



the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The former Prince of Wales

Bulletin 140 / November 2022 / www.rhodogroup-rhs.org

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

It's been an unusual year weatherwise. I mentioned in the last edition that *Rhododendron 'Polar Bear'* was in flower over a month early. A few weeks later, whilst we were at the peak of the dry period, I noticed that there were no new leaves showing and the old ones were beginning to yellow and fall. I started to worry about its survival but then the rain came and shortly after that the new season's growth appeared. Looking at it now with its proliferation of buds one would never know there had been a problem or cause for concern. Nature still surprises me after many years. No doubt many of you can empathise with this experience and I hope your plants have recovered in the same way. Overall there has been a shortage of rain this year and those of us growing on well-drained soil have had difficulties.

Yearbook

You will have probably ascertained that we had a few issues with the Yearbook this year. It arrived later than we would have liked and some final corrections did not occur before printing which led to us sending you a replacement page.

We are determined to do better in the future and are putting plans in place to ensure this.

Brexit?

Since Brexit we have had difficulty in getting our Yearbook to some of our members in the EU. In particular, to Denmark where customs seem to often decide that the recipient needs to pay a lot of duty, tax and fees. We continue to work to resolve this.

We also had a problem in Ireland where a bulk shipment for ongoing separation and distribution to members appeared to have disappeared. Irish members were understandably concerned and we therefore shipped individual copies to those members only for the original mailing to arrive a couple of weeks later. My apologies to those whose copy was delayed and to those whose copy has still not arrived. We are working on it.

Wherever you are located, if you have not yet received your copy then please let Yearbook@rhodogroup-rhs.org know as soon as possible.

Hopefully these problems will diminish as new systems settle into place.

Secretary

I am pleased to say that we have a new Secretary for the Group or perhaps I should say Secretaries since the husband & wife team of Barbara and Robert (Robbie) Sampson have volunteered to take over this important role. You can contact them at secretary@rhodogroup-rhs.org

***The Group needs a volunteer
Yearbook Editor -
see the Chairman's Note***



Camellia trichocarpa in Maurice Foster's garden Photo: Maurice Foster (see page 3)

Lead Yearbook Editor

Unfortunately, as we fill one vacancy on the Management Committee another one opens. Mary White has decided that she can no longer continue in this role. We therefore need a new editor as soon as possible so that they can see the 2023 Yearbook come to fruition and take over for the 2024 edition.

The role of Lead Yearbook Editor is a particularly rewarding one, offering the individual who takes it up the chance to head up a team of genus-specific commissioning editors who between them devise and decide the main content of each forthcoming issue. The Lead Editor then coordinates the assembly of the articles in readiness for production and publication, managing timelines, deadlines and all the ins-and-outs of bringing the book before the members. In addition, the Lead Editor will themselves manage the regular contributions and reports which fall outside the scope of the articles and, as the book comes together, gets to put his or her own stamp of individuality on this much admired publication, choosing cover images for example and deciding where each article is placed to achieve the particular blend of content they envisage.

Whilst we are putting the 2023 edition together, for someone who is tempted to take this role on, there's the opportunity to learn the ropes beside us, so do get in touch for more details.

In times to come

The RHS has undertaken a rebranding exercise which involved changes to their logos. Coming out of that exercise you may have noticed that we have a new Group logo reflecting our association with the RHS. It appeared for the first time on our Yearbook and is also on our website.



We are looking at taking advantage of this change to restyle the Bulletin in due course, so do not be surprised if it looks a little different in 2023. However, fear not, nothing else will change and it will contain just the same mix of interesting content as ever.

Graham Mills

EDITOR'S NOTE

The next issue of the Bulletin is no. 141, March 2023. Copy date will be Friday 27th January. Members' contributions are always very welcome and can be sent to me at peterfurneaux@gmail.com or by post to Lucton Court, Lucton, Herefordshire HR6 9PQ. If you don't use a computer, handwritten or typed manuscripts are also acceptable. Photos from your phone, camera or transparencies are also welcome. When you have read Maurice Foster's article in this issue of the Bulletin you may be able to answer some of the questions he raises and have your reply published in a new Letters section in the Bulletin. Publication would only be with your approval.

Peter Furneaux

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S NOTE

Subscription renewals

The Group's membership year starts on 1st November and those members who pay by Direct Debit may need to be reminded that the unfamiliar EAZYCOLLECT entry on their bank statement relates to their renewal payment. (Eazy Collect Services Ltd are the company we have used to manage our Direct Debit collections since we first offered this payment method.)

If your subscription is due for renewal by any other method you will have already received an email notification along with the relevant forms and details of the various ways of making your renewal payment.

If you have decided to take up Joint Membership and pay by Direct Debit DO remember to cancel your single payment.

Thank you for your continued support for the Group.

Philip Eastell

MEMBERS' NOTES

The ban on retail sales of peat

About a year ago the government launched a consultation on the banning of peat for all retail sales and amateur use. The RCMG Plant Committee, led by Pam Hayward, submitted a response in March 2022, supporting the general thrust of reducing the unnecessary use of peat within the amateur market, but pointing out the special circumstances that ericaceous subjects require a low pH to grow well, and that all the peat alternative products have neutral or higher pH. Propagation without peat can be challenging at the initial stage, especially for our 'hard to root' subjects. We proposed that rather than a blunt ban on the use of peat from a certain date, that ericaceous plants be allowed to use a much-reduced percentage of peat to lower the pH to more suitable levels for our crops. Unfortunately, as a minor use speciality we found ourselves in an isolated position, with little support from other organisations such as the RHS which is supporting the total peat ban. Rather than considering the science of growing low pH crops without peat, DEFRA has now announced a complete ban on the retail use of peat by the end of 2024, so this clearly affects keen members who wish to raise and grow their own specialist plants. Legislation will be similar to the laws protecting ivory, enabling prosecution of anyone in the supply chain or the final user. This autumn, DEFRA has conducted further consultations about banning the use of peat by professional growers and nurserymen, looking at a time limited ban by 2030 or 2035, with the possibility of an extension for ericaceous crops.

There is no doubt that early peat-reduced and peat-free composts were poor quality, and not fit for purpose. Some retail composts have been especially poor quality, and not suitable for ericaceous crops. About 15 years ago on the nursery, we trialled a product which included composted green waste, and killed hundreds of 3 litre evergreen azaleas due to the high level of salts being released in warm summer months. So, is the ban on peat all doom and gloom for ericaceous crops? No, with improved research, there are now viable solutions. During the past 10 years, compost manufacturers have made significant improvements to their products, with a better selection of peat alternatives and the necessary adjustments to nutrient and pH levels. On the nursery we have reduced our peat usage by about 5% per year, and now 60% of our mix is composed of pine bark, wood fibre, coir and solids from an anaerobic digestive (AD) plant, all of which have their own benefits. This year we have three large-scale trials of peat-free ericaceous composts supplied by professional compost manufacturers, and although some rooting has been a little slower, the crops are looking good, despite the additional stresses of the extraordinary summer drought. So the message is really to seek out the better ericaceous peat free composts, and not those manufactured down to a price. It is now time to start gaining experience in how different composts perform with your choice plants; you will typically find that peat-free composts dry out more quickly and require a little more water.

