees or shrubs in flower, was won by the Crown Estate; their exhibit included the ubiquitous *Spiraea* 'Arguta' whose dazzling white flowers proved that you don't need rarities to win major prizes at our shows.

The organisation of the show was a collaboration between the RCMG South East branch, Georgina Barter of the RHS, and John Anderson and his team from the Crown Estate, and they all deserve our gratitude and congratulations for a job well done.

Russell Beeson

All photos by the author.



*Magnolia* 'Lois' exhibited by Caerhays

preceding week or two had enabled many good plants to develop well, though anyone hoping to see a bumper year for Loderi blooms would have been disappointed, as only a handful of early flowers were on show on this occasion.



*Camellia japonica* 'R L Wheeler' exhibited by Trewithen

No fewer than five major RHS trophies are awarded at the Main Rhododendron Show. These were won by the Crown Estate (Lionel de Rothschild Challenge Cup), Caerhays (McLaren Challenge Cup), Botallick (Roza Stevenson Challenge Cup), Botallick (Loder Challenge Cup) and Exbury (Crosfield Challenge Cup). The winning exhibits demonstrated some of the supreme achievements at the show and are too numerous to list here. However, the Crown Estate's winning entry included quite magnificent trusses of *Rhododendron falconeri* and *R. hodgsonii*, and the *R. decorum* from Caerhays was perfect in its simplicity.

Most of the rhododendron species and hybrid classes were well supported, and I think it is worth noting particularly that there were many beautiful entries in the classes for tender and Vireya

## Main RHS Rhododendron Competition

### 23rd April 2022 at Rosemoor with SW Branch Camellia, Magnolia and Floral Display competitions

This was the big one, the premier show which all of us had been looking forward to with so much anticipation after 3 years. There was clearly a widespread desire to get stuck in again and all our usual exhibitors were there in force, along with a few who have rarely, if ever, exhibited at Rosemoor, for example Bodnant, Deer Dell and Tregothnan. Over recent years we have become used to a growing number of amateurs competing on equal terms with the major gardens, and this trend continued this year. The result was one of the fullest shows in recent history, with many late entries creating a headache for the organisers and stewards, who rose to the challenge and managed to fit everything in. As a result, the Garden Room looked magnificent and a credit to all concerned.

Talking to other exhibitors, there was general agreement that, despite some stormy and frosty weather in early spring, 2022 was a superb flowering year for our three genera and much else besides. Many put it down to some timely rain in the previous summer, which produced really good growth and bud setting. The first day of the show was overcast and cool, but several frost-free days over the



*Rhododendron hodgsonii* exhibited by the Crown Estate

rhododendrons, with Andy and Jenny Fly taking the honours for Vireyas, as they did at the Savill show two weeks earlier.

A new trophy was introduced by the SW branch this year, to commemorate a recently deceased and much admired local member: the Barry Starling Award (donated and presented by John Sanders) aimed to popularise the class for a rhododendron plant exhibited in a pot. Amidst several interesting and varied entries, this award was won by Minterne with a nice specimen of the popular 'Pink Drift'.

The SW Branch competitions also produced some outstanding exhibits, with Trewithen (as so often) winning the Trewithen Cup for their superb camellias, including a perfect bloom of *Camellia* 'R. L. Wheeler', which also won them the Williams Challenge Trophy. Rosemoor Garden was awarded the Quicke Cup for the best magnolia exhibit, with a huge vase of *Magnolia laevifolia*, flowering with unusual abandon. I was also bowled over by two spectacular vases of *Magnolia* 'Lois', one from Caerhays and the other from Botallick, which may have given encouragement to those who regard this as the finest yellow magnolia.

To sum up, this was a superb show, and the many exhibitors are to be congratulated for their efforts. Of course, the show also relies on the organisational skills and hard work of the RHS representatives, the SW Branch and Rosemoor staff, who did so much seen and unseen to ensure the success of the event.

Russell Beeson

All photos by the author.

## Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition

30th April 2022

The Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition was cancelled by the RHS at very short notice due to there being no entrants. Apologies for any inconvenience this caused. It is hoped that the 2023 event will attract both competitors and members' support.

Pam Hayward

## AGM, Centenary Cup Competition and Show

15th May 2022 at Ramster

After a 2 year absence, it was great to be able to finally hold an in-person AGM, and it was also lovely to be able to celebrate the Centenary of Miranda Gunn's family at Ramster, and see the outstanding gardens created there since 1922. In a marquee adjacent to the car park, members brought hundreds of blooms to enter for the RCMG Centenary Cup Competition.



The Centenary Cup Competition preparations in full swing at Ramster

This is a competition with simple rules and classes, ideal for novice exhibitors to gain experience for RHS competitions such as at Rosemoor and the Savill Garden, and novices did indeed participate with some excellent displays.

Some exhibitors set up on the previous evening, but most came early on the Sunday morning, and the marquee was buzzing with members from far and wide placing their exhibits on the new green cotton sheeting that the Group had purchased to cover the tables. As the time for judging approached at 10.00am, the scene became more like *Bake Off*, with last minute staging and labelling of a diverse range of exhibits. All classes were well represented except for camellias, due to the season being so early.



Centenary Cup Winner 2022: *Rhododendron* 'Karen Triplett' exhibited by Andy & Jenny Fly

### Class winners

Class 1: Species rhododendrons – Andy & Jenny Fly, *R. yunnanense*

Class 2: Hybrid rhododendrons – Andy & Jenny Fly, *R.* 'Karen Triplett'

Class 3: Tender rhododendrons – Chris Loder, *R. lindleyi*

Class 4: Deciduous azaleas – Brian Long, *R.* 'Freya'

Class 5: Evergreen azaleas – Rod White, *R.* 'Palestrina'

Class 6: Camellias – not awarded

Class 7: Magnolias – Exbury Gardens, *M. x weiseneri* 'Aashild Kalleberg'

Class 8: Ornamental trees and shrubs – Brian Long, *Davidia involucrata*

Special thanks are due to Dr John David and Colin Tomlin who kindly judged all the classes. After a social time chatting and studying all the exhibits, members walked across to the beautiful Ramster Hall where we were treated to a delicious buffet lunch, finishing with a Centenary Cake and incredible miniature cakes decorated to look like flowers.

The AGM was completed after lunch (see 2022 minutes online), and the Centenary Cup was presented by Colin Tomlin to Andy and Jenny Fly for their superb clean and fresh exhibit of *Rhododendron* 'Karen Triplett'.

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Miranda Gunn sitting on the wonderful Dragon Bench at Ramster

Miranda Gunn then gave a lovely presentation about her family and the development of Ramster before leading a guided tour of the gardens. The gardens were looking at their best, with many interesting Ramster hybrids and some of the RCMG Hardy Hybrid collection on Ant Hill giving a wonderful and varied display, plus of course all the famous R. 'Cynthia' giving a good show of deep pink! Miranda's hospitality in hosting the AGM, setting up the Centenary Show, providing a delicious lunch and then sharing some of her huge knowledge during the garden tour was much appreciated by all who attended the day, and she was presented with two of the 'Dane' series of foliage rhododendrons that she is collecting for the garden.

David Millais

All photos by the author.

