

# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The former Prince of Wales

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## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The last time I wrote I was waiting for the end of the rain and the arrival of sunshine. I really must remember the dictum of 'being careful of what you wish for' since our garden has had almost no rain, less than three inches, since. Luckily this had little impact on the plants in our three genera except for *Rhododendron* 'Polar Bear' which started opening in mid-June and the flowers were dropping on the same day as they opened.

The weather seems to have been particularly favourable to *Magnolia*  $\times$  *wieseneri*. This is always an interesting plant, with its large saucer-like flowers and strong scent. To me it smells like medicine but I know that others find it attractive. Usually it flowers for a long time with just two or three flowers visible at any one time. This year it seems to have been full of blooms for a couple of months.

Another plant that has been outstanding this year is *Callistemon citrinus* 'Splendens'. I first met this plant when, as a child, I saw it planted in a porch on the Temperate House at Kew. Its red bottlebrush flowers were exciting then and remain so today. It stoked my existing interest in plants and many years later a *Magnolia*  $\times$  *soulangeana* 'Lennei' that was planted by the exit to a garden centre, now sadly defunct, got me interested in magnolias. Shortly afterwards I read an article in the Yearbook about the garden that Peter Smithers was creating in Vico Morcote and I then knew what I wanted to do with the remainder of my life. The rest is history.

## Volunteers

I am pleased to say that we have a new Treasurer in the form of Philip Eastell who has certainly 'hit the ground running' and has registered last year's accounts with the Charity Commissioners and avoided a fine from HMRC.

However, as you will have ascertained it has not resulted in an increase in the number of volunteers supporting the group. We still have vacancies for Yearbook Lead Editor and Events Co-ordinator as well as a Chairman for both the Norfolk and West Midlands branches.

I note that other organisations that rely on volunteers are having similar problems in attracting new candidates; in some cases they have appointed paid staff to undertake the administration. I am aware that in the case of one group of specialist plantspeople, that practice has resulted in them burning through their reserves and I am concerned about what will happen to them next. At least we are alert to the pitfalls and will be making every effort to manage our affairs responsibly in these challenging times and I am sure that our new Treasurer will not allow that situation to develop with us. However, without new volunteers stepping forward we are stuck between reducing our services or increasing subscriptions to pay



*Magnolia*  $\times$  *wieseneri* at Tregoning Mill, the Chairman's garden  
Photo: Graham Mills

*If you do have any time you could offer, please make contact with the Chairman*

for them. Neither option is attractive so can I make a plea that if you do have any time that you could offer to the Group, please make contact with me.

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

The next issue of the *Bulletin* will be no. 143, November 2023. In the meantime, I hope you will find much pleasure in your own garden and in visiting other gardens and collections. Some of you may be inspired to write for the *Bulletin*. This publication depends largely on your contributions. Copy date for the next *Bulletin* will be Saturday September 30th. Send an email to [peterfurneaux@gmail.com](mailto:peterfurneaux@gmail.com)

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Peter Furneaux

## IN THIS ISSUE

AGM Report p.2

Show Reports p.2

Members' Notes p.7

Branch Reports p.14

Plant News p.18

Membership p.19

Contact Details p.20

Forthcoming Events p.20

## Annual General Meeting & Centenary Cup Competition

The 2023 AGM was held at Ness Botanic Gardens on 13th May alongside the Centenary Cup Competition. Ted Brabin acted as the Chairman at the meeting and Robbie Sampson was Secretary.

The routine voting of officers went smoothly after an annual summary of the Trustees' Report was presented by the Secretary for Graham Mills.

The Chairman announced that the recipient of the 2022 Chairman's Award was Sally Hayward for her long service and valuable contributions.

The Centenary Cup was won by National Trust Bodnant Garden and was presented to them by Ted Brabin.

The Chairman spoke about the gift to His Majesty King Charles III from the RCMG to celebrate his coronation. He introduced Sian Thomas, Chairman of Wessex Branch, who spoke about the individual plants generously given by members of the RCMG in the North West and N Wales Branch area and throughout the country.

She thanked David Millais for his hard work contacting prospective donors and bringing the collection together in such a short time.

One of Colin Mugridge's rhododendrons was in that collection, along with a plant from the National Trust another from the Bodnant Estate, given by Ned Lomax, Head Gardener at Bodnant.

On Zoom, Rosemary Legrand thanked the Chairman, Pam Hayward and the Management Committee for their hard work throughout the past year. She was pleased that the initiative for the King's Coronation gift had been started by her donation of three plants that her late father, George Hyde, had hybridised.

The Secretary thanked Ness Botanic Gardens for hosting the event. He thanked the judges, Chris Sanders and James Armitage and went on to thank Ness Reception and Catering staff and the Garden Manager, Nick Lightfoot, for his IT support and for being there at moments of crisis; a calm hand on the tiller. Finally, he thanked the Chairman, Chief Steward and event organiser and friendly face, Ted Brabin. Thanks also to Angela Brabin for her photographic skills. (Report of the Competition on page 6)

Robbie Sampson

## SHOW REPORTS

Much has been, and more will no doubt be written about the challenging weather conditions that affected the 2023 show season. It will suffice to summarise them here as a prolonged drought and heatwave in the previous year's summer, a wet autumn, encouraging stressed plants into growth, soon followed by a vicious cold snap in December. Winter seemed interminable and spring, when it finally appeared, was late and chilly. Of our three genera, rhododendrons were most seriously affected, and most growers found that magnolias and camellias largely sailed unscathed through these adversities. The result of all this was that, as compared with 2022, there were some gaps on the rhododendron benches across the shows as many exhibitors struggled to find sufficient material.



*Magnolia 'Caerhays Belle', winner of the Lamellen Cup for Caerhays*

## Rosemoor Spring Flower Show 11-12th March 2023

While much of the country was shivering in the snow and ice of yet another cold snap, the weather was being a little kinder to us in the southwest. Yes, it was miserable, with sleet, rain and little sun, but at least we were above freezing and our gardens were starting to blossom, albeit about a week later than normal. So, once again, slightly against the odds, the Early Spring Show at Rosemoor was a resounding success and perhaps more varied than ever.

As before, the RHS Early Camellia and Daffodil competitions shared the Garden Room with the SW Branch Early Magnolia, Rhododendron and Spring Ornamentals competitions. All this took a lot of organising, for which we are particularly grateful to Jonathan Webster and his team from RHS Rosemoor, Georgina Barter from the RHS Shows Department and Pam Hayward from the SW Branch.