Other products that are available include composted wool waste, bracken compost and your own home-composted material. Some years ago, the RCMG was invited to trial wool waste compost, and this was offered to members. I know some people found it too strong and it scorched their plants due to the low nutrient requirement of ericaceous crops. Bracken compost from areas such as the New Forest is particularly suited to ericaceous plants, and we have had good results with it in trials, but professional manufacturers don't

use it due to supply and compliance standards. In the garden, everyone should be home-composting their garden waste. Our large heap includes about 10–20% horse manure, old compost material, leaves, pine-needles, green waste and shippings. Turned and mixed every 9 months, it will make excellent planting compost after about eighteen months.

A fuller report is due to be published in the next yearbook.

David Millais

A touch of spring, with a taxonomic question

One of the rather unsung benefits of some camellia species in the garden is the quite spectacular colour of the young spring growth. This can vary from a pleasant apricot yellow to a vibrant bronze-red, with the colour tones going through various transitional phases as the shoots mature.

One interesting point is that shade does not seem to materially affect the issue; normally one would expect colour to be muted in deep shade, but this is not the case with camellia species and they can light up quite heavily shaded places in a very pleasing way, sometimes with the flowers.



Camellia bailenshanica

One of the most dramatic is *Camellia bailenshanica*, a species with a limited population in Sichuan and I think now sunk into *C. reticulata* by some authorities. As the image shows, it has deep red shoots which push to some length before slowly transitioning to dark green. In flower it varies from deep red to pale pink.



Camellia transnokoensis

Camellia transnokoensis also adds to the beauty of its habit and flowers with vivid young growth, and *C. trichocarpa* also complements its wonderful flower, bark and dark rugose foliage with dark copper/bronze young shoots (see page 1).

Camellia henryana is closely allied to *C. yunnanensis*, both flowering in November in open weather and on into winter. My own plant of what has previously been identified as *C. henryana* explodes into reddish-bronze young growth that covers the plant in the spring and is more spectacular in the garden than the intermittent, weather-controlled flowering.



Camellia henryana: landscape impact (above) and detail (inset)

I have doubts about the taxonomy. In my specimen, leaf and flower are both smaller than in typical *C. yunnanensis*, and the vivid young growth colouring appears to be a feature unique to this *C. henryana* specimen. But the fruit shapes are identical, a relatively flattened round pale green with a reddish cheek and remaining green in shade. Both come from seed collected some thirty years ago in Yunnan, but widely separated, the former in the far west, the latter in the far north east. Both are hardy and flower profusely in Kent.

The principal botanical differences in the literature are in the number of styles and the thickness of the pericarp, thin in *C. henryana* and a centimetre or more thick in *C. yunnanensis*; and in these particulars, my two plants cannot be separated, both having 4+ styles and a thick pericarp. So is my *C. henryana* just a form of *C. yunnanensis*? In that case, is 'true' *C. henryana* in cultivation? I would be pleased to hear from any member who might have a view on this.

Incidentally, an article in the current issue of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* treats *C. trichocarpa* as an autumn-flowering species and a variety of *C. yunnanensis*. It proposes a name change to *Camellia yunnanensis* var. *camellioides*, an earlier name.

Continued overleaf

I have three accessions of *C. trichocarpa* from two different sources, between ten and twelve years old. All are identical in flower and foliage and all flower in the spring, in late March through to April. I have never seen a flower in the autumn and as I write in early November the flower buds remain small and tight while *C. yunnanensis* has just opened its first flowers. Again, I would greatly appreciate to hear from any member who grows *C. trichocarpa*, *C. yunnanensis* and/or *C. henryana* as to their experience of flowering times and putative relationships. It could be, for example, that there are specimens of all three that may flower only in the autumn or only in the spring. It would be interesting and useful to share any information.

Ref: *Collected Species of the Genus Camellia: An Illustrated Outline* (Jiyin, Parks, Yueqiang 2005)

Maurice Foster VMH

All photos by the author.



Recently cut stems of mature rhododendrons (left) and undesirable *R. ponticum* rootstock regrowth needing removal (right)

Regenerative Pruning of Rhododendrons

Whether one is growing just a handful of rhododendrons or has a large woodland garden with a network of pathways and beds dedicated exclusively to them, there almost inevitably comes a time when they will have outgrown their original allotted space and one needs to intervene. They will often have suppressed more delicate or slower growing plants or encroached onto or over paths, creating tunnel-like features that can hardly be called a joy to experience. Their flowers are also often at a height where they can only be enjoyed by squirrels and birds. The continual clipping back along path edges to maintain access often ends up with a non-flowering hedge effect which, again, rather goes against the point of planting them in the first instance.



The oppressive tunnel-like appearance (left) and green hedge effect (right) of rhododendrons needing more thoughtful management

It is possible to implement a regenerative coppicing programme on many rhododendrons, which will allow the blooms on their re-growth to be appreciated for many more years before a further pruning programme needs to be undertaken. However, plants such as *Rhododendron thomsonii*, *R. barbatum* or hybrids with similar, attractive peeling bark will not regenerate once they have been cut back into old wood. Almost all other plants have dormant growth buds beneath the more common textured bark, as seen on most old Hardy Hybrids, and will readily produce new shoots.

I have found that the timing of coppicing is somewhat crucial, with the best re-growth occurring if the plants are pruned as the sap is rising in the spring, immediately before they break into flower or

the new season's growth. The cut surfaces will 'bleed' for a couple of days but to no detriment to the plant. In fact the re-growth emerges closer to the point of cutting than undertaking pruning earlier in the season, when the plants are fully dormant.

The plants will, initially, look alarmingly bare but after some two to three months, new growths should start to appear. However, do check where this new growth is coming from as many Hardy Hybrids were grafted onto *Rhododendron ponticum* rootstocks. The extra light and the upsurge of sap at the base of the pruned plant will often stimulate the dormant *R. ponticum* buds to break into growth. These basal shoots should be pulled off rather than cut back as their growth will suppress the grafted variety it is supporting.

Flower buds can be produced within three years of a plant being pruned but it may take more, depending on the severity of the pruning. It is likely that it will also take a few years before a continuous canopy has developed.