## MEMBERS' NOTES

### Hergest Croft Gardens, Herefordshire Rhododendrons planted after 1940

*I should like to thank Lawrence Banks, whose close collaboration and penetrating memory were indispensable in writing this article. He was always generous with his knowledge and it was a privilege to share in his passion for plants. Darwin once said 'I learn more in these discussions than in ten times over the number of hours reading,' describing conversations with his friend Joseph Hooker. I dedicate the following article to Lawrence Banks, friend and mentor. Rowan Griffiths*



*Rhododendron griersonianum x elliottii*

In the last edition of the *Bulletin*, we left our story at the advent of war and a period of comparative neglect for the garden and Park Wood. Although R. A. Banks (Dick) would not return to live in Kington until 1953 it is clear his thoughts had already returned to horticulture and the gardens before his return. Summer holidays were often spent camping in a log cabin he had built in Park Wood after seeing them in Canada. When Peter Banks, his younger son, was asked at school what it was his father did, he answered 'hacking in the bushes and writing labels', and in this way much of the restoration began. While he recovered from mumps Dick spent a memorable month during 1949 in the log cabin doing just this. Like all gardeners, we are excited by the new and it was not long before Dick started to make additions to the garden and Park Wood.

In December 1940 there was a sale of rhododendrons from famous gardens for the Red Cross. Dick bought thirty-six. They included a number of excellent *Rhododendron griersonianum* hybrids of which the Leonardslee form of 'Tally Ho' as well as *R. griersonianum x elliottii* are all still extant in the garden.

Four *Rhododendron venator* from the sale came from John Barr Stevenson of Tower Court, Ascot. It was in the years following Stevenson's sudden death that his wife Roza contributed both plants and knowledge to the collection at Hergest. During several visits in the 1950s Roza helped to identify many of the rhododendrons which had lost their original labels. Following a similar visit by Dick and his wife Jane to Tower Court in 1960 they sent head gardener, William Cowdell, down to work with Robert Keir, the gardener there. They lifted a number of rhododendrons and Kurume azaleas and brought them back to Hergest. Amongst the rhododendrons were two 'Polar Bear' which Eric Savill, at Windsor, claimed were of Roza's own breeding.<sup>1</sup> At Hergest these plants are now some 30 feet tall. The Kurume azaleas, which are complex hybrids of *R. kaempferi* dating back to the 19th century, included five of the 'Wilson Fifty' originals, also eight such as 'Ko-murasaki', 'Noda-no-Sato' and 'Sanko', that JB Stevenson had bought direct from the Yokohama Nursery. Koichiro Wada made a selection of Kurumes on behalf of Stevenson, 'Roza always maintained that those from Yokohama Nurseries were better performers than Wilson's fifty.'<sup>2</sup> It is worth bearing in mind that the 'Wilson Fifty' were sent as bare rooted plants by Wilson to only two UK gardens: Caerhays and Tower Court. We are fortunate to have had plants recently re-identified by Dr Akihide Okamoto of the Kurume City World Azalea Centre in Kurume City.

Throughout the 1950s Dick continued to make purchases adding to the rhododendron collection in Park Wood, sometimes from nurseries such as Reuthe, preferred by his father, W. H. Banks. The free-flowering Japanese *R. quinquefolium* was bought from there in 1957. Other new sources begin to appear during this period. A huge mass of *R. lutescens* overlooking the pond, and a fine example of *R. rex* were purchased from Sunningdale Nursery in 1958 and before that, the hybrid 'Cilpinense' in 1956, after Jim Russell had spent time reviving the nursery. Dick made acquisitions from the Cox family at Glendoick as early as 1959, adding to the collection *R. aberconwayi*, *R. lepidostylum* and a form of *R. souliei* planted with the FCC form, also from Reuthe.

Other plants accumulated from friends and garden visits too numerous to mention, but one plant that stands out is a fine example of *R. sinogrande* for which we owe thanks to the Lord Strathcona of Colonsay who bought gifts of two self-sown seedlings in 1979. This plant has come surprisingly true for an open-pollinated garden



plant. A collection of *Ledum* (now *Rhododendron*) was given by Mr Hulme of Ness in 1978, of which one still survives. In June 1977, Dick made a trip to Bodnant, accompanied by Hugh Johnson, to collect two forms of *R. williamsianum* which Lawrence, Dick's eldest son, had selected. Lawrence and his wife Elizabeth (a landscape architect by profession) would guide the garden through its most recent evolution. It was becoming clear that the 'rhodomania' that had afflicted W. H. Banks had a genetic basis.

Dick married Rosamund Gould in 1976, having lost his first wife Jane in 1974. Rosamund's background in floristry, having co-founded the florists Pulbrook & Gould, would go on to make a longstanding contribution to the garden and Park Wood. Following his retirement in 1964, Dick had had the opportunity to embark on travels of a botanical bent and this continued after his second marriage when he and Rosamund would travel regularly with the International Dendrology Society which they joined following its visit to Hergest Croft Gardens in 1967.

On a tour to China in 1981 Dick observed, recorded, and pressed a wealth of plant material. Seeds collected from the sacred Mount Omei in Sichuan produced garden plants of *R. wiltonii*, more often described from plants growing on Erlang Shan<sup>3</sup> from Henan province, though the Mt. Omei plant shows no remarkable differences.



*Rhododendron wiltonii*

Dick probably laid claim to the first introduction of *R. dendrocharis* from the same expedition. During a Turkish tour in 1982 with Jimmy Smart and Martyn Rix a Subsection Pontica species was collected which is yet to be definitively determined but is either *R. smirnowii* or *R. uernii*.

Friends would sometimes leave seeds or plants with Dick and several of these made a permanent home here. *Rhododendron calophytum* and a beautiful plant from Subsection Argyrophylla, also from Mount Omei, were left by fellow traveller Corona North, who was responsible for restoring the wilderness she inherited at Altamont, Co. Carlow, into one of the great gardens of Ireland.

One of the major undertakings in restoring the garden during this period, and to some extent one that continues to this day, was the re-siting of overcrowded and unhappy plants or the layering of plants too large to move. Dick spent many hours lifting and moving plants, which undoubtedly saved many from inevitable demise. A classic example is the huge plant of *R. falconeri* which grows on an island in the stream in Park Wood and which had to be built up with



Subsection Argyrophylla rhododendron species from Mount Omei

leaf mould to avoid being drowned. We are all too often hesitant to lift rhododendrons. There are many examples of important plants which are still with us because of Dick's judicious re-siting.

Hybrids raised by his sister Rosa Banks, who experimented with hybridising in the 1920s, are still flourishing; *R. thomsonii* x 'Ernest Gill' being one of her finest crosses. Many others were planted out by Dick after being abandoned in nursery beds. On occasion, outside help from fellow enthusiasts was, and is, welcome. One such fortunate plant is *R. sanguineum* var. *haemaleum* which Dick notes was 'grafted by Mr Clarke in 1984, though it was possibly a cutting taken by Frank Hansen from the same plant in 1985.' It is clear from such reminiscences how a network of horticultural allies and the continuous propagation and replanting has much to do with finding as many of the original plants extant today.

The 5-acre 'Tups' field between the Azalea Garden and the lane was taken into the garden by Elizabeth and Lawrence in the mid-1980s. It was referred to as the New Planting until Elizabeth Banks, passing the 'New Inn' at Pembridge built in 1311, decided it was high time it was given a name – Maple Grove. In 1992, to soften the transition between the Azalea Garden and Maple Grove, beds of Knap Hill azalea hybrids bought from Bridgemere – 'Double Damask' and 'Persil' – and those raised at Exbury – 'Oxydol' and 'Berryrose' – were planted, providing a natural progression into the new planting. Throughout, groups of Loderi rhododendrons have been added; 'Venus' and 'Game Chick' both start a strong pink before fading. David Millais provided us with our most recent addition, the introduction of the later-flowering Midsummer Series of deciduous azaleas, often flowering as late as August and a brilliant way to extend interest in the understory layer of an arboretum. These are the culmination of a 15-year breeding programme with *R. viscosum*, started by the late Ted Millais.