It was not surprising that the magnolias were few in number and were dominated by two Cornish gardens – Caerhays and Botallick – who both brought some magnificent exhibits. The most spectacular was a huge vase of *Magnolia 'Caerhays Belle'*, which won the Lamellen Cup for Caerhays, who also took away the Brother Vincent SSF Cup for the best single bloom, won as so often by a colossal flower of *M. 'Felix Jury'* – what a wonderful magnolia this is.



*Magnolia 'Felix Jury', winner of the Brother Vincent SSF Cup for Caerhays*  
Photo: John Marston



Rhododendrons were also a bit sparse and again Caerhays and Botallick saved the day, though it was good to see Hergest Croft also providing some nice exhibits, along with several other exhibitors, both professional and amateur. For me, the most outstanding exhibit was *Rhododendron moulmainense*, a large spray of which was exhibited by Caerhays. The superb fragrant, pale mauve flowers of this tender plant are rarely seen in the UK, and I feel sure that most growers of tender rhododendrons would love to be able get their hands on it. The Tremeer Cup for the rhododendron exhibit judged best in show went to a perfect truss of the blood-red *R. 'Shilsonii'* from Botallick.



Above: *Rhododendron moulmainense*

Below: *R. 'Shilsonii'*, winner of the Tremeer Cup for Botallick



The camellias were as good as ever, which demonstrated the amazing toughness of these plants despite the prolonged drought of 2022. Botallick and Marwood Hill were probably the most prolific exhibitors, but the Rosemoor Award for the best bloom in the show went to Caerhays for a perfect flower of *Camellia 'Royalty'*, which was one of many magnificent forms and hybrids of *C. reticulata* on display.

The Spring Ornamentals classes go from strength to strength, particularly in a season in which rhododendrons and magnolias were hard to come by. For the first time, several exhibitors entered palm foliage in the class for evergreen shrubs, leading to the suggestion that, in future years, palms might warrant their own class; the winner here was a huge frond of the very glaucous *Butia capitata* from



*Camellia 'Royalty'*, winner of the 2023 Rosemoor Award for Caerhays

National Trust Overbeck's. However, possibly the most outstanding exhibit in a huge collection of rarities was a large branch of the conifer *Araucaria angustifolia*, from a female plant bearing cricket-ball sized, globular, prickly cones. Some admirers wondered whether there may be a male plant available to enable seeds to be produced. This handsome relative of the Monkey Puzzle tree, exhibited by Caerhays, won the Alun Edwards Memorial Cup for the best exhibit in the Ornamentals section.

To complete the picture, lovers of daffodils were able to admire the many competitive classes, ranging from tiny miniature species to the most modern hybrids, as well as the usual spectacular non-competitive display by Scamps of Falmouth.



*Araucaria angustifolia*, winner of the Alun Edwards Memorial Cup for Caerhays

Photo: John Marston



## Wisley Show

### 1st-2nd April 2023

For many years, RHS shows were held at Vincent Square in London. I recall reading several reports of those shows bemoaning the small number of exhibitors – most of them being the most famous and magnificent gardens who rotated the cups between themselves from year to year. Nowadays, we are not very surprised that so few exhibitors thought it worth their while to travel to London for the shows. Now that they are mostly held at venues outside central London, it is much easier for a wide variety of exhibitors to attend, including many amateurs.

Borde Hill and RHS Rosemoor were the first out-of-London sites to host shows, soon followed by Wisley, then by Harlow Carr. The Main Camellia and Early Rhododendron competitions in early April were successfully hosted by Wisley for five years, until rebuilding plans necessitated a break. We were then fortunate to be able to move to the Savill Garden for several years, interrupted by the Covid pandemic for 2020 and 2021, then finally in 2022. Now, in 2023, we were able to come home, as it were, to Wisley, following the completion of the magnificent Hilltop complex, which includes a superb exhibition hall, just a short walk from Battleston Hill.



*Rhododendron* 'Taranto', winner of a hybrid class for the Crown Estate

Early April is always a risky time for growers and exhibitors of our genera; so much depends on the severity of the winter just coming to an end, and the risk of late frosts affecting our gardens. The most terrible example of what can happen occurred at the Savill show in 2019, a never-to-be forgotten occasion when, not only were many rhododendron and magnolia blooms spoilt by frost but, worse still, cold nights during the show weekend saw camellia exhibits frozen solid in their vases. Our return to Wisley in 2023 followed a difficult winter with, notably, cold snaps in December and January, either spoiling or delaying many exhibitors' specimens, so overall the show was not as full as we have often seen. However, a nasty surprise lay in wait for exhibitors in the Camellia competition. It seems a few blooms brought along to the show were infected by Camellia Petal Blight, which then spread like wildfire through the hall, so that by Sunday most of the exhibits were devastated by brown lesions on the petals. To my knowledge, this is something we have not experienced before at a show, and clearly there are some profound implications which need to be carefully investigated and thought through.



A very fine clear pink *Rhododendron arboreum* exhibited by Exbury

Despite all of that, the show was a successful and enjoyable occasion, well organised by Georgina Barter and her team from the RHS Shows Department, and efficiently stewarded by Sally Hayward. There were many fine exhibits to be seen, and the buzzing atmosphere was all we would normally expect. An unavoidable clash with the Cornish Garden Society show meant that Caerhays, Trewithen and a few other far south west gardens were unable to attend. However, Exbury, the Crown Estate and High Beeches were dominant exhibitors, and it was a huge pleasure to see a good number of exhibits from Leonardslee Gardens, who had been off the show scene for many years.

There is no space here for a detailed run-down of exhibits, but I cannot help remarking on a most unusual rhododendron, exhibited by the Crown Estate in their winning entry for the three hybrids class. This was *Rhododendron* 'Taranto', described in the *Rhododendron* Register as a cross between '*R. falconeri* subsp. *falconeri* and *R. falconeri* subsp. *eximium*'. It was raised at Clyne Gardens in South Wales. I suppose that, being a hybrid within a species, it could perhaps have been exhibited in the species class. The handsome dark, deeply-veined foliage beautifully set off the tight truss of mauve flowers, which seemed to me to suggest a strong affinity with *R. niveum*. Subsequent investigation indicates that *R. niveum* is indeed involved and the Register has been corrected in a subsequent Supplement, meaning that this fine hybrid actually has a close affinity with the better-known 'Colonel Rogers'.