Regrowth 2–3 months (left) and *R. 'Fastuosum Flore Pleno'* in bud 3 years after pruning (right)

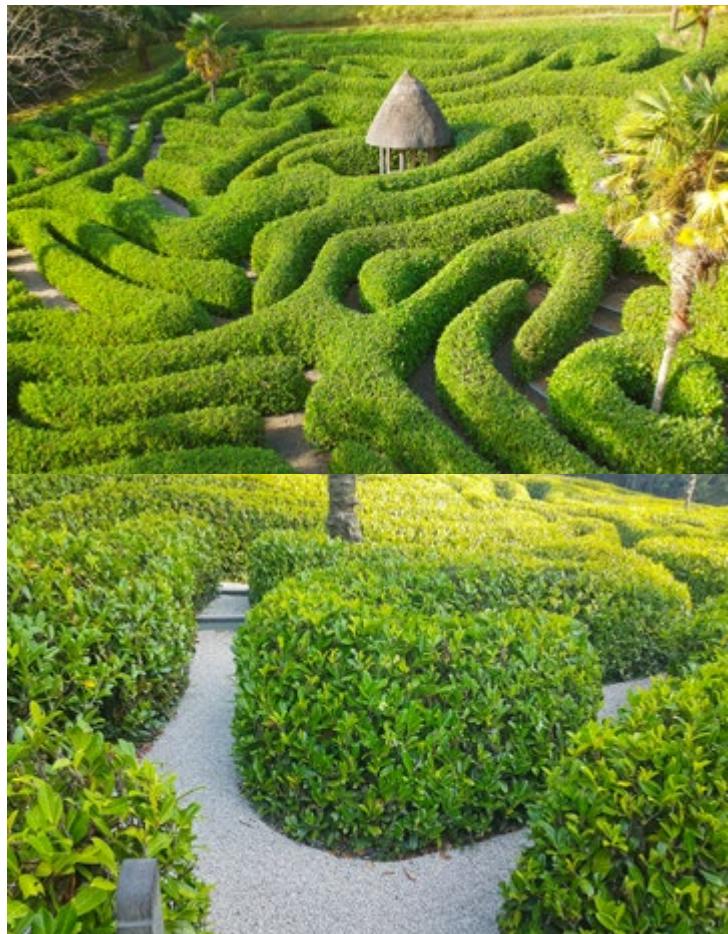
As soon as possible after rhododendrons have been coppiced, a mulch of organic material should be placed over the root plates of the plants, to a maximum depth of 75mm. If a chipper is available the cut branches can be chipped directly onto the beds. Ideally the mulch should be applied only when the ground is moist, when it will help to prevent desiccation of the surface roots, maintain equable temperatures within the root zone and suppress weed growth occasioned by the increase in light reaching the ground.

Ivor Stokes

All photos by the author.

Notes from a Cornish garden

This summer saw the completion of a five-year-long project to renovate the almost 700 metres of path work within Glendurgan's iconic cherry laurel maze. When the maze was created in 1833 by Alfred and Sarah Fox, it was not envisioned that almost 200 years later some 80,000 people a year would enjoy treading its steep narrow paths and steps. For the safety and comfort of our visitors, and to protect the rootzone of these near 200-year-old plants from compaction, the entire path network needed upgrading from soil with wooden step risers to a bonded surface with concrete steps capable of withstanding heavy footfall. Each winter, for five years, a section of the maze paths was renovated with new foundations, steps, and metal edging laid, followed by bonded surface dressing in the following summer. By the very nature of these paths being in a maze, every metre of metal work, tonnes of hardcore and gravel, and many litres of tar were carried in and around the maze by hand! This was made additionally challenging by the maze being sited on a steep slope. I think I speak for the whole team when I say it's a relief, and with no small sense of satisfaction, to have that chapter in the garden's history closed. As custodians of an historic garden feature it's comforting to have further protected the longevity of the maze for hopefully another 200 years to come, and we can now turn our fuller attentions to the conservation and development of other areas in the garden.



The iconic Glendurgan maze (top) Photo: Jamie Pikesley
Newly surfaced path (bottom) Photo: Ned Lomax

Throughout all this construction work the garden has continued to do what it does best, putting on an extraordinary show from our three genera of plants amongst the diverse range of other plants that we are fortunate enough to be able to grow here. Here are a few that have caught our interest this year from early summer onwards.



Rhododendron hemsleyanum

Having already been drawn to the wonderfully exotic looking, chunky foliage of *Rhododendron hemsleyanum* when I joined the team at Glendurgan in June last year, it was lovely to find that its large trusses of white scented flowers this year didn't disappoint. Aside from being a fantastic plant in its own right, *R. hemsleyanum* is a significant plant due to its threatened status in the wild as a result of restricted distribution. We currently have an air layer ball, hopefully working its magic, on one of our two possible natural source specimens.

In early July, after flowering for the first time only last year, our *Magnolia foveolata* flowered again. Frustratingly the few flowers this year were too high to photograph! But we did manage to get one flower down last year to photograph and spent quite some time debating what the scent reminded us of. I think Hubba Bubba bubble gum!



Magnolia foveolata at Glendurgan Photos: Tom Cutter

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Rhododendron kawakamii

Perhaps the most exciting flowering to come from our three genera this year has been *Rhododendron kawakamii*.

Planted into the stump of a fallen *Thuja* last year, this little Taiwanese Pseudovireya appears to have established well, putting on a good show of dainty, waxy yellow flowers in late June/early July. Bean states it is the 'hardiest of Vireyas, capable of withstanding several degrees of frost'. We don't tend to get prolonged deep frosts here, more likely a late frost to catch out spring growth, so lower temperatures shouldn't be too much of a concern for us. In fact, the converse has been more of an issue this year as we found ourselves, like many, in repeated periods of heat and dry, well beyond our average range.

When we talk about 'gardening on the edge', of pushing boundaries, we often associate it with how much cold a plant may tolerate. Cornish gardens have a strong tradition of experimenting with just how much we can get away with when it comes to the more exotic and tender plants, and it's always lovely to hear visitors exclaim disbelief at what we can keep in the ground all year round. But we are in fact, or have been, gardening in a mild temperate climate with a relatively narrow temperature range, and reliably 'moist bordering soggy' at times. The edge that has been pushed for us this year is the heat and drought tolerance of some of our traditional Cornish woodland planting. Thankfully, we appear to have had very few fatalities so far, but some plants were still looking concerningly wilted in September. We're yet to see what possible longer-term impact these stresses may have had on them, and if a repeat next year would be a test too far. So far, despite some heavy rain days, this autumn is looking to be on the drier side, with our local reservoirs still dangerously low at the time of writing in October. We'll certainly be watching our spring-flowering shrubs and trees expectantly next year for signs of any impact on their flowering. Many growers of rhododendrons have been reporting a second autumn flowering this year, seemingly triggered by the preceding heat and dry of the summer – or perhaps the stresses caused by them. We have found a few unexpected flowers

on our *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum* and related hybrids but nothing like the free-flowering seen in some other gardens.

In summer and early autumn, we rely quite heavily on hydrangeas at Glendurgan for late summer flower interest down in the main valleys of the garden. They have fared varyingly against the summer conditions with some of our *Hydrangea macrophylla* and *H. serrata* struggling and fading before they really got a chance to get going. On a more positive note, the *H. aspera* varieties coped much better and all flowered beautifully. A particular favourite of mine being *H. aspera* 'Titania' with its rainbow of pinky-red and blue flowers and enormous white outer florets that can reach up to 8cm in diameter. Some of our plants positively thrived in these extreme conditions. We're not sure if the bananas, sited in spots where the ground retained some moisture, have ever looked better than they did this year thanks to many weeks of sun and low winds.