The timing of the inception of the Maple Grove was serendipitous as political barriers for plant exploration in China were relaxed, and here was the perfect place to grow a new wave of plant introductions. This was really the first time wild collected seed had arrived directly in substantial quantities to Hergest Croft.

Throughout the last twenty years many of those rhododendron species we received have begun to flower and flourish. Perhaps one of the most notable introductions of recent years has been *R. suoilenhense*; with its huge creamy corollas it reminds one how

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*Rhododendron suoielhense* makes an outstanding shrub (above) with plentiful impressive and eye-catching trusses (below)

Victorian and Edwardian gardeners must have felt witnessing these huge flowers from subsections Grandia and Falconera for the first time. We received the seed from Fergus Kinmonth in 1992 and when it was first formally described in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* in December 2019 the plant was illustrated from our specimen by Christine Battle.

One of the expeditions that produced a wealth of notable plants was that of the Alpine Garden Society in 1994, producing a fine example of *R. rubiginosum* ACE1664 from Subsection Helirolepida; their lightness of habit and pretty pink flowers are a joy in the Maple Grove and Park Wood.

In 1997 Dick died, continuing his work on the cataloguing and labelling in Park Wood to the last. The collection in Park Wood would continue to expand under the careful stewardship of his widow Rosamund. In the early 2000s Rosamund increased the number of species rhododendrons in one of the few areas in Park Wood that still boasted relatively high light levels. I'm often reminded of Peter Cox's advice when walking the deeper paths of Park Wood that when thinning trees, 'mark the number of trees you think should come out, go and have a strong drink, then come back and mark twice as many again!' The bank leading to the Flower Fall was an ideal place; it is surprising only that a previous generation had not got there first. Many new plants were added, including several interesting plants from Subsection Glischra: *R. glischroides* with attractive bullate foliage and crimson-scarlet flowers, and the slightly less compact but no less attractive *R. glischrum* ssp. *rude* (*R. rude*), with its distinctive bristles on the upper surface of the leaf.

Perhaps not the most valuable garden plant of this group, *R. adenosum* was considered extinct in the wild until May 2020 when Chinese botanists, during two days in the Kulu mountains (the type location), rediscovered one individual, currently the only known wild specimen.

We try always to remember our responsibility as an ex situ conservation site when making decisions about which plants to grow and which to remove. Rosamund was assisted by Peter Cox in the selection of species. They included recent introductions, many of which are turning out to be promising. *Rhododendron huianum* like many of its Fortunea allies grows vigorously and has more of a purple hue to the flowers than its close relatives. I was surprised to see Hilliers' suggests this is not an easy plant to grow well as two growing in different positions have both thrived here.

Another new species is *R. ochraceum* with leaves bearing a matted woolly indumentum and arranged to give the impression of neat whorls, reminiscent of *R. pachysanthum* which Dick planted in 1991, to which it is related through Subsection Maculifera. However, *R. ochraceum* boasts scarlet flowers more reminiscent of *Neriiflora* to which Davidian assigned it on account of its indumentum. Classification aside, this is an exceptional plant to be introduced as late as 1995. Another Maculifera of an entirely different appearance to those already mentioned is the Taiwanese *R. morii* planted in Park Wood by Dick in 1994 and again by Rosamund in 2010; this species appears willing to flower anywhere, even in deep shade. Rosamund enters her 100th year in 2022 and can witness how many of the species she has sourced and added to the garden are really starting to perform.



*Rhododendron glischroides*

One of the pleasures of recent years has been to witness the first flowering of many of the seeds collected by Chris Chadwell throughout the Himalayan region. There is a fine group of *R. arboreum* from his Kohli Expedition to Nepal with Alastair McKelvie in 1991. They are a fantastic example of the variation encountered within the species growing at different altitudes, particularly in the wonderful variety of indumentum from silver and gold to brass and fawn. Although the C&MC plants all bear the pink flowers associated with var. *roseum*, they also demonstrate the variation in indumentum not always associated with this variety in the literature. Another example from a different expedition is CC2899 which bears all the signs of being a good lower altitude *R. arboreum* ssp. *arboreum*, with blood red flowers and a silvery white indumentum. It is surprising then that the plant came through the 2010/11 winter when we reached lows of  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$ .



A mystery from this group came out of a seed packet of CC1007 which are all *R. arboreum*, probably ssp. *cinnamomeum*, with pink and white flowers and brass-coloured undersides to leaves, excepting one plant of *R. barbatum*. This is most likely a rogue seedling from a nearby plant when the seed was collected. What is clear is that all these plants are certainly no less beautiful for some of the questions they pose, and we are grateful for the important contribution to the collection made by Chris Chadwell and his colleagues.

Two more recent collections include violet-tinted *R. campanulatum* that look very promising and CC98316, an extremely floriferous plant from Subsection Triflora. It looks closest to *R. rigidum* with its leathery leaves, although this Chinese species does not occur with a westerly distribution reaching the Himalaya. *Rhododendron yunnanense* is perhaps the only suitable identification based on distribution but morphologically I think *R. rigidum* is a better fit. The inflorescence of this last plant can often bear so many individual blooms as to produce the pom-poms we associate with so many hardy hybrids.

As we draw our story of the Rhododendron Collection here at Hergest Croft to a close we inevitably have an eye on the future. Lawrence and Elizabeth's son Edward and his wife Julia are now the fifth generation of the Banks family to be planting here. There are challenges ahead and one which faces all gardeners is that of climate change. In the first of these articles Lawrence wrote that our average rainfall is around 42 inches a year, and although this is still largely the case, last year we received only 36.3 inches. Over the last three years it has certainly felt more often than not that summer and spring rain has gone wanting while most has fallen in the autumn and winter. *Primula pulverulenta* that we once considered a weed is a good litmus test for spring rainfall and its numbers are greatly reduced. We now plant rhododendrons as early as possible in the winter and no later than the end of March. I've had to move plants such as 'August Fire' – a selection of *R. prunifolium* which requires a damper site – to parts of the garden that stay moist most of the time as I can no longer rely on regular summer rainfall.

There is some solace as we have discovered a number of varieties previous generations would surely have considered too tender for the garden have thrived outside, particularly those from subsections Maddenia and Edgeworthia. Having had initial success with *R. maddenii* ssp. *maddenii* (which arrived under the synonym *R. brachysiphon*) and *R. edgeworthii* in sheltered spots, we were emboldened to try their hybrids outside. Both 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam' (*edgeworthii* x *formosum*) and the less well-known offspring 'Actress' ('Lady Alice Fitzwilliam' x *edgeworthii*) have done well. I don't believe there are better scented plants in the garden. 'Sesterianum' with the same *R. edgeworthii* x *formosum* parentage appears to do better here than 'Fragrantissimum'. One of the more recent *R. edgeworthii* crosses that is proving itself a very worthy plant is 'Tinkerbird', Peter Cox's breeding with *R. ciliatum*. All the above are grown in either a very sheltered spot we call the Scots' Grove, which has a canopy of *Quercus ilex* under the Scots pines or the Park Wood. A group of *R. maddenii* ssp. *crassum* that thrive at around 900 feet in the Maple Grove was a revelation. These from the Chadwell and McKelvie Kohli Expedition to Nepal, bear the largest flowers of any of the Maddenia we grow. It is a clone surely worthy of wider cultivation having coped with temperatures of -15°C degrees unscathed. Joseph Hooker surely did *R. maddenii* a disservice when he described it as 'faintly odorous', however another species from the Maddenia subsection, *R. valentinianum*, although completely unscented more than

compensates with a profusion of its citrus yellow flowers. One plant from Inverewe and another from Fergus Kinmonth work equally hard for our attention. *Rhododendron johnstoneanum* I find also to be very little scented though it is an attractive plant, with larger flowers than *R. valentinianum* and perhaps a softer yellow.