Hybrid *Rhododendron* 'Sunny' × *rubineiflorum* won the newly introduced Vireya class for potted exhibits for Andy and Jenny Fly



Two other exceptional exhibits that caught my eye were, firstly, a beautiful clear pink form of *Rhododendron arboreum* from Exbury and, in complete contrast, a wonderful spray of the Vireya hybrid 'Sunny' × *R. rubineiflorum*, covered in brilliant scarlet flowers, exhibited by Andy and Jenny Fly.

## Main RHS Rhododendron Competition

**22nd-23rd April 2023 at Rosemoor.  
with SW Branch Camellia, Magnolia  
and Floral Display competitions**

The effects of the winter were still evident at the later Rosemoor event and it is perhaps fair to say that growers in the south of England suffered the most, but to say this is certainly not to diminish the achievement of a more northerly garden, National Trust Bodnant, who, having made a tentative return to exhibiting in 2022, were undoubtedly the stars of the 2023 show, with a multitude of successful exhibits, reflected in their being awarded no less than three of the major trophies: the McLaren Challenge Cup, the Loder Challenge Cup and, perhaps most significantly, the Crosfield Challenge Cup for three hybrids raised in the garden of the exhibitor. Bodnant is well and truly back, under its Head Gardener Ned Lomax, well-known to many in the South West from his previous position at Glendurgan.



*Rhododendron augustinii* of exceptional colour and presentation, from the Crown Estate



*Rhododendron* 'Snowy River', a most attractive hybrid of *R. ririei* × *R. niveum*, raised at Bodnant and exhibited as part of their prize-winning entry for the Crosfield Challenge Cup



*Magnolia* 'Lemon Star', a superb yellow-flowered Belgian hybrid, shown to perfection by Caerhays and winning the SW Branch's Quicke Cup

With Trewithen taking a break, this year's show was otherwise dominated by Caerhays, with some particularly magnificent magnolias and large-leaved rhododendrons, The Crown Estate, with some fine camellias, and the private Cornish garden of Botallick. During the last ten years or so, there has been a very welcome growth in the number and exhibiting power of amateur gardeners, who have been successful in competing against the major gardens and have added a new dimension to our shows. I think I am right to observe that amateurs were a bit thin on the ground in 2023, and it is to be hoped that future years will see them back again in force.

From what I have set out so far, the reader might feel that the show was disappointing. Perhaps I have dwelt too much on the difficulties. In fact, it was a superb show, with many fine exhibits in all the main categories. The lateness of the season meant that we saw some plants which we rarely see at the Main Rhododendron Competition. But we also had a reasonable display of *Rhododendron* 'Loderi Group' forms, which we have not seen for a few years because they often come too late – so it can work both ways.

The show was organised with the calm efficiency we have become used to. Our thanks for this go to the RHS Shows Department, the RHS Rosemoor team and local members of the RCMG who do so much to make the show an enjoyable experience for exhibitors and for visitors.

In this brief note there is no space for details of the many exhibits, but I have included a few images of specimens that particularly appealed to me:

*Russell Beeson*

All photos by the author unless otherwise noted.



## Centenary Cup Competition

13th May 2023 Ness Botanic Gardens

The Centenary Cup Competition took place on Saturday 13th May 2023 and for the first time was held at Ness Botanic Gardens, on the Wirral. The event coincided with the Eurovision Song Contest, which meant accommodation was scarce and very expensive. The industrial action by train unions also meant there were no trains to or from Chester. However, with support from the main Group and local branch members, we were able to put on a good show. National Trust Bodnant brought a vanload of material and those not exhibited in the competition were used to decorate the Bulley Room. It was the first time Bodnant have participated in the show and it would be excellent if they chose to do so again in future years.

The Bodnant staff's efforts were repaid when a magnificent specimen of *Rhododendron falconeri* ssp. *eximium* won first place in the class for hardy species and it went on to win the Centenary Cup for the best exhibit overall; a deserving specimen.

The Hardy Hybrid class, with a very large collection of exhibits, was won by Colin Mugridge, for one of his own hybrids. In the next class for tender rhododendrons, Bodnant again came first with a specimen of *R. edgeworthii*, the Bodnant pink form.

Liz Carter won the First Place certificate in the class for deciduous azaleas and was followed by Sian Thomas, winning the category for evergreen azaleas for a specimen 'borrowed' from her father's garden in Liverpool. The certificate for camellias was won by Bodnant with *Camellia japonica* 'Purity' and that for magnolias by Ness Botanic Gardens for a specimen of *M. 'Heaven Scent'*. To cap it all, Liz Carter won the last category for a flowering shrub with a *Cestrum newellii*, festooned with flowers.



The 2023 Centenary Cup winning entry: *Rhododendron falconeri* ssp. *eximium* exhibited by National Trust Bodnant Gardens  
Photo: Angela Brabin

Overall, we had a lovely show, aided by the staff at Ness, who did everything in their power to ensure we had a good day.

The AGM of the main Group took place after lunch, facilitated by our new secretaries, Barbara and Robbie Sampson.

Ted Brabin



Centenary Cup Class Winners enjoying the sunshine outside the Bulley Room with their winning entries

Left to right: Colin Mugridge, Ted Brabin (NW and N Wales Branch Chairman and host), Liz Carter, Mike Roberts from Ness, Sian Thomas, Lynne Clifton and Huw Edwards from Bodnant, and Ned Lomax (Head Gardener at Bodnant) Photo: Angela Brabin



## Patience may be rewarded: or my rhododendron 'bucket list'!

**D**o you have a favourite rhododendron? My response is that I have several but *Rhododendron neriiflorum* ssp. *phaedropum* Appropinquans Group with its attractive bi-coloured flowers is certainly up there in my top ten for consideration!

It was first collected in Yunnan as *R. neriiflorum* var. *appropinquans* (F21531) by Forrest in 1922 and again under F23297 in 1923. Rock also collected it contemporaneously in the same area. Since then its name has been subject to taxonomic 'hokey-cokey' but is hopefully now settled as of this edition, thanks to a decision by Dr David Chamberlain which recognises it as a distinctive colour variant of the subspecies of ornamental interest.