Hydrangea aspera

For us, the extreme weather really has highlighted the importance of good planting practices for successful establishment, alongside selecting the best location for long-term plant survival. We've also been prompted to refer to and reassess our list of significant plants as we prioritised watering across a garden which has no mains water points within it and limited access for watering by tractor-mounted bowser. All of which is back to the basics of good gardening and stewardship: plant things well and know the importance of the collection that you are looking after.

Nicola Johnson

Senior Gardener, NT Glendurgan, Mawnan Smith, Cornwall

All photos by the author unless otherwise stated.

Conserving Bodnant's Rhododendron Collection

The story of the development of Bodnant Garden, Tal-y-Cafn, North Wales, is inextricably linked to the story of 20th century British horticulture. It coincided with a period of enormous excitement as new temperate areas of China opened up to Western plant hunters who systematically scoured the countryside for plants to introduce to British gardens. Like other great British garden owners of the age, Bodnant's creators, the McLaren family, were engaged in a fierce but friendly competition to collect and grow as many of these new introductions as possible. Obsessions with particular genera were common, the evidence of which still shows in the plant collection today, with some genera represented by multiple

species and varieties. This was never more so the case than with rhododendrons; a group of plants which has almost come to define Bodnant.

The story of Bodnant's rhododendron hybridisation programme is also one of a partnership between two families: the McLarens and their head gardeners, Frederick, Charles and Martin Puddle. It begins with Henry McLaren's appointment of Frederick Puddle as Head Gardener in 1920. Frederick had trained at the famous King's Road Veitch Nursery and came to Bodnant with fifteen years' experience of orchid hybridisation. He was able to turn his hand to rhododendrons quickly and soon the pair were engaged in a programme which was to create 350 registered cultivars, including numerous awards of merit and first class certificates.

Early focus was centred around the pursuit of early and freer flowering hybrids from more tender parents, producing plants such as *Rhododendron 'Vanessa'* ('Soulbut' x *griersonianum*) and *R. 'Cilpinense'* (*ciliatum* x *moupinense*). *Rhododendron griersonianum*, one of George Forrest's most significant introductions, is a somewhat untidy grower in cultivation, but it does have a number of very distinctive characteristics which make it appealing to the hybridiser. Henry and Frederick used it extensively to encourage flowering from an early age in their cultivars. This is particularly apparent in plants such as 'Laura Aberconway' (*griersonianum* x 'Barclayi') with its beautiful red blooms. The pursuit of ever-better reds led to the creation of what became known as 'The Bodnant Bloody Reds', with



A magnificent display of the reliable and free-flowering *Rhododendron 'Vanessa'*

R. haematodes often featuring as one of the parents. Most significant though to domestic gardeners were the 'Scarlet Dwarfs', bred from *R. forrestii* Repens Group, which proved to be popular choices for the smaller gardens of the British public.



Rhododendron 'Ethel' – one of the 'Scarlet Dwarfs' for which Bodnant is famous

Within this group, 'Ethel' is perhaps one of the better known and of course 'Elizabeth' (*forrestii* Repens Group x *griersonianum*) stands out as one of the best and most widely used rhododendrons of all time.

Of the 350 or so varieties registered by Bodnant, roughly a third still survive in the collection. Inevitably, some may only ever have existed as single plants which were soon lost, whilst others may have succumbed to inclement weather over the last one hundred years or so. Of the varieties which survive, some are represented by many plants around the garden, whilst others are considerably more in



Rhododendron 'Cilpinense' – a widely grown early-flowering Bodnant hybrid

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Rhododendron 'Elizabeth' – a timeless Bodnant favourite Photo: Alison Clarke

danger of extinction. As the original plants reach their senescence, there is an increased pressure to propagate and safeguard them as a vital part of the story of the garden. This is no mean feat as the collection is vast, spread out over a large site and includes many plants which require an expert eye simply to distinguish between them. This process came naturally to Charles and Martin Puddle, both of whom grew up in the garden and were exposed to the collection from an early age. After Martin's early death in 2005 however, the future seemed less certain. The modern National Trust Head Gardener is required to possess a very diverse skill set and so intimate knowledge of particular groups of plants can't be taken for granted. Fortunately though for Bodnant, in 2006 Alison Clarke joined the Bodnant Garden team to manage the on-site nursery, with additional responsibility for the garden's planting records.

Alison began her horticultural career at Writtle College before taking a position at RHS Hyde Hall as Curator's Assistant, and it was here that she first developed an interest in rhododendrons. The scale of the collection at Bodnant however required a great deal of research and Alison threw herself into study of the genus. With the assistance of members of the RCMG and experts from the rhododendron world, Alison set about learning the collection, which in many cases required the identification of unlabelled species and cultivars. Over the years her knowledge of the Bodnant hybrids became second to none and so when micropropagation became a viable prospect for rhododendrons, Alison knew exactly which plants were most in need. An early partnership between the RCMG and Duchy College in Cornwall yielded success, with the return of a number of healthy young plants. This process, taken up by the National Trust's Plant Conservation Centre, continues to propagate and conserve Bodnant's most important plants, as well as many others from gardens around the country.

This month, Alison is leaving Bodnant Garden after sixteen years working for the National Trust. The garden owes her a great debt as few have done as much to safeguard its future, and particularly its fantastic plant collection. I've no doubt that when the time comes, she will want to leave quietly and with very little fanfare. She's very modest about her achievements at Bodnant and her broad horticultural expertise. In fact, very few of her colleagues are even aware that she received the AJ Waley Medal in 2017 for her work with rhododendrons. I've certainly been very grateful for her advice

over the short period we've worked together, since I started my role at Bodnant, and no doubt I'll be calling her up and picking her brains for a few more years to come.

The collection is, I hope, in safe hands but, as our climate changes, the risk to Bodnant's historic plants grows. Our focus will remain on the propagation and continuation of our existing plants. However, we're always on the hunt for 'lost' Bodnant hybrids and I've been fortunate enough in recent months to track down a couple of varieties which haven't been part of the collection for some years. If any group members have plants which they suspect may have come from Bodnant, we'd love to hear from them. You may have a variety we're missing!

Ned Lomax

Head Gardener NT Bodnant, Tal-y-Cafn, Colwyn Bay, Conwy
All photos by the author unless otherwise stated.

BRANCH REPORTS

South East Branch

Visit to The High Beeches, 26th October 2022

The South East Branch paid a very interesting visit to The High Beeches when our fellow member and custodian of the garden, Sarah Bray, showed a large party around her beautiful garden. The visit was particularly well attended as I had asked Wessex Branch to join in if they wished and quite a lot of them did wish! The garden was closed to the public as usual on a Wednesday, so we had the full run of the 27 acres of this High Weald garden. I must admit that for those whose years have slipped by rather alarmingly, it is quite a steep garden, but the effort of walking it is repaid by the quality of the planting and maintenance.