I think it is probably inherent in gardeners to always be looking to improve and innovate, however, having the opportunity to collaborate on these articles with Lawrence has offered a timely reminder of the value of pausing our forward momentum to take a look back at the combined efforts of all those who brought us to this point. A garden such as this grows on an enormous repository of experience and knowledge. It is through the records left by Grandfather Willie and Father Dick that we are fortunate enough in 2022 to still be drawing on that self-same knowledge, and it has been a pleasure spending time among all the notes and lists in which their passion is so evident.

Rowan Griffiths

All photos by the author.

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## Scottish Rhododendron Society Tour

27th April – 3rd May

The 2022 Scottish Rhododendron Society Tour was based in south west Scotland roughly between Stranraer and Castle Douglas. Though my intention was to focus on rhododendrons and their identification, the tour encompassed many fine woodland gardens and was an opportunity to see and learn from these as well as from fellow professionals. What follows is a summary of the principal highlights of the tour along with the main lessons learned.

Day one and the afternoon of the tour took us to the fabulous Glenwhan Gardens near Dunragit, not far from our base at the North West Castle Hotel, Stranraer.



A view across one of the lakes at Glenwhan Gardens

Continued overleaf





Members of the SRS Tour of Galloway Gardens at Tessa and Ian Knott Sinclair's garden at Glenwhan

The most special gardens, in my humble opinion, are those that evolve over the years and are very much the passion project of interested and enthusiastic owners. Glenwhan certainly lives up to this standard.

We arrived and were served an enormous lunch of soup and sandwiches in the on-site café. This provided an opportunity to chat and catch up with a contingent from Germany, led by Hartwig Schepker, who joined us on part of the tour.

The gardens at Glenwhan have been created over the last 40 years, though conjured might be a better word to describe their creation. The owner, Tessa Knott (and her first husband) purchased 103 acres of rough, gorse-covered ground in 1971, though the advantages of the site for garden-making became obvious. Warmed by the Gulf Stream and with panoramic sea views and a southerly aspect, this is an excellent landscape in which to grow and display rare and exotic plants, shrubs and trees. There are few of us who could say we were lucky enough to begin our gardens with a blank canvas.

The garden is based around two small lochs created using the water that flows through the garden from a Georgian reservoir and this brings so much life and movement to the garden as well as reflecting the plants and the sky.



*Rhododendron davidsonianum*

Rhododendrons feature prominently at Glenwhan including many hardy hybrids that were amongst the first things to be planted, such as old favourites 'Cynthia', 'Phyllis Korn', 'Cunningham's White' and the Loderi Group. As the shelter belt grew up and Tessa's interest increased, species rhododendrons were planted, to take advantage of the microclimates within the garden. These include impressive examples of the large leaved species including *R. sinogrande*, *R. macabeum* and *R. sinofalconeri*. As someone who gardens in Shropshire, a drier part of the country without the moderating influence of the Gulf Stream, I must confess that my mouth was watering at the sight of such impressive plants. There were also impressive specimens of *R. oreotrephes* and the wonderful *R. kesangiae*. It was great to see this latter plant in flower as mine has not yet reached that stage. *Rhododendron davidsonianum* and *R. rubiginosum* were also impressive in the sunshine.

There were also numerous plantings of evergreen azaleas including the bright (though not garish) *R. 'Kirishima'*.

Also impressive were the large *Myrtus lechleriana* that were in full flower which almost obscured the neat glossy foliage and I frankly confess to losing my heart to a wonderful *Betula potaninii* which displayed its wonderful peeling bark in shades of russet, brown and orange.



*Camellia x williamsii* 'Brushfield's Yellow'

Camellias were also still going strong in some parts of the garden including *C. x williamsii* 'Brushfield's Yellow' with soft lemony centres to its creamy flowers. *Olearia phlogopappa* 'Combers Blue' displayed its daisy-like purple flowers. From a distance it seemed like an out of season aster!

Our visit culminated with a group photo and expressions of warm appreciation and affection for this outstanding and deeply personal garden.

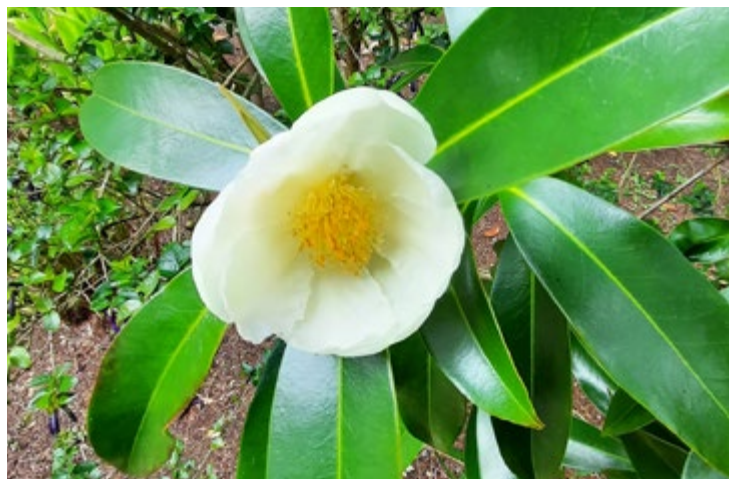
Day two took us to Logan Botanic Garden where we were guided by the curator, Richard Baines. Logan is probably the mildest garden in Scotland, enjoying an almost sub-tropical climate, moderated as it is by the Gulf Stream and the Mull of Galloway. There was a huge amount to see at Logan and it was interesting to hear Richard Baines speak on the predicted effects of climate change and how plants grown at Logan could be more widespread. What it brought home was the need to understand the microclimates that exist within a garden. The walled garden at Logan was particularly interesting and contained some notable plants that I am trying to cultivate at Hodnet including *Polylepis australis* (Logan holds a champion tree of this species), *Rehderodendron macrocarpum* and *Carrierea calycina*.





The amazing contorted trunk of *Polylepis australis*

There were also interesting newly introduced members of Theaceae including *Polyspora*, a genus which has only recently become established taxonomically but has potential to be grown in sheltered areas outside of the mild south west and more moderate areas such as the Welsh coast and south west Scotland.



*Polyspora* species at Logan Photo: Peter Furneaux

During the tour we visited Richard Baines' own private garden where he is establishing and selecting many plants collected by himself including selections from seed-grown *Araucaria*. Of most value were his propagating facilities where he grows many new introductions from seed. He also grows a number of magnolias from seed, especially *Magnolia wilsonii* and has already named one clone. How he propagates his rhododendrons was very instructive and I learned much about the different growing media he uses, feeding and other regimes. This was one of the most useful parts of the tour. As wild-collected seed has become increasingly unavailable, I was eager to discuss how gardeners such as myself might get hold of and trial new introductions and was able to make valuable connections in this area. Dissemination of wild-collected material is a key conservation tool and provides valuable information on how different species will grow in different areas of the country. There were in-depth discussions of the relative merit of species categorisation as a useful tool, especially when rhododendrons hybridise freely across their ranges, as opposed to groups or clades. This taxonomic discussion included some finer points of identification which proved useful at Logan House Garden where many purported species, though wild-collected, were actually hybrids, especially amongst different

members of the *Grandia* subsection. It was very instructive to see some of the morphological changes when hybridisation between *R. rex* ssp. *rex*, *R. rex* ssp. *fictolacteam* and *R. arizelum* were looked at or where *R. falconeri* had crossed with another unknown species. Looking at the intermediate characteristics between different species gave valuable insight into what to look for when trying to identify plants. Hearing a group of knowledgeable enthusiasts debate the finer points of different characteristics was an education in itself. It is always reassuring when the 'experts' are as in the dark about the same things as you are!