During a visit to Deer Dell (the late John McQuire's garden) in 2014, I enjoyed seeing his two plants of this species flowering profusely. The offer of some scions from John followed and they duly arrived later in the same year. I had only once previously seen it in flower at Benmore – probably in the early 1980s. My propagation method at that time was to use fairly deep polystyrene boxes (15" x 12" x 12") rescued from some of my wife's chilled food purchases and filled with 50/50 sieved peat/washed fine Cornish grit above a couple of generous drainage holes. The benefit of deep boxes is that they allow ample space above the top surface of the rooting medium to avoid the close-fitting pane of glass lid from touching the scions, whilst at the same time permitting some allowance for extension growths. The excellent insulating properties of polystyrene also minimises the chances of the rooting medium freezing during the winter period. The box was sited year-round in a dappled-shaded part of the garden and checked and watered infrequently. Six scions out of eleven ultimately rooted successfully – without use of bottom heat and/or additional rooting hormones – having taken some eighteen months or so. Hardly commercial but amateurs remain obviously happy!



*Rhododendron neriiflorum* ssp. *phaedropum* Appropinquans Group at Deer Dell in 2014

For various reasons I decided to leave them in their polystyrene box; the glass cover now permanently removed (with some periodic dilute ericaceous feed) to encourage some new growth prior to



Corollas from the first-flowering of the author's successfully propagated plants

potting them on. Circumstances were such that, after a very slow start, their progress was encouraging and I decided to leave them all in situ to a point whereby they eventually reached some twenty-four inches in height. At this same time, in spring 2022, two of them offered their first spectacular trusses! A low-risk move was contemplated by transplanting all six established rooted plants as one complete group into a garden space. With a change of mind earlier this year, I decided that in view of its rarity that I should try to separate the very well-rooted clump into their respective individual plants and share with others. I have always supported the gardener's philosophy that the best means of survival is to share your plant with whoever and so maybe ask for some propagating material back again if the need should arise! Hopefully, fortune will favour the brave, as the rectangle of tangled roots of all six plants was separated with the use of an old bread knife and the individuals potted separately into some choice ericaceous compost. Just one plant required support in the form of a wigwam of canes to minimise 'wobble' at the roots due to its somewhat meagre share resulting from the division of the congested mass. In the main, the fibrous root systems of ericaceous plants generally offers a good chance of re-establishment with appropriate after-care. So far so good! I will plant my remaining plants in their final garden sites next year if all goes according to plan.

Visitors to the Rhododendron Show at Rosemoor in April last year (2022) will recall seeing an exhibit cut from the source plant of my original scions as a competitive entry from Sylvia McQuire. No doubt readers will appreciate why this species is on my own very short list of favourites! Each to their own. I would be interested to know if anyone else is growing this?

Maybe you too have a favourite to share and we can keep this theme running?

### NB

Colour variations in the images I suspect results from indoor/outdoor lighting and/or camera/iPhone?

AM awarded to the plant exhibited as *R. floccigerum* var. *appropinquans* by Lord Digby, Minterne in 1957.

Personal note added by George Forrest to his entry as F21531 in the 1922 Field Notes reads 'Even as a foliage plant it has merit, with its long lanceolate leaves of such soft dull green above and so brilliantly glaucous beneath. The bristly young wood and the long spine-like bristles at the base of the foliage buds are also remarkable.'

John Sanders

Photos by the author.

## Our Heritage Camellias found in Italy

It was exciting to visit Northern Italy in peak camellia season in March this year for the International Camellia Society Camellia Congress with its camellia tours, and to focus mainly on the amazing *Camellia japonica* varieties bred in the nineteenth century which can be different in style to the plants we see today. We saw showcased the conservation work for Italian-bred historic cultivars such as those found in old gardens around Lake Maggiore and near Lucca in Tuscany at Compito. This is where a collection has been formed from propagated material taken from old gardens containing historic cultivars. Compito has an International Camellia Garden of Excellence, known as the 'Camielletum', which also includes groups of other camellia varieties and species. What has been achieved is most praiseworthy, and raises a question – should we be doing something similar by assembling our own collection of historic native-bred cultivars?

To our shame perhaps, some of the Italian gardens also had collections of British-bred varieties from the early 1800s until the 1850s, which are either lost to cultivation or are now unknown here. During this period we probably led camellia breeding in Europe before we were eclipsed or passed on the baton. As camellias were out of fashion by 1890 in the UK, many of the so-called Camellia Houses where they were usually cultivated, were sometimes turned over to the novelties provided by our famous plant-hunters of tropical plants, ferns and orchids; many of the buildings themselves were neglected during the First World War, and most never returned to their heyday standard. Our heritage camellias gradually slid into oblivion. But there may still be historic specimens lurking in forgotten corners, ready to be re-discovered, so this article is partly a plea to members to be on the alert for these historic varieties.

Choosing from amongst the many Japonicas I saw, my favourite seen for the first time was 'Cup of Beauty' with its unusual double flower form, blooming in the garden of Villa Durazzo Pallavicini, Genoa. It existed by 1857 after it was 'brought from China by Robert Fortune and placed on sale by Glendinning. The name Cup of Beauty is a literal translation of its Chinese name. It is irreproachably imbricated with



*Camellia japonica* 'Cup of Beauty'

petals very rounded, white, lightly striped with a rose-pink tint' to quote from the Camellia Register's description. Looking at its sheer, intricate beauty, we might think it aptly-named! The plant had a huge trunk, indicating its age. Antique Japonicas are prone to sports: they can suddenly change colour or flower form, and this camellia has a light pink sport with white tipping in 'Madame de Cannart d'Hamale' found in Belgium in 1870, but there is another older variety called 'Myrtifolia' which is wholly pink in the same extraordinary style and it was in England before 'Cup of Beauty'. It was featured in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* in 1814 and has a variable description; Chandler & Booth include mention of scent in 1831, which is an extra dimension we should not forget *C. japonica* varieties can offer. I was fortunate to see both 'Cup of Beauty' and 'Myrtifolia' growing side by side. Identifying historic cultivars can be a considerable challenge and it does draw out the embryonic or hidden sleuth within us, as we try to tease out their story!