Group members taking in the scene at The High Beeches

Sarah gave the visitors a short history of the High Beeches garden, which was purchased in the late 1960s by her parents, Anne and Edward Boscawen, who were well known to the Group for many reasons. Before that and from 1846 it had been owned by a series of Loders, a family well known in the Sussex area for their houses and gardens, for example Leonardslee.

The first Loder started to plant the land, but it was Colonel Giles Loder who laid out the garden beginning early in the 20th Century. Sarah explained that it was his policy to try to plant 'with the space' rather than arrange the plants in some predetermined pattern.

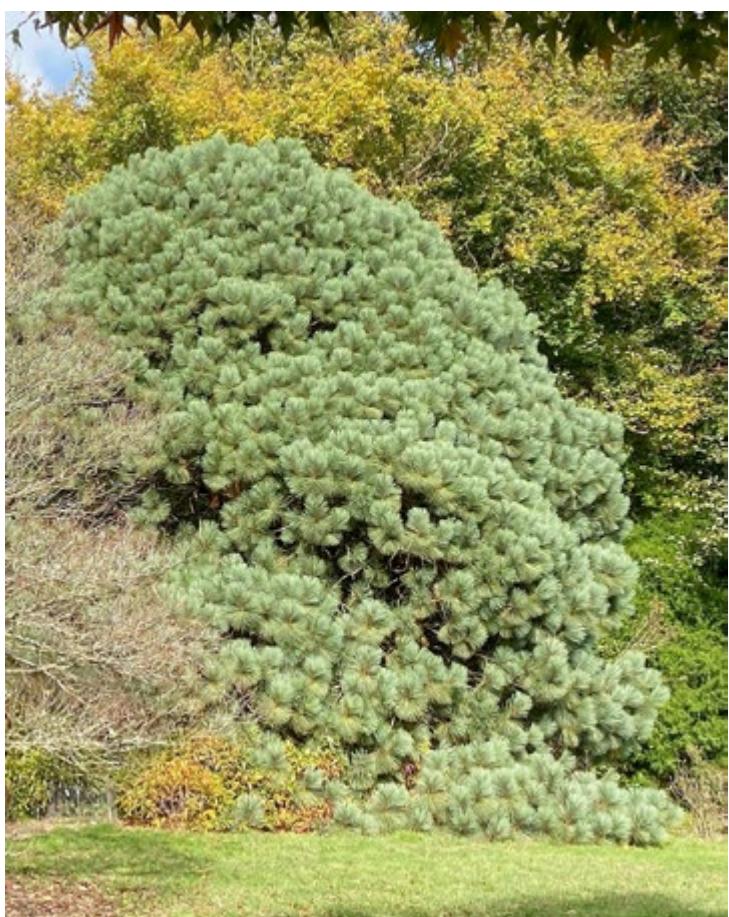


Peaceful woodland scene at The High Beeches

Not everyone present could appreciate this approach but others enthusiastically accepted the idea and felt it was a very successful way of planting.

There had been some very strong winds before our visit and we were told that quite a lot of the colour, notably among the acers, had been removed by wind. However, the combination of colour, trees, understory and terrain make for a lot of interesting and attractive views, as can be seen in the photographs that accompany this note.

There is a wide range of different forms of many plants in the garden, so liquidambers and nyssas gave a wealth of colour, and even though the oaks were not generally showing any autumn colour at all, several very unusual *Quercus* varieties were particularly interesting.



Superb specimen of *Pinus montezumae*

Sarah pointed out to us a superb *Pinus montezumae*, long-needed and very glaucous. *Sorbus hupehensis* was covered in pink berries and, true to its usual performance, *Rhododendron 'Yellow Hammer'* was just starting to flower. Further on, there was a cut-leaf beech hanging down a bank – stunning.

An interesting observation from the visit was that there did not appear to be any evidence of large losses due to drought; we didn't actually ask for confirmation, but if there were casualties, they have been quickly hidden!

At the end of the walk, Sarah entertained us to tea and cakes in a room that has been the tea-room in the past, but is currently 'between uses'. Sarah and I were able to inform the gathered group that the SE Branch was formed at The High Beeches in the late 1970s, by her late father, a fact probably unknown, other than to Sarah and me.

Barry Haseltine

All photos by Neil Usher.

South West Branch

**Autumn Meeting & AGM
RHS Rosemoor, 29th October 2022**



Attentive audience of South West Branch members and friends

Thirty-five branch members and their guests, and visitors gathered at Rosemoor for our annual Autumn Meeting & AGM.

It was really satisfying to see some younger members attending and we also welcomed our RCM Group joint secretaries, Barbara and Robbie Sampson with Sian Thomas, a volunteer with them at the Savill Garden and the new Chairman of the Wessex Branch.

It is always good to see old friends and catch up with the news. Head Gardeners Jane Hammacott from Castle Drogo and Bob Mehen from Roseland Parc were both first timers, and it was great to see them. We also welcomed David Carver, our youngest attendee. I hope they all enjoyed the day.

The usual format was followed – a members' plant sale followed by a 'Show and Tell' session.

The Show and Tell is always good fun and produces a wide range of plants being talked about.

Continued overleaf



Bob Mehen introducing *Davallia tyermanii* at the 'Show and Tell'

Bob Mehen had brought a pot of the beautiful fern, *Davallia tyermanii* which led him to discuss the Tyerman legacy at Roseland Parc and the garden he hopes to reinstate in honour of this previous owner and plantsman. There is of course a *Rhododendron 'Tyermanii'* of a Maddenia persuasion.

Russell Beeson brought a massive herbaceous tree-sized weed from Mexico and a calceolaria from Chile. We saw the scrumptious *Exbucklandia*, from Dick Fulcher and I showed *Abutilon 'Kentish Belle'* and the large-flowered 'Marion', both of which are flowering well at present and do so over many weeks.

Many other offerings were produced. Caroline Bell was keen for us to bring any *Camellia oleifera* which we were growing to determine if they were the true species. One specimen showed promise but the attempt to find further examples of the wild form continues.

The Plant Quiz took place during the morning and I was pleased to find many attendees having a go. Dick Fulcher went away with the *Magnolia 'Fairy Cream'* which was the prize. The Raffle was also well subscribed with good prizes to entice entries.

After a break for lunch, we re-convened for the short AGM when the Treasurer, Ashley Brent, gave the latest figures for the Branch account which was in a healthy state. The Chairman looked back over the year – the first 'normal' one for shows and visits. We thanked the staff at Rosemoor for accommodating us and looking after our needs, and a big thank you was extended to all members who had brought plants for the raffle and plant sales. Their support is greatly valued.

The Chairman then mentioned that the death of our stalwart member, Barry Starling had led not only to a Cup in his memory presented at our April Show, but that Keith Rushforth had named a newly discovered rhododendron from North Vietnam in his honour – *Rhododendron starlingii*. The full description is in the latest edition of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* and this will be a well-deserved and enduring legacy for Barry.