The highly productive propagation facilities used by Richard Baines

As a professional gardener managing a large woodland garden, some of the most valuable arts of the tour were gleaned when we had chance to speak to fellow professionals in similar situations. This opportunity came when we visited Castle Kennedy and Threave. At Castle Kennedy we were shown around by the current and former head gardeners who were able to explain how the gardens had developed, what the challenges were and how they were coping and what they intended to do for the future. Above all loomed the shadow of Storm Arwen, and many of the gardens we visited were still in the recovery phase.

Judgements or constraints imposed by time, manpower and money meant that each garden had tackled the 'clean up' in different ways and it was good to pool our collective experience. Especially as such storms will only become more prevalent with climate change. Planting for resilience formed a large topic of conversation, not just because of weather but also from a pest and disease point of view. Gardens of woody plants can be especially vulnerable because they don't always re-grow fast enough to recover from disasters. Obviously the experience of dealing with *Phytophthora ramorum* was instructive. At Castle Kennedy we discussed a grassland project which had the additional benefit of lower cost and environmental impact with reduced mowing. In addition, we debated the need to manage an historic landscape in a sympathetic way whilst also planning for an unpredictable future. The free exchange of ideas was one of the best aspects of the tour.

In conclusion, we visited many great gardens in the company of excellent and enthusiastic gardeners where ideas flowed freely. There are many lessons I will take back to Shropshire to pass on to staff there as well as building on the connections made whilst on the tour. I would like to thank the Professional Gardeners' Trust for its support, which, at a time of rising costs made it less of a struggle to attend this worthwhile garden tour.

Ross Underwood

All photos by the author unless otherwise stated.



## Mercurial Magnolia

Two close gardening friends, Liz and Peter Carter, who live nearby, both obsessive plant collectors, made visits to Cornish gardens many years ago. Having filled their garden attached to their house, they bought a further large plot of land, up the lane from home, and commenced clearing brambles, nettles and a miscellany of other weeds. In the meantime they had been to Cornwall and were entranced by specimens of *Michelia doltsopa* (as was), now *Magnolia doltsopa*. In a moment of madness they bought one and planted it in their new 'field' in the mid-eighties. Had they asked me I would have advised there was no chance of it thriving in the Wirral. However, this garden is very well protected and has a mild microclimate. The magnolia grew and grew, with no hint of a flower, until the International Camellia Society visited in Spring 1997. In the presence of such an august body and to celebrate their visit, two flowers were produced. This was such an event that Peter affixed a ladder to the now quite tall specimen, to enable visitors to savour the fragrance. Many did and none fell off the ladder!

That was that and not a single flower for years, partly discouraged by the winter of 2010/2011, which killed the top half of the tree. This was unceremoniously chopped off. The years passed and the husband, Peter, had died. The wife, Liz, passed the tree almost daily and nothing but leaves were produced. As far as flowers were concerned, it was like the burial of Sir John Moore.

Then, she walked past it this year and glanced upwards and lo, about 150/200 flowers 30 feet from the ground, at the top of the tree. Far too high to have a sniff, with any kind of ladders.



Flowering again at last, Jill Carter's *Magnolia doltsopa* with its topping of white blooms Photo: Angela Brabin (Also see page 1)

I was summoned by Liz to share in her excitement and was bowled over to see it, in March, bedecked in its glory. A phrase used for another plant sprang to mind '... even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these'.

Is this a sign (possibly ominous) of things to come.

Ted Brabin

## BOOK REVIEW



### Borde Hill Garden – A Plant Hunter's Paradise

Author: Vanessa Berridge

ISBN: 978-1858946900

Hardback: 206pp

Format: Portrait (250mm x 290mm)

Publisher: Merrell

Publication date: 28 April 2022

Price: £40

Available at a discount through Amazon

One of the most treasured volumes in my library is a bound copy (published in 1935) of a *Catalogue of the Trees and Shrubs (excluding Rhododendrons) at Borde Hill, Sussex* in December 1932. It was compiled by the Kew-based botanist and dendrologist Albert Bruce Jackson (1876–1947) with a foreword and notes by Col. Stephenson Robert Clarke CB. My copy was bequeathed to me by a long-time friend and colleague of mine, the late Hatton Gardner who for many years in the 1960s spent much of his free time updating the plant records at Borde Hill via a card index system.

Borde Hill, one of the great gardens of Sussex, and Britain for that matter, benefited from the personal interest and endeavours of several successive generations of the Clarke family beginning with Colonel Stephenson Robert Clarke (1862–1948) and continuing through to the present day with Andrewjohn Patrick Stephenson Clarke (1955–). My earliest visit to this plant paradise was in the 1960s when the then owner Ralph Stephenson Clarke (1892–1970) invited my employer Harold, later Sir Harold Hillier, a long-time gardening friend, to tour the collections. It was an experience I shall never forget and we were joined by the Head Gardener Brian Doe. It was the first of many visits, which included an equally memorable day in July 1975 in the company of Tony Schilling together with the late Alan Mitchell and the late Desmond Clarke (a cousin of Robert Nunn Stephenson Clarke (1925–1987)), a well-known dendrologist and Chief Editor of the Eighth Edition of W.J. Bean's *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*. On this occasion we had come together principally to view and discuss the many birch (*Betula*) species and varieties represented, and guided by the then Head Gardener Jack Vass, we went on to look at the many other trees and shrubs there which included a huge selection of rhododendrons, species and cultivars, and likewise camellias.

Indeed, it was at Borde Hill that one of the most popular and famous camellias of all time, *Camellia x williamsii* 'Donation', was raised from a cross made in the winter of 1937–38 by the then Head Gardener Walter Fleming between *C. saluenensis* and *C. japonica* 'Donckelaeri' (now known as *C. japonica* 'Masayoshi'). The details of 'Donation', including its introduction to commerce and subsequent success, is but one of the many stories to be found in this long awaited, fulsome and fitting tribute to the Garden and





This glorious aerial view of Borde Hill showcases the layout and the wealth of trees which characterise the garden Photo: © Nick Barrie

the gardening dynasty that created and continues to develop and support it.

Its author has faithfully recorded a real-life saga that features a supporting cast of some of the most significant names in British gardening history, spanning the late Victorian era to the present day. There is a skilful balance in the narrative which, while detailing the lives and times of the Clarke family living in the “big” house reminds us also of those other individuals who in their own ways contributed to the story, in particular the gardening staff. It comes as no surprise that the roll call of Head Gardeners from the beginning included some of the most skilled and respected of their profession and it is fair to say that the respect was acknowledged by their employers to their mutual benefit. Indeed, some of those who shone at Borde Hill subsequently pursued a successful career elsewhere.



*Magnolia campbellii* ssp. *mollicomata* ‘Borde Hill’ raised at Borde Hill from F25655 Photo: © John Glover Photography

Inevitably, it is the Garden that dominates the show and the author faithfully reminds us of the sheer numbers and variety of plants successfully grown at Borde Hill, reflecting the many and varied interests of the Clarkes and the many sources and calibre of their suppliers, be they nurseries such as Veitch or Hilliers, plant hunters including Wilson, Forrest and Kingdon Ward or friends and fellow enthusiasts such as Lionel de Rothschild at Exbury and George Johnstone at Trewithen, while RHS Wisley and the botanic gardens at Kew and Edinburgh also played their part.