A beautiful pink sport from the same plant of *Camellia japonica* 'Cup of Beauty' pictured below left

Another camellia we encountered was named 'Spofforthiana' after its place of origin in North Yorkshire and its originator was the famous botanist, Hon. William Herbert, a younger son of the 1st Earl of Carnarvon and himself a contributor to *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*. It has synonyms of 'Spofforthiana Alba', 'Spofforthiana Alba Vera', 'Spofforth Striped' and 'Spofforthiana Striata', and its flowers showed the variation in colour and form which fit with its synonyms. There were two plants of it at the Camelletum demonstrating these variations. It is described in the Register as 'Originated by Rev. Herbert, Spofforth, England from a seedling of 'Alba Simplex' x 'Pomponne'. A very large, double white with a few pink stripes' from before 1830. Its two famous parents both grow inside Chiswick Conservatory, that repository of 30 historic camellias in London's Chiswick Park just off the Great West Road. But we need more repositories than that to recover our camellia heritage. I then saw plants in several gardens labelled 'Pomponia Semi-Plena' (a synonym for 'Pomponia Semi-duplex'), a seedling in the 'Pomponne' family whose origin is uncertain, and a virused antique 'Alba Plena' on the island of Isola Madre's botanic gardens on Lake Maggiore, a garden which existed by 1823.





*Camellia japonica* 'Spofforthiana Alba'

I had never before heard of 'Rawesiana', which is named after Captain Rawes. In the UK we focus on the famous *Camellia reticulata* 'Captain Rawes' which bears his name, the first *C. reticulata* to have been brought back from China, arriving in 1820. Captain Rawes was an East India Company captain who brought back many camellias from China on commission and the 'Rawesiana' was brought in for a Mr Palmer in 1816. Although Japonicas obviously originate in Japan, we received them via China, as Japan was closed to travellers until 1854. 'Rawesiana' with its crimson informal double flower has more than 96 synonyms including 'Speciosa' given by Chandler & Booth in their famous 1829 book, so it was clearly a popular plant. Sadly, it may not exist in the UK at present.

A camellia labelled 'Vandesiana Carnea', which is an Abbé Berlèse synonym for 'Vandesiana', existed by 1830 according to its Italian label, and originated with us, perhaps at Loddige's Nursery, London.



*Camellia japonica* 'Pomponia Semi-Plena'

It was conserved in the Camellietum along with 'Serratifolia', another one of our heritage plants from the 1830s. The RCMG database records of UK camellias, which are confidential as to location and ownership, reveal no entries for either of these camellias. The database provides a census of what we have growing in the UK, going way beyond what the *Plant Finder* and its back issues offer. This database is important from both a conservation and research point of view. Please can I therefore encourage members, if they have not already done so, to send their lists of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias growing in their gardens or vicinity to Sally Hayward, our Database Manager, at [rcmconservation@gmail.com](mailto:rcmconservation@gmail.com) to assist our conservation initiatives.



*Camellia japonica* 'Rawesiana'

The 'Countess of Derby' was first named as such in a Veitch Nursery catalogue of 1856, although imported from Italy, so it is only partly British, but the name was adopted in Italy. The stock plant dating back to at least 1920 is still growing in the old Veitch nursery premises at Exminster in Devon, now in private ownership, but is it elsewhere? An old plant on Isola Madre, like the Veitch stock plant, carried fully red sports with its signature bi-coloured double flower when seen, but the Camielletum's camellia, being a younger plant, had no sports.

*Continued overleaf*





*Camellia japonica* 'Countess of Derby'

A red-coloured *C. japonica* was first recorded as growing in Lord Petre's 'stovehouse' in Essex in 1734; this is often considered as the first European reference to camellias growing outside Asia. Camellias then might have disappeared from cultivation until 1792, when 'Alba Plena' AGM and 'Variegata' were famously brought back from China on the *Carnatic* by Captain Connor. But the story of Lord Petre's contribution does not end when he died at a young age in 1742, as his gardener, James Gordon, sought other employment as a nurseryman in London's Mile End Road in Stepney. Gordon's nursery may have successfully grown camellias before the famous introductory date of



This historic *Camellia japonica* 'Variegata' on Isola Madre interestingly exhibits a very different looking flower to ones usually seen in the UK

1792 mentioned, because he could have taken seed or cuttings from Lord Petre's stovehouse. Thompson took over Gordon's nursery on his death, and then Thompson's son followed his father.

I was therefore excited to find a camellia called 'Mile-endi' which refers back to that history in London E3 (a mile from the City of London's old gate), which was an area once famed for pioneering camellia nurseries and their camellia introductions. It is probably correctly named in the Camellietum, but it would help if we could find it in the UK. The Register records it as '*van Houtte Catalogue, 1839, 1:6: This camellia is a final souvenir from Thompson of Mile End Nursery, bright scarlet ... grenadine red, stamens very numerous. Originated in England.*' Two researchers of historic, antique



*Camellia japonica* 'Mile-endi'

camellias, Piero Hillebrand and Gianbattista Bertolazzi, in their beautifully illustrated book *Antiche Camellie del Lago Maggiore* in Italian and English from 2003, show it as an almost anemone form; so the camellia at the Camellietum in Tuscany is not identical with the plant photographed by the two researchers from the Lake Maggiore area where the weather is colder. Hillebrand and Bertolazzi are both now deceased, and their detective work over several decades before their book appeared indicates just how long the Italians have been working to identify and preserve their heritage camellias. There are two other Italian books on Italian historic camellias from other conservation pioneers published around the same time, and I only photographed and saw a part of what was available, so I long to visit again.

Caroline Bell

All photos by the author.



## Searching for Tyerman's Legacy

**T**ruth be told, five years ago I wasn't that interested in camellias, rhododendrons and magnolias. Thirty years of living and gardening in Cornwall had made me appreciate them for their bold spring displays, but it was the exotic 'jungle' plants that thrive in the mild, wet Cornish climate that filled my gardens.

All this changed back in 2017 when I started work at Roseland Parc, a retirement village in Tregony, Cornwall. The gardens were a mishmash of old and new, with no real theme or connection but did contain a modest collection of our three genera. Carrying out some early clearance work in the older areas of the garden and finding lost features led me to start researching the history of the grounds as a guide to how to more sympathetically restore things. It didn't take long to find the name John Simpson Tyerman, who owned the old house on site, Penlee, in the 19th Century.

Tyerman was a Kew trained horticulturist and highly regarded plantsman, who made his name as the curator of the botanic gardens in Liverpool. He formed connections across the globe, bringing in plant material new to science and conversing with Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, amongst other esteemed names in plant collecting. He was a keen collector of ferns, and is remembered by an interesting species named for him, *Davallia tyermanii* the silver hare's foot fern. He was also an avid shell collector and has a sea snail named after him!