Tony Kirkham explaining what is seen in one of the comparative images he used to illustrate his Wilson lecture

We then welcomed our guest speaker, Tony Kirkham, MBE, VMH, and newly-appointed a member of Council at the RHS, for which we congratulated him. His lecture was entitled 'In the steps of Ernest Wilson a century on'. This was based on his fascinating book co-authored with the late Mark Flanagan, and a wonderful lecture it was. The time flew by. Wonderful photographs taken from the exact spot that Wilson had taken his images in 1908–1910 showed, remarkably, the same trees as well as the mountains and rivers which were still recognisable. Truly amazing. On a more poignant note, Tony ended the lecture talking about the massive earthquake that had occurred in Sichuan, destroying a great deal of what had been photographed just a couple of years before. He went back in 2008 to see the devastation for himself. If Tony and Mark had travelled on an exact hundred year anniversary rather than at ninety-eight years, the trip would not have been possible, a sobering thought.

Tony had brought with him copies of his book on which the talk was based and all were snapped up after the session. Generously, he had donated a copy for the raffle which was won by our newest committee member, Joanne Court.

We had enjoyed a great day. It was testament to our lecturer that he told me afterwards that he did not see anyone asleep during the talk!

John Marston

All photos by the author.

Russell Beeson takes questions from the audience

Wessex Branch

Summer Picnic, Ramster Gardens, 21st July 2022

Summer seems a long way back and the branch picnic is a memory of a happy afternoon connecting with friends, sitting in sunshine, and enjoying the feeling of early summer. Just what we had intended, which was an opportunity for our many new members to meet and socialise in the wonderful ambience of the Ramster Gardens followed by a walk.

We took our own picnic and a fun time was had by all, with conversation, relaxation and even a lolly ice. Thank you to Miranda and Paul Gunn for the opportunity to enjoy being together. We talked a lot about the weather of course and it was after this event that we then had weeks of very dry and hot weather.

The optimism for our gardens following a year of challenging weather

Following this extraordinary weather, we asked some of our branch members which plants they were pleased to see doing well after the difficult weather this year and any other observations they might have and here are some of the results.

'Plants that have been mulched on our thin sandy soils fared much better than those that had not. I don't think I lost a single plant where I had planted within the last year but did suffer losses where plants had been in the ground less than two years but not developed as much root as I had expected.'

Another comment that I have received from Dr Hartwig Schepker at Bremen Rhododendron Garden (that the RCMG is visiting next spring) is that he has found the Ghent azaleas to be the best performers with greater drought tolerance than Knap Hills, as they are closely related to tough drought-tolerant American species. He is also seeing less powdery mildew and better autumn colours, and their smaller flowers fit better into the landscape.'

David Millais, Farnham, Surrey

'I have been amazed at how prolifically my Japanese anemones have been flowering, especially the lovely white 'Honorine Jobert'; they have done better than ever this year.'

Camellias have come through the drought remarkably well, and two, 'E T R Carlyon' and 'Kramer's Beauty', appear to have an abundance of buds for next year. This makes up for some of my more recently planted rhododendrons, which are dropping more and yellower leaves than I can remember happening before. I wonder if I gave them rather too many watering cans of tap water once my rainwater ran out, perhaps leaching out the iron and nutrients? The larger, more established rhododendrons are not affected.'

Anna Treterer, Wescott, Surrey

'Camellias are the star of the show for me, they came through the drought unscathed, with never a drop of water. *Mahonia* and *Cornus* also did well. We have many rhododendrons bursting into flower, 'Cunningham's White' is in full bloom, and many *Rhododendron yakushimanum* hybrids are showing flower. I don't like it; they have got into a real muddle and suddenly we have rain and sun after weeks of nothing.'

Miranda Gunn, Chiddingfold, Surrey

'*Camellia sasanqua* 'Variegata' was beginning to flower at Leonardslee with great scent in the first week of October.'

Elliot Chandler, Leonardslee, Sussex



Camellia sasanqua 'Variegata' flowering at Leonardslee at the beginning of October Photo: Elliot Chandler

'Ghent azaleas and those with *Rhododendron occidentale* in their parentage were barely affected. None of these azaleas died, and the leaf and flower buds are well set for next year; the bonus is fresh leaves every year! Our only loss was *R. 'Radistrotum'*, such a pretty dwarf rhododendron hybrid. We are relieved that we have had *Camellia* '1001 Summer Nights Jasmine' through the summer and our reward is the first flower which opened in mid-October. Evergreen azalea *R. 'Devisiperibile'*, a Sir Giles Loder introduction, is almost in full flower again. Just leaves for 2023.'

Our theory is that the earlier-flowering rhododendrons got so much sun and were stressed as the water levels in the ground fluctuated continuously so they have put out more flowers as a survival mechanism.'

Barry and Polly Cooke, Cobham, Surrey



Rhododendron 'Devisiperibile' in full flower in mid-October Photo: Polly Cooke

Continued overleaf

'Camellias seem unscathed and pruned ones grew well all summer, but fewer flower buds set, except on watered plants in pots. A reason for the flowers we see on the rhododendrons could be the initiation of the flower bud was delayed by drought and then they didn't get the correct day length to induce dormancy and so they carried on flowering.'

Everard Daniel, Sussex

'Our crinodendron flowered well. We haven't lost any plants and the rhododendrons seem to have recovered. Camellias look as good as ever.'

Barbara and Robbie Sampson, Chobham, Surrey

'In the summer borders the dahlias and cannas have done well. It will be interesting to see if things come into leaf as they should next year, I remember that this was somewhat of an issue during the last drought. The *Camellia sasanqua* so far have thrived, lots of good flowers if they have had enough moisture. The *C. japonica* have many buds and the hamamelis all look very good with many buds, as do the magnolias, with their buds coming on well.'

Phil Holmes, Nymans, Sussex

'Rhododendron 'Golden Coach' has been flowering in many gardens including our own, Savill Garden and Leonardslee. The deciduous azalea 'White Lights' has also been in flower. Plants seem to be confused now. It has been interesting to see the effects this long dry summer in the UK has had on what we grow, especially flowering times. Just before the drought started, we entered the last flower show and we won with *R. 'Karen Triplett'* which has got to be our highlight of the year.'