Every visitor will have their own special tree moments and I know I won’t be alone in choosing the Garden of Allah, an area close to the house created by Stephenson Robert Clarke in 1925 where he

was inspired to plant a “who’s who” of special trees which included *Magnolia fraseri*, *M. officinalis* and *M. obovata* from S.E. USA, China and Japan respectively, known here as ‘The Three Sisters’ or ‘The Holy Trinity’. Nearby he added a Chinese Tulip tree *Liriodendron chinense*, a Wilson original bought from Veitch in 1913 which represents as impressive a quartet as can be found anywhere. Not far away in Warren Wood is another signature tree in *Meliosma alba* (formerly *M. beaniana*), one of only three in British collections. Almost, if not as important as the ‘woodies’ are the enormous numbers of perennials including bulbs which attract their own admirers.

This brings me to the colour illustrations, most of which were provided by John Glover. There are garden books in which the text is dominant and the illustrations disappointing and vice versa. Here the illustrations are beautifully in sync with the narrative and are particularly successful in capturing the spirit of the garden and its plants through the seasons. They also highlight the many changes made by family and staff over the years as well as those new features and planting schemes designed and delivered in more recent years by some of the profession’s outstanding talents. Added to these and enriching the book in its early (historical) chapters are the many archive photographs.

A final note. With this publication’s specialist relationship in mind and for those who have never visited Borde Hill, and they must be few, this account makes a brave attempt at acknowledging the multiple riches of the rhododendron, camellia and magnolia collections here which alone, in the flowering season, would occupy the enthusiast’s undivided attention were they able to avert their eyes to all else.

Roy Lancaster CBE, VMH

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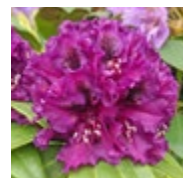


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## New Forest Branch

### Visit to Exbury Gardens, 22nd March 2022

Tom Clarke, the Head Gardener, kindly invited us to visit Exbury Gardens for our first garden visit for three years. A dozen of us attended, including some new members, whom we were very glad to welcome. We were fortunate to enjoy a sunny day, with plenty of spring colour.

The day began with a valuable demonstration of how to prepare rhododendron blooms for exhibition. Tom had cut a number of trusses and sprays from the garden, and showed how to present them in vases to the best effect, and how to keep them fresh for as long as possible.



Tom Clarke gives a masterclass in staging rhododendrons for exhibition  
Photo: Russell Beeson

After the demonstration, Tom gave us a guided tour of part of the 200-acre gardens, which looked very inviting in the spring sunshine. Numerous rhododendrons were in flower, including various forms of *Rhododendron arboreum*, and the bright red of *R. arboreum* 'Rubaiyat' really stood out.

After lunch Tom took us for a further tour of the gardens, and we were able to see the famous rhododendron hybrid 'Fortune' in bud, and *R. macabeaenum* in flower. We noted 'Androcles' with its large trusses of pink flowers and then 'Red Admiral' and 'Ivery's Scarlet'. By way of contrast we came across *R. spinuliferum* and *R. scabrifolium*.

We could not have had a better day to resume our garden visits, and we are grateful to Tom for sparing us so much time.

Martin Gates

### Visit to the Savill Garden, 4th May 2022

For most of us, there have been rather limited opportunities to visit gardens over the last two years and so, as with shows, there was pent-up enthusiasm for garden visits this year. A highlight of the New Forest Branch's programme for 2022 was a tour of the Savill Garden in Windsor Great Park, led by John Anderson, the Keeper of the Gardens. Many of us were more or less familiar with this celebrated garden, but John knew exactly where to take us to see the most interesting and spectacular plants of the moment, as well as to point out some of the cunningly designed views and vistas. The result was a rewarding experience of one of England's greatest woodland gardens, looking at its very best.



Members of the New Forest Branch who attended this meeting  
Photo: Sheena Dias

The standards of stewardship and cultivation are of a high order, as one might expect from the Crown Estate, and it is perhaps interesting to observe that most plants appeared to be in excellent health, free-flowering and vigorous, despite the undoubted challenges of gardening on this scale in a notably frost-prone and dry environment. This has not happened by accident. The Savill Garden has a fascinating history, which is well known and well documented, and has benefited from a small number of outstanding Keepers, each of whom has built on the legacy of his predecessors, resulting in a garden which, rather than trying to fight adversity, has learned to adapt to live with the prevailing conditions and to grow supremely well the plants that suit the environment.

I will mention just a very few of the plants that stood out for me, as the list might otherwise go on for several pages. Our tour concentrated on the Spring Wood area, and on our way there we encountered a venerable Himalayan Cherry, *Prunus rufa*, with its fantastic peeling grey-brown bark. Perhaps the most outstanding spectacle was provided by the many huge specimens of *Rhododendron* Loderi Group 'King George', in perfect condition, together with various colour forms of *R. augustinii* and impressive evergreen azaleas, contributing to a perfect woodland tapestry. The planting and development over the years has been done with great care, so that some of the finest plants can be tantalisingly glimpsed through gaps before one arrives at them.



*Rhododendron* 'Crowthorne'



Hope Findlay, a former Keeper of the Gardens, raised many rhododendron hybrids, the best known of which is probably the excellent 'Blewbury' (*R. roxieanum* x *anwheense*), now widely available and popular. Sadly, though, many of his other achievements have not spread much further than the Windsor Great Park gardens. We were shown one of the best of these – a well-flowered specimen of 'Crowthorne' (*R. souliei* x *aberconwayi*) – which I am sure few would have noticed without John pointing it out to us. It seemed to combine the best features of both its superb parents.



*Rhododendron vernicosum*

Another remarkable specimen was labelled *Rhododendron vernicosum* Rock 18139, and was covered in ruffled flowers of pale pink, with a deep pink throat – a beautiful sight but possibly having the “look” of a hybrid, rather than a pure species, despite the well-known variability of this wide-ranging species in the wild.



*Rhododendron* 'Lemon Lodge'

John also pointed out a number of fine hybrids raised in New Zealand, some with the same parentage as 'Loderi' but with their own distinctive look, also the spectacular 'Lemon Lodge', which is very popular in its home country but rarely seen here.

At the end of the morning, branch chairman Rosemary Legrand expressed our appreciation to John Anderson for giving so freely of his time, expertise and enthusiasm. Our party of nineteen hugely enjoyed the visit and some stayed on into the afternoon to explore the gardens further.

*Russell Beeson*

All photos by the author unless otherwise stated.

## South East Branch

### Visit to Hoads Cottage, Ashford, 7th May 2022

(home of our members Tom and Davina Wood)

We were fortunate to have two excellent visits this spring. Tom's garden is an absolute delight, having been nurtured for very many years from being the site of the original Oakover Nurseries, which was so badly damaged in the 1987 gale that it was relocated to the present site at Hothfield; it has been gradually expanded to where production is now carried out on over 400 acres and is managed by Tom's son John.

The abandoned site deteriorated, becoming overgrown and completely derelict. Tom purchased it in 1996, gradually cleared it and planted it up with trees and shrubs – gifts from friends and visitors but mainly stock scrounged from his own nursery production. This, in part, accounts for the wide range of plants, together with 'leftovers' from the nursery that form the background of rhododendrons, camellias etc. He built his own house there, literally, we understood!