The extraordinary hare's foot fern *Davallia tyermanii*

He retired early to a life of leisure in Cornwall in 1871, taking over the house and its grounds, which included a productive walled garden. However, it is only in the last couple of years I have found out that he appears to have had a go at rhododendron breeding when I discovered *Rhododendron* 'Tyermanii' – a hybrid between *R. formosum* and *R. nuttallii*.

I've been lucky enough to see a couple of specimens of this plant here in Cornwall at Glendurgan and Lamorran, and what a beautiful thing it is, with large, heavily scented creamy white flowers, flushed pink with a yellow base. What isn't certain is whether Tyerman bred this plant himself, or if it was named after him by someone else. If he did breed it, was this his only success?

Sadly his retirement wasn't long, and he died aged just 58 in 1889. After his death the house was bought by J. C. Williams of Caerhays fame, who appears to have set about removing many of



*Rhododendron* 'Tyermanii' at Glendurgan

the specimens, explaining how '*most of my gardening friends then shared in the loot*'. In the days before garden centres, collecting rare and unusual plant species often involved travelling the world, so finding a horticultural cornucopia for sale on his doorstep may well have been a major attraction when buying the property. In Tyerman's letters, (sent to me by the wonderful Stephen Lyus who happened to be researching Tyerman from the Liverpool end of his story) he mentions visiting Tregothnan and the house of Rev. T. Boscawen of Lamorran, (brother of Lord Falmouth) who according to Tyerman '*takes particular interest in Rhododendrons of which he has a very good knowledge...he has the direction to a great extent of his brother's grounds as well as his own where a very large collection of Camellias and Rhododendrons are growing*'.

If anyone knows any more of Tyerman's foray into rhododendrons I would be very interested. I can be contacted at [bobmehen@googlemail.com](mailto:bobmehen@googlemail.com).

Bob Mehen

Photos by the author.

## Notes on autumn-flowering *Camellia* at RHS Garden Wisley

**I** remember hearing someone say they would quite happily abolish the month of November in the garden, which for the most part is a sentiment I wouldn't object to. Of course, there are many great plants with year-round interest, and autumn colour may still be lingering in a late year, but certainly by the end of the month we are left with very little worth looking at in flower. Or so I thought, before my first encounter with autumn-flowering *Camellia sasanqua* and other autumn-flowering varieties, as a student at RHS Garden Wisley a few years ago.

They are without doubt the stars of the November garden, their bright presence all the more remarkable for the niche that their flowering period fulfils. We are fortunate to have a good collection of *C. sasanqua* and other autumn-flowering camellia cultivars at Wisley, which cover a wide variety of forms and colours. A number

*Continued overleaf*



of these are relatively recent plantings, with new cultivars that we are eagerly waiting on to perform. However, there are several varieties that stand out as having stood the test of time, flowering reliably as mature plants each year.

Of these, the single pure white cultivars are enduring favourites, as I am always drawn to the large ‘poached egg’ flowers which make for a lovely effect with their ruffled petals and a big central boss of yellow stamens. ‘Tago-no-tsuki’, ‘Kenkyo’ and ‘Narumigata’ are all excellent in this respect and perform reliably. There is something very pleasing about the contrast between the clean white flowers and the rich reds, oranges and yellows of the colouring surrounding trees and shrubs. Any one of these planted with the late-colouring *Acer japonicum* ‘Aconitifolium’ as a fiery backdrop and a carpet of autumn-flowering snowdrops (*Galanthus reginae-olgae*) at their feet would make a highly satisfactory combination.

We have several good examples of ‘Tago-no-tsuki’, which are probably some of the largest plants in our collection of *C. sasanqua* varieties. While the plants themselves are old, the name is relatively new. For many years they were labelled ‘Alba’, ‘Fukuzutsumi’ and ‘Narumigata’ respectively, the latter being an exceptionally fine plant at the top of Battleston Hill, whose true identity has long attracted doubt. At last, much thanks to the work of Jim Stephens at Mount Edgcumbe, we now have a proper name for this excellent variety.

The true ‘Narumigata’ we have growing elsewhere, which differs in its larger, markedly cup-shaped blooms, with each of the petals often touched with pink at the base, giving it an attractive ‘apple blossom’ effect. This can be seen in ‘Rainbow’ to a greater extreme; its loose white flowers with an irregular pink margin to the petals give them a pretty pink suffusion. We have found it to be exceptionally free-flowering over a long period, especially given full sun, and with a relatively compact habit.



*Camellia sasanqua* ‘Tago-no-tsuki’



Above: *Camellia sasanqua* ‘Narumigata’ Below: *C. sasanqua* ‘Rainbow’

Taking this one step further is the very showy ‘Stars ’N Stripes’, a Nuccio second generation *Camellia sasanqua* hybrid introduction, white with red-pink stripes and a pink border, reminding me of an out-of-season *Rosa gallica* ‘Versicolor’. It is certainly an interesting novelty, flowering with us for the first time last year as a young plant. ‘Ishtar’ looks to be similar in flower.

There are a great many pink-flowered varieties, in almost every shade from very pale rose to almost magenta. Of those we grow, I find the richer pinks better suited to our woodland setting, as the deeper colours associate well with the autumn hues of nearby deciduous shrubs. ‘Cleopatra (Sawada)’ and ‘Hugh Evans’ both rank highly, bearing a profusion of small pink flowers, even in deep shade, with a tidy, more upright habit than some. The herbaceous Japanese woodlander *Saxifraga fortunei* is one of the few plants I know that flowers simultaneously with these camellias, and I can’t help but think of a dense mat of a cultivar of similar colouring in full flower beneath ‘Hugh Evans’; something I am fired up to try.

*Camellia vernalis* ‘Hiryu’ is another great cultivar that deserves a mention for its saturated fuchsia-pink colouring, at least in the plant we grow under that name. It has small but nicely formed double flowers with poise and charm, displayed well on a nice compact plant.



True red is more of an elusive colour in autumn-flowering camellias than in their spring-flowering relations. 'Yuletide', a chance seedling from 'Hiryu' that occurred at Nuccio's, has captured all our imaginations in recent years as a reliable, red-flowered variety. I couldn't believe my eyes seeing an entire sales bench of potted plants in full flower in the Wisley Garden Centre one year. Regrettably, we have found this highly desirable cultivar very reticent to flower once established, which seems to concur with other's experiences with it in a garden context.