Andy and Jenny Fly, Storrington, West Sussex



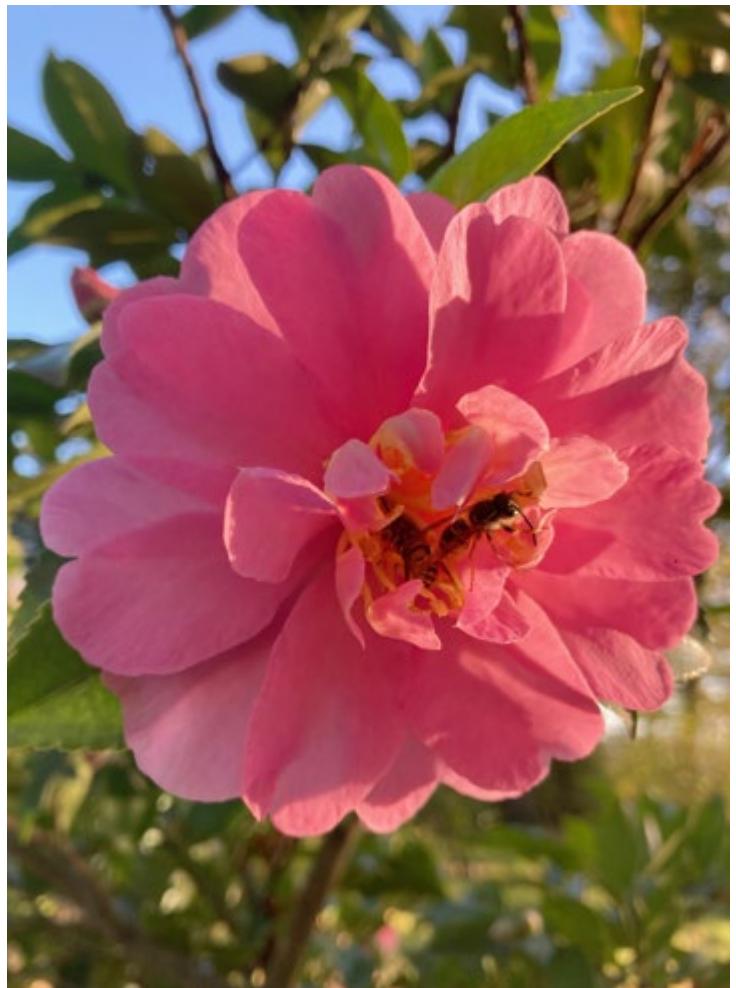
Rhododendron 'White Lights' flowering in Andy and Jenny Fly's garden
Photo: Andy Fly

Visit to Timber Hill, Chobham

9th November 2022

The branch visited the collection of mature early-flowering *Camellia sasanqua* at the Timber Hill Garden of Nick and Lavinia Sealy in Chobham, Surrey. Lots of other wonderful plants and trees to see and the tail end of autumn colour. We much enjoyed a walk around the 16-acre garden with its collection of 250 camellias, rhododendrons, magnolias and other specimen trees planted on a hill overlooking the North Downs.

The garden has been developed by the family since the 1960s, planting under the canopy of the very much older oak trees, with the dwelling and garden recorded as early as the 15th Century. Almost as long a period as the Sasanqua camellias have been prized in Japanese gardens.



Camellia 'Showa-no-Sakae' attracting the bees in the warmth of the autumn sunshine at Timber Hill Photo: Sian Thomas

Lunch of home-made soup and fruit cake in a cosy barn with a real fire topped it off. Over thirty of us swapped plant stories and tips, enjoying a treat of blue sky and sunshine after days of rain. We were especially pleased to have several of our garden team members join us.

Thank you to Lavinia and Nick for hosting, the members who helped make lunch and to David Millais for bringing a display of sasanqua blooms.

Whilst looking splendid all year for their foliage, it was a joy to experience the beauty of the flowers and fragrance of the Sasanquas in a stunning garden with friendly and helpful ambience along the way.

Sian Thomas

Amos Pickard Magnolia Collection at Canterbury Cathedral adds to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Green Canopy Project

Members will probably have heard about the Group's magnolia collection being developed at Canterbury Cathedral. For the uninitiated, this is one of the collections set up as part of our Centenary Fund Project which aims to celebrate and conserve important groups of our three genera and bring their existence to the general public's attention.

This particular assemblage is for the magnolia varieties raised and selected by nurseryman Amos Pickard during the late 1960s and 70s at his nursery in Canterbury. The cathedral cloisters and gardens offer the perfect location for this collection and, following the initial planting of *Magnolia 'Pickard's Schmetterling'* in 2018, great progress has been made in sourcing missing varieties and getting young plants ready to add. There are only six of the twenty-three varieties yet to find, a great result from a great effort.

We are fortunate to have both an excellent Head Gardener at the cathedral and a dedicated Group Collection Guardian in Sally Hayward who has done her utmost to ensure this collection is as complete and well cared for as possible.

With plenty of publicity from the start, putting the spotlight on our efforts even more was the surprise invitation to use one of our unplanted magnolias as Canterbury Cathedral's contribution to the Queen's Green Canopy Project as an element of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations this year.

'Pickard's Coral' was chosen and on October 20th the young, well-budded plant was duly blessed by the Acting Dean and then planted by Lady Colgrain, Lord-Lieutenant of Kent.

It was wonderful for the Group to be involved with this event and we look forward to seeing an image of this magnolia in bloom next spring as well as hearing all about the Pickard Trail which is being planned for the collection; we will keep you informed of its inauguration and how you can visit.

Thanks to Sally and to Head Gardener Tom Goodall who nurtured this young plant into a specimen worthy of selection for this very important initiative.



Happy group at the Queen's Green Canopy planting ceremony at Canterbury Cathedral in October Photo: Saras Wouldham

AGM Review of *Camellia sasanqua* and other autumn-flowering varieties

The Group has been singing the praises of autumn-flowering camellias for as long as I can remember and a recent trawl through the Group archives, when searching for something that took place long before my time, by chance revealed a proper Press Release that the Group had issued to accompany an exhibit at a London Show which took exactly the same enthusiastic approach. None the less and despite all this 'banging on' about these autumn delights, it's evident that more needs to be done: the public still ask if camellias should be flowering at this time of year and the industry seems just as, if not more reluctant to get a good range into general garden outlets. A few years back one might have encountered two, three or four different *Camellia sasanqua* varieties on offer at the local garden centre but this year I completely baffled a buyer at a very well-known national chain when I asked about the availability of autumn-flowering camellias – he didn't know what I was talking about, nor, sadly, was he the least bit interested. They would be stocking none. My own local garden centre sported just five plants, all the same variety. That was all they had purchased, citing post-pandemic and spiralling cost problems with much increased minimum orders which meant sourcing from specialist nurseries was no longer an option and the bigger, more general nursery wholesalers just don't offer autumn-flowering camellias.

What a delight therefore to hear that the RHS were launching a review of AGMs for these camellias, and just them, not the whole genus. How lucky too that we have in our midst a National Collection Holder of an enthusiastic persuasion who agreed to chair

Continued overleaf

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this exercise. Caroline Bell is absolutely the right person for this job and she has put together an impressive list of experts to assist her, including overseas contributors who are well placed to use their differing growing experience to inform the process more widely and, as nurserymen, perhaps influence the all important availability issue which excludes so many excellent varieties from this award.

Our database of extant varieties has been vital in providing the baseline from which to work, and Caroline and Sally worked together for some weeks to ensure naming is correct, duplicates and synonyms were clarified and highlighted as necessary, and urgent registrations carried out. Both the International and European Camellia Registrars have been really helpful and engaged with the process throughout, further enhancing the mutual working relationship.