A view of the garden at Hoads Cottage Photo: Everard Daniel

The garden is on a quite steeply sloping valley running from south to north, on greensand, with a small stream running from top to bottom, containing several ponds, made by Tom, he told us. There are really mature plants in the garden, some from the nursery that have remained for its life – so are really large now. In fact, Tom has recently cleared a group of very large hardy hybrid rhododendrons that were 'planted on' from the nursery and had outgrown their usefulness, so have now made way for new things.

Tom has several collections of choice specimens, for example a Loderi area, acers, in lots of forms, and many magnolias, including yellow ones. He is very fond of a new one, 'Daphne'. Interestingly, Maurice Foster usually credits 'Lois' as being the best yellow, but others seem to favour 'Daphne'.

The group retired exhausted to the house where Tom and Davina, together with their daughter, Ann, fed us with homemade malt biscuits and cream cakes –yummy!



## Visit to Leonardslee, 13th May 2022

(jointly with Wessex Branch)

Our second visit was organised in miraculous fashion by our membership secretary, Philip Eastell, and was strictly limited to 25 people – easily attained, to the extent that a waiting list had to be arranged. We were led around the garden by the Head Gardener Jamie Harris and his rhododendron specialist assistant Elliot Chandler. As someone who had known Leonardslee well for many years, it was fascinating to see, in one sense, how little has changed after the long period of neglect, but on the other that it really is not very different now from 50 years ago – still a wonderful sight and a challenging walk around. In fact, the modern buggy has made an appearance to assist some visitors, a move in keeping with the modernisation that has taken place in adding ‘other interests’ (although wallabies had been there for years). The old house is a luxury hotel and there are 80 statues spread over the site, for example.



Members of the group at Leonardslee with Elliot Chandler, specialist rhododendron gardener Photo: Philip Eastell

The gardens are too well-covered elsewhere to warrant a long introduction, but suffice to say that those lucky enough to attend enjoyed getting back there and will look forward to future visits, which we were pleased to hear we would be welcome to make in the future.

Barry Haseltine

## South West Branch

### Visit to The Lodge, Fletchersbridge, 5th April 2022

(Tony Ryde)

We met on a windy but mostly sunny morning on the terrace in front of The Lodge at Fletchersbridge, a few miles from Bodmin, and were greeted by owner Tony Ryde and James who helps in the garden. Tony had moved into the somewhat derelict Lodge and overgrown wild valley about 22 years ago. He relished the prospect of developing the area with its acid soil, having been in a chalky area before, and enjoying growing our three genera. The fruits of his labour were laid out for all to see.

In front of the house there is a wide open vista of beautifully mown grass descending to the valley and stream below. Tony has dammed this in places to make three large ponds. Delightful little waterfalls



The beautiful view down to the top lake from the terrace

connect the lakes as the ground descends and drumstick primulas provide colour by the streamside. Like most of the South West, there had been a sharp frost three nights before which had spoiled many of the magnolias in the garden, but many camellias were still flowering and the overall effect was unspoilt. We presented Tony with a plant of *Magnolia* ‘Felix Jury’ by way of thanks.

### Visit to Lanhydrock Garden, Bodmin, 5th April 2022

(National Trust)

We gathered by the entrance to Lanhydrock garden and met Tommy Teagle who has been working there for 40 years or more, and took over as head gardener from Peter Borlase in 1993. It was great to have such a knowledgeable guide who had shown our group around on several occasions over the years. The frost had not affected the magnolias as badly as at The Lodge, and the old *Magnolia x veitchii* trees planted in the 1930s were superb as ever. Large ‘Cornish Red’ rhododendrons were at full blast, and some of these had been cut down further up in the woodland garden edge having become enormous. This revealed a superb view of the house from above and to the landscape beyond, so they will be kept at a lower height in future. Many magnolias stood out here, including a magnificent ‘Apollo’ covered in flowers, and the large intriguing



The distinctive flowers of *Magnolia* ‘Paul Cook’ at Lanhydrock



flowers of 'Paul Cook'. We noticed what looked like a deciduous orange azalea flowering which was incredibly early. We had seen the same one flowering at Caerhays two weeks before but it also was not named. All was looking very well kept and although Tommy's team had been much reduced since the garden's heyday, he and his team are to be congratulated for keeping it all looking well cared for.

#### Visit to Chevithorne Barton, Tiverton, 4th May 2022

Our next visit saw us gathering at Chevithorne Barton, the home of the Heathcoat-Amory family whose neighbouring property, Knightshayes Court and its wonderful garden, is now in the care of the National Trust. It was a beautiful sunny day and the garden near the house, with its drifts of the invasive *Allium triquetrum* along with bluebells and paths cut through the dappled shade of the trees, made for a beautiful setting. This even prompted one of our number to exclaim that this was the most beautiful garden she had been to for ages. Although Chevithorne is the home of the National Collection of (450!) oaks, there were plenty of other plants to keep the group happy. We noted some azaleas and yellow magnolias, including *Magnolia* 'Yellow Bird' in full bloom.



A happy group of South West Branch members at Chevithorne Barton

Head Gardener William Woodman was our guide, and his enthusiasm was infectious. Although with only a few garden staff, Will has managed to keep the garden and 25 acres or so remarkably well cared for. We were led through a 100-year-old very long firing range which was in fact a complete valley, now being planted up on either side as an arboretum. Going through a gate into more woodland, we encountered a recently created lake, following a newly levelled path, mulched with wood chips rather than bark as this breaks down better and supports micro-organisms.

We ended our tour in a lovely, sunny, enclosed terraced garden by the side of the house, created in the 1900s by the first Heathcoat Amory to live at Chevithorne.

The walls and stonework have created a mild microclimate enabling many exotic trees and shrubs to thrive; the scent from the myrtle, *Amomyrtus luma*, pervaded the air.

An excellent and enjoyable day.

John Marston

All photos by the author.

#### EVENTS NEWS

#### Proposed trip to Germany, May 2023

For more than 20 years I have been going to the Ammerland region of Germany every four years to see the Rhodo event at Westerstede which draws a crowd of about 80,000 visitors, just to see rhododendrons! Here you can see new varieties of rhododendrons and seek out older varieties in their parks and gardens. I have always thought that members would really enjoy a trip to this wonderful area, which is full of interesting plants, both new and old. I am therefore proposing a 4-day tour next May, and would be interested to hear feedback from members who might like to join me, so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

The dates will be approximately 16–20th May 2023, and I typically fly from Stansted to Bremen on Ryanair and hire a car. Apart from Hachmann's nursery which is some distance away, all the other places to visit are close to Bremen and Westerstede, so there are only short distances to drive between gardens and nurseries. This is an area rich with rhododendrons growing on the lovely deep peaty soils of this region, which seems to promote extraordinary flowering every spring.

[www.rhodo.de](http://www.rhodo.de)

If we have time, another option about an hour from Westerstede would be Lütetsburg Castle Garden which has a collection of historic old hybrids from the nineteenth century.

[www.schlosspark-luetetsburg.com/de](http://www.schlosspark-luetetsburg.com/de)

Each of these visits are special, but highlights would be a whole day at Bremen Rhododendron Park where Dr Hartwig Schepker has kindly offered to show us around both the gardens and Botanika, the giant glasshouses where Martin Monthofer looks after the Vireya and



Rhododendrons in the centre of Westerstede at a previous Rhodo event.  
Photo: David Millais

Continued overleaf



tender rhododendrons. Bremen holds more than 600 species and 3000 cultivars of rhododendrons, all in a beautiful setting. Holger Hachmann is the foremost breeder of rhododendrons in the world, and his nurseries grow more than 600 varieties of rhododendron. The display gardens and plant centre are well worth a visit. The Bruns and Hobbie gardens are display gardens associated with good nurseries, both of which have been considerably developed in the past few years, with towering old rhododendrons in the Hobbie gardens. Schroeder is the largest grower of young rhododendrons in Europe, and has a mind-blowing 20 acres of stock plants just to take cuttings from, including some of the rarest old hybrids from throughout Europe. Park der Garten is on the site of a former research station, but now with outstanding modern landscape gardens, as well as a huge collection of European hardy hybrids all planted out in alphabetical rows!