Most of the collection is found growing in light woodland on Battleston Hill and in Oakwood, where they are complementary to our core collection of spring-flowering *Camellia japonica* cultivars and hybrids that major in these areas, effectively extending the camellia season by another couple of months. However, it has been interesting to observe how well plants in full sun have performed, flowering superbly following the hot summer of 2022. It has reinforced the idea that they are more adaptable plants than often given credit for, more suitable for general planting, not needing the shelter of a woodland as widely presumed. Even where space is limited, they can be wall-trained. 'Paradise Belinda' has taken well to this treatment on a west-facing wall at Wisley, where its big pink flowers are very effective against the red brick.

Our relative success in recent years has tempted us to try some of its hybrids. Caroline Bell's superb article in the 2021 Yearbook outlines just how much development has taken place in the 21st century, particularly in hybridisation. 'Yume' looks to be a very interesting bicoloured hybrid with *Camellia yuhsienensis*, while 'Yoimachi' promises excellent fragrance, being a hybrid of *C. fraterna*. Both went in as young plants last autumn, along with a number of other new cultivars from Yves Stervinou in France.

As our collection is growing and improving year on year, *Camellia sasanqua* and its autumn-flowering companions continue to have an exciting future at RHS Garden Wisley.

Jack Aldridge

(Jack Aldridge is a plantsman and horticulturist at RHS Garden Wisley, responsible for Oakwood.)

All photos by the author.



*Camellia vernalis* 'Hiryu'



*Camellia sasanqua* 'Paradise Belinda' is perfect against a wall at Wisley

## MILLAIS NURSERIES

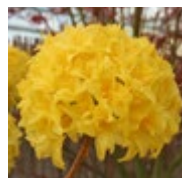


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## New Forest Branch

Visit to Minterne Gardens 26th May 2023



New Forest Branch members 'plant hunting' at Hilfield Friary

Mark Bobin, the Head Gardener at Minterne, invited the branch to a masterclass on the effects of hybridisation on rhododendrons but the day began with a visit to the Secret Garden at the nearby Hilfield Friary of St Francis. This was originally created by a renowned plantsman and collector, Brother Vincent, a long-time member of our Group. Walking through the tall specimens, it was possible to believe we were botanising in rhododendrons' native habitat.

On the way back to Minterne, we visited the Friary's meadow filled with wildflowers including native orchids.

After lunch at the café at Minterne House, the owner, Lord Digby, showed us his copy of *The Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya*, published in 1849. His ancestors sponsored expeditions and many of the species at Minterne were propagated from seed brought back by these plant hunters in the nineteenth century.

We then set off on the one-mile trail around the Himalayan Gardens. We were impressed by all the work Mark is doing to improve both

the layout and the collections. Water plays an important role, with lakes and cascades creating a calm and tranquil setting. The views along the valley were magnificent with *Iris sibirica* 'Caesar's Brother' in full bloom.

Mark gave us a masterclass on the effects of hybridisation, starting with *Rhododendron griersonianum*. He demonstrated how the hybrids retained some of the key features of the species but varied both from it and from each other. One example on the bench was *R. 'May Day'* (*haematodes* x *griersonianum*) but we enjoyed trying to spot other hybrids during our tour.

The *Davidia involucrata* were also at their best, covered with white bracts, so it was a fascinating and varied day.

Emma Page

Photos by the author.



*Iris sibirica* 'Caesar's Brother', a magnificent Canadian variety from the 1920s, looks fabulous along the waterside at Minterne



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## South East Branch

### Garden visit to Colwood House, Warninglid, Sussex 18th May 2023

**A**t the kind invitation of the owner, Mrs Rosy Brennan, we gathered at Colwood House on a very pleasant spring afternoon to be shown around and explore the 12-plus acre grounds of a somewhat mixed heritage house, much altered and amended over its history. Amongst others, a school had owned the site for over twenty years, and although not completely neglected, the school's groundsmen had not looked after the rhododendrons or azaleas at all, so *Rhododendron ponticum* was rife and the yellow of the azaleas was predominant; laurel was present in quantity as well.

Rosy and her husband only took the house over just before the 1987 gales, which apparently did do a great deal of damage to the trees in the garden. There had been the ubiquitous Cedar of Lebanon at the back of the house, but that went. We were all amazed at how well the garden has been rescued by Rosy and her husband, until he died five years ago. Despite the *R. ponticum* and laurel, what can be seen is a very lovely garden of varied planting.

One's first sight of the garden, on driving in, is a colourful display of azaleas around the front lawn. There is a good mixture of Ghent azaleas which were in full flower. Complementing the azaleas there is a large *Rhododendron* 'Loderi King George', also in full flower at the time of our visit. On first sight it is a lovely shape but on further inspection one sees that it is actually growing from well behind where the flowers are, but has still ended up well-arranged – nature at work.

There are many trees that, whilst not quite National Champions, are high up the list of several species in the Tree Register, some with County Champion status. We were most impressed with a *Davidia* that survived the 1987 gale, now with an unusual 'kink' due to its partially falling and subsequent regrowing; it was absolutely covered in white 'handkerchiefs' on the visit.

There is an enormous 'Cornish Red' rhododendron, very unbalanced from the historical growth, that leans wildly and is lifting out of ground, but nevertheless is thriving – though it looks as if it could do with some help to stop it from toppling over; it appears very prone to drying out at root level, as well.

A legacy of the school was a large swimming pool, but it has been reduced in size, we were told, as it was just too big for a garden. It



The formal parterre at Colwood House



*Rhododendron* 'Loderi King George'

now forms a part of a terrace area with shelter and quiet peacefulness. The pool area is lined with clipped camellias, mostly *Camellia* × *williamsii* 'Donation' we were told, which, although shaped like balls, apparently flower very well. To the bottom of the garden a small lake has been restored with its 'secret island', and a number of old established rhododendrons, such as 'Cynthia', nearby.

After an extensive walk there was welcome tea and cakes on the terrace to round off the visit.