There are currently just six autumn-flowering camellias with AGMs: *Camellia sasanqua* varieties 'Crimson King', 'Hugh Evans', 'Jean May', 'Narumigata', 'Sparkling Burgundy', one of the *Hiemalis* Group and 'Show Girl' the hybrid. There are many more which are fantastic garden plants and, provided their current availability is sufficient to support the AGM criteria, we hope they will make it through the process and earn that ticket to greater exposure and public awareness.

The critical final meeting will take place at Wisley, where there is an impressive growing collection, and all being well we shall be able to feature the results of this exercise in the forthcoming yearbook.

Meanwhile, if you are not already 'of the faith' take the time to seek out these varieties, note their grace and airiness, let your nose determine whether scent or floral impact or indeed both lead you to grow them in your own gardens; whatever, just enjoy these autumn gems and pass the word!

Pam Hayward

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EVENTS NEWS

Group Tour to Germany, May 2023

The Group is looking forward to its first overseas tour since COVID brought the world to a standstill, and it's going to be a good one! We have joined together with the Netherlands Rhododendron Society (NRS) and are offering a wonderful opportunity to visit the Ammerland area of Germany for a 5-day tour between the 15th and 19th of May 2023 to enjoy a veritable feast of rhododendrons, gardens and good company.

The tour is very lucky to be led by David Millais from our Group and Petra Zwann of the NRS, and will visit gardens including Rhododendronpark Hobbie, Park der Gärten, Böhlje Garden Centre, Lütetsburg and zu Jeddeloh. Members will also have the amazing opportunity to attend RHODO23 at Westerstede, which will be celebrating its 75th year and is definitely an opportunity not to be missed!

Bookings were completely full but **a few additional places have now been made available...** so if you want to grab the chance to join, don't delay, get in touch to secure your booking on this exciting Tour by emailing events@rhodogroup-rhs.org

For more information, the full schedule and booking form please see the Netherlands Rhododendron Society website:

www.rhodovereniging.nl/germany-2023

PLEASE NOTE that flights from the UK to the Netherlands meeting point are not included in the Tour cost. Travel/hotel within the Netherlands can be arranged on request at additional cost by the NRS and RCMG.

Wendelin Morrison

SEED LIST 2023

Donations of seed are already arriving and our thanks to all of you who make an effort to support the Seed List every year. It does not go unnoticed that the same names appear and we do know how much effort is involved in preparing seed to send to us.

If you have seed to offer but have not yet sent it may I remind you to send packages to:

Tim Atkinson
143 Oldham Road,
SOWERY BRIDGE,
Yorkshire HX6 4QG

and if you have any queries or comments do email us:

timothyatkinson@msn.com or pam@woodtown.net

Pam Hayward

CORRECTION TO 2022 YEARBOOK

Members should have received either a pdf to print out by email or a printed replacement page 13 in the post to insert into their copy of the 2022 Yearbook. Please contact me if you have not had either.

Once again, our apologies for this error which slipped through unnoticed at the final stages of production.

Pam Hayward

LETTERS

I wonder if we had a regular page for letters in the Bulletin, we might encourage members to air their views on various topics arising, for instance, from articles in the Yearbook and Bulletin. The membership is such a valuable reservoir of knowledge and experience that anything to help this to be shared more widely would be a good thing. I accept that the time gap between issues is not ideal. For example, I would love to hear from any member who may have a view on the *Camellia yunnanensis* discussion per my note in this issue. And is there a consensus to change our website entry on the status of *Magnolia sinensis*? There is plenty of anecdotal evidence of support for it at species level.

There is some current discussion on the desirability of 'Group' treatment for allied species, forms and hybrids in *Magnolia*, for example in the important *M. sprengeri* complex. What do members think? There must be views out there on this kind of issue.

Maurice Foster, VMH



Can anyone explain why this happens? Observe where the new growth, leaf and flower are from in the image (left)!

This is a recently acquired plant of *Rhododendron 'Balalaika'* – a hybrid with *R. dichroanthum* ssp. *scyphocalyx* in its mix, married to an old Seidel *R. catawbiense* hybrid – and interestingly, on Inkarho® rootstock.

Barry & Polly Cooke

Fascinating information is brought to us each year by the phenologists who record the arrival of spring with markers such as the first frogspawn, budburst etc and similarly with autumn and the turning of the leaves. This science is helping to determine correlation with climate change and the recent interruptions to the natural seasonal rhythms we are all experiencing.

Just now (November 18th) many of us are spotting uncharacteristically early flowering in our *Camellia japonica* varieties ('Gloire de Nantes' has been in bloom here on Dartmoor for nearly a month) and I wonder if members might begin to properly record the onset of flowering for all of our genera across the year to see what information we can add to the science.

Pam Hayward

Replies to the Editor please: peterfurneaux@gmail.com

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

Paul Mullins
Ron Brumby
Kurt Ilko
Michael Brighton
Rosy Brenan

Horsham, West Sussex
Chester, Cheshire
Corby, Northamptonshire
Droxford, Hampshire
Warninglid, West Sussex

EUROPE

Annika Lad

Faroe Islands

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Alan Elliott

Kay Pennick

Dan Turner

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South Yorkshire
Royal Botanic Gardens,
Edinburgh, Scotland
Royal Botanic Gardens,
Wakehurst, West Sussex
Millais Nurseries, Farnham, Surrey

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Peter & Jean Gellatly
Fred & Jackie Woodhams
David & Susanna Millais
Nick & Jackie Butler
Robert & Barbara Sampson
Peter Furneaux & Mary Taylor

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Forthcoming Group & Branch Events

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

Sat 18th

North Wales/Northwest Branch

Ness Botanic Gardens

Talk by Joe Wainwright

'The Gardens of the North West and Wales - A Photographer's View'

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

Sat 26th (TBC)

Wessex Branch

Pulborough

Garden Visit to Springs Hanger

Sian Thomas
07767 751276
wessex@rhodogroup-rhs.org

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 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 29th / Sun 30th

RHS

RHS Garden Harlow Carr

Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition

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

Wessex Branch

Ramster Garden

Wessex Flower Show

Sian Thomas
07767 751276
wessex@rhodogroup-rhs.org

MAY 2023

Sat 13th

RCM Group

Ness Botanic Gardens

Group AGM & Centenary Cup Competition and Show

Robbie & Barbara Sampson
secretary@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Sat 13th / Sun 14th

North Wales/Northwest Branch

Ness Botanic Gardens

Branch Show

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

JUNE 2023

Wed 21st

New Forest Branch

Sculpture by the Lakes, Dorchester

Guided Tour of the gardens

Martin Gates
mgates@talktalk.net

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Members are more than welcome to attend events at any branches

Please send event updates to Wendelin Morrison
Email: events@rhodogroup-rhs.org

WEBSITE: www.rhodogroup-rhs.org