The cheapest option will be for members to book their own flights to Bremen (flights currently about £25 each way), share cars or people carriers to go to the various places, and stay in a hotel near Westerstede. If there are larger numbers of members interested, then it may be worth asking a travel agent to make all the bookings and arrange coach travel within Germany, but this will add significantly to costs. The Ammerland is a popular holiday destination in May, and accommodation will book up well in advance, so I do need to receive expressions of interest as soon as possible. Please respond to me if you are interested in this trip.

David Millais

vc1@rhodogroup-rhs.org

## PLANT NEWS

### RHS Director General's retirement marked with both a magnolia and a rhododendron!



*Rhododendron* 'Bridgewater Biggs' Photo: Colin Mugridge

Many of you will know that Sue Biggs retired earlier this year from her post as Director General of the RHS. What you may not know is how her name will be remembered at two RHS gardens. At RHS Wisley, a spectacular tree magnolia on Battleston Hill has been registered as *M.* 'Sue Biggs' and at RHS Bridgewater, a rhododendron hybrid raised by talented hybridiser and winner of the prestigious Crosfield Cup, Colin Mugridge, has been given the name 'Bridgewater Biggs' in her honour.

### National Collection of Subsection *Fortunea* rhododendrons

We were delighted to get the news from Plant Heritage that the Himalayan Garden in Yorkshire has just been given National Collection status for Rhododendrons in Subsection *Fortunea*.

Headed up by RCM Group Garden Member Jago Wallace under the direction of Will Roberts whose family own and run the garden, the collection includes twenty-five species, subspecies and varieties at present. It will be extremely interesting to follow the progress of this collection as it develops and matures. I hope in time that the



*R. calophyllum* var. *openshawianum* C&H7500 forms part of the new National Collection of *Fortunea* Rhododendrons Photo: Stephen Ward

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Group will be able to supplement the collection where there are gaps or where additional collections might help the visiting public to understand the diversity of this important subsection, containing as it does, some of the most decorative and of course, scented species.

*Pam Hayward*

## SHOWS NEWS

### A new venue for the Spring Ornamental Competitions in 2022

Since 2017 the RHS Spring Ornamental Plant Competitions have been held at the Savill Garden, thanks to the generosity of the Crown Estate in offering to host the event while RHS Wisley underwent a major transformation.

Thankfully, post-Covid, the swansong Windsor event was able to be held in 2022 and all attendees will have lasting memories of the show. (See pages 3 & 4)

The Crown Estate have always made us feel very welcome at Savill and team spirit has been much in evidence. Our thanks to John Anderson in particular.



The Sweet Pea Society Show in the new Garden Room Photo: Vanessa Penn

In 2023 the competitions will be held in the Garden Room at RHS Wisley, a brand new climate-controlled venue, flooded with natural light and bursting with possibilities. The space has already been 'road-tested' by the Sweet Pea Society and by the time we get to 1st April next year the logistics of holding a competitive event there should be fine-tuned.

There is much to be excited about and we look forward to building the same great relationship with the Wisley team.

*Pam Hayward*

## MEMBERSHIP

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

*Philip Eastell*

### UK

Stacey Baird	Farnham, Surrey
Keith Browning	Barnstaple, Devon
Scott Jamieson	Rotherham, Yorkshire
Alan Wright	Hindhead, Surrey
Mark Shields	West Kirby, Wirral
Jack Aldridge	Woking, Surrey
Juliet Stubbington	Ashburton, Devon
Philip Ramsbottom	Honiton, Devon
William Pinnell	Ledbury, Herefordshire
Adrian Gigg	Ongar, Essex
Lavinia Sealy	Chobham, Surrey
Nick Sealy	Chobham, Surrey
Jan Phethean	Helston, Cornwall
James Phethean	Helston, Cornwall
Alasdair Maclean	Nairn, Scotland
David Carver	Yelverton, Devon
Sian Thomas	Windsor, Royal Berkshire
Anna Trenter	Westcott, Surrey
Vicky Roberts	Lymington, Hampshire
Gavin James	Ledbury, Herefordshire
Jim Leggett	West End, Surrey
Jack Davies	Windsor, Royal Berkshire
Les Tindall	Kingswood, Kent
Bryony Mills	Tilford, Surrey
Alan Robertson	Edenbridge, Kent
Natalie Brookbank	Budleigh Salterton, Devon
Benjamin Heller	West Byfleet, Surrey

### IRELAND

Rory Newall	County Galway
Darragh Stone	Dublin
Robin Kane	Waterford
Michael White	Dungarvan

### AUSTRALIA

Belinda Young	Stoneville
---------------	------------

### GARDEN MEMBERSHIP

Tom Clarke	Exbury Gardens, Hampshire
Monique Gudgeon	Sculpture by the Lakes, Dorset
Jamie Harris	Leonardslee, West Sussex
Andrew Burchill	Heaslands, West Sussex
Paul Orchard	Timber Hill Garden, Surrey
Tom Cutter	NT Glendurgan, Cornwall
Karen Cardiff	Broadleas, Wiltshire
Flic Archer	NT Sheffield Park, East Sussex
Ned Lomax	NT Bodnant Garden, Wales
Tom Burns	NT Leith Hill, Rhododendron Wood
Tom Coward	Gravetye Manor, East Sussex
Barbara Sampson	Savill Garden – Guides

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## Forthcoming Group & Branch Events

### OCTOBER 2022

#### Sat 1st

##### North Wales/Northwest Branch

Ness Botanic Gardens

Talk by Ned Lomax (New Head Gardener at Bodnant)

Topic to be agreed

Ted Brabin

0151 353 1193

angela.brabin@btinternet.com

#### Sat 29th 10am

##### South West Branch

RHS Rosemoor

Branch AGM & Autumn Meeting

Plant Sale, Quiz, Bring & Tell

Lecture by Tony Kirkham

'Wilson's China, A Century On'

Dr John Marston

01271 267091

artavianjohn@gmail.com

### NOVEMBER 2022

#### Sat 5th

##### North Wales/Northwest Branch

Ness Botanic Gardens

Talk by Stephen Lyus

'150 years of Sefton Park'

Ted Brabin

0151 353 1193

angela.brabin@btinternet.com

#### Sat 12th 11.15am

##### New Forest Branch

The Sir Harold Hillier Gardens

Annual Lecture by Mark Bobin

'A Visit to NE India'

Martin Gates

mgates@talktalk.net

### MARCH 2023

#### Sat 11th / Sun 12th

##### RHS & South West Branch

RHS Garden Rosemoor

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

### APRIL 2023

#### Sat 1st / Sun 2nd

##### RHS

RHS Garden Wisley

RHS Main Camellia, Early

Rhododendron & Spring

Ornamental Plant Competitions

Georgina Barter

020 7821 3142

georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

#### Sat 22nd / Sun 23rd

##### RHS & South West Branch

RHS Garden Rosemoor

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 29th / Sun 30th

##### RHS

RHS Garden Harlow Carr

Harlow Carr Rhododendron

Competition

Georgina Barter

020 7821 3142

georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

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