Barry Haseltine

## South East and Wessex Branch

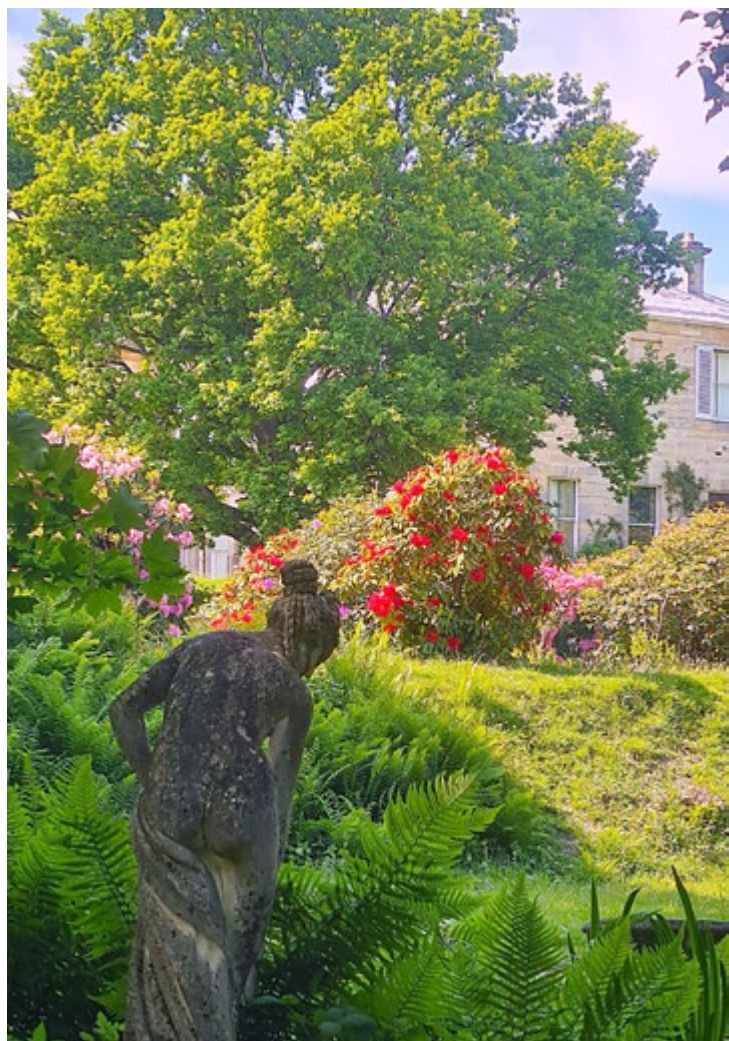
### Visit to Hammerwood Park, East Grinstead 2nd June 2023

**A**t the invitation of Mr and Mrs David Pinnegar, a last minute visit was arranged for 2nd June to the grounds of Hammerwood Park, an estate whose history goes back to the 1700s, with a rhododendron garden that is believed to be from the 1800s. David Pinnegar had approached the Group two years ago, with a view to offering an invitation to look at the partially restored 'American Garden', but it had not been possible to fit it in. However, as the season was very late this year, early June became possible for the visit and we duly met there on a lovely early summer's day. The house is from the late 1700s and was designed by Benjamin Latrobe, an English architect who emigrated to the USA and found fame by designing the White House and the Capitol Building among many others; an American town is named after the family. The house had been seriously neglected up until the 1980s, when David's family acquired it and started to bring it slowly back to life; the house is now in good order, and very attractive.

There are in fact two rhododendron areas, the one from more than a century ago and another on the original tennis court, planted with modern hybrids by David's mother in the late '80s, which were none the less difficult to identify. Unfortunately, with funds for management in very short supply and much of the work relying on volunteers, the rhododendrons have been neglected, leaving only a very nice *R. ponticum*, walk – if you could get through. A couple

Continued overleaf





Statuary enhances the wonderful garden at Hammerwood Park

of years ago, the Pinnegars were able to cut down and clear away the rhododendrons to about two metres high, regardless of what the plant was. The subsequent regrowth has been *R. ponticum* and the original grafted scions, but now it is possible to distinguish one plant from another. They are marking *R. ponticum* re-growth to be removed in the winter, and the area is beginning to look like it was meant to – but there is a long way to go.

The Group was singularly unable to identify hybrids except 'Sappho', but others in purple shades were not identifiable. It was unclear how much was actually *R. ponticum* as there was a huge range of colours from fairly light to very dark purple, but we know that *R. ponticum* has heavily hybridised to give a wide range of colours – all shades of purple, of course.

The setting for the house and garden is fabulous, facing south to undulating wood/farmland; the layout of terraces etc adds to the ambience of the setting, although maintenance of the grass is limited to coarse cutting, no time for manicuring grass ('hooray' say modernists.)

After the visit we were taken into the house and offered marvellous cakes and hot and cold drinks. In his thanks to us for coming, David said they had been worried that they had been unable to name most of the plants, but now they understood that 'experts' such as the RCM Group couldn't either!

We are invited back to try to re-establish the garden with them, no doubt as volunteers as well as visitors; if only the Group's average age was not so high!

Barry Haseltine

## South West Branch Away Day to NT Killerton Saturday 1st July 2023

**F**ourteen South West Branch members gathered at National Trust Killerton near Exeter for our annual Away Day entitled 'The Living Collections and Plant Conservation at the National Trust'.

Our hosts were the National Trust's National Curator for Living Collections, Alison Crook, newly in post, and Plant Conservation Centre Manager and expert propagator Chris Trimmer, who was responsible for designing the Plant Conservation Centre (PCC).

Chris had come to Rosemoor some years ago to give a practical demonstration of rhododendron propagation, and we invited him back as his previous visit had been most interesting and very instructive.

Alison started the proceedings with an illustrated talk on the aims and increasing work of the PCC in not only preserving and propagating threatened plants within the National Trust, but in forging links with other botanical agencies and gardens with similar aims. This has become even more of an issue with our changing climate which is producing additional stresses on the plants we currently grow. She is taking fresh look at resilience of gardens in the face of this developing challenge.\*

A close relationship with the Micropropagation Unit at Duchy College has been operating for many years, and has served to save many historic plants including rhododendrons. A case study was *Rhododendron* 'Van Houttei Flore Pleno', a Ghent Azalea introduced before 1900, long out of cultivation but with a unique survivor found at Emmetts Garden, Sevenoaks, Kent in 2010. Material was sent to Duchy College for micropropagation, and young plants were returned to Emmetts in 2016. It can sometimes take up to 15 years for a micropropagated rhododendron to reach a good size for planting out. This demonstrates the usefulness of a connection with a specialist micropropagation centre such as we have at Duchy College, and both Ros Smith and Dr Naomi Beddoe from there were present, having set up a small display in the room.



Chris Trimmer describes the work of the National Trust's Plant Conservation Centre





South West Branch members making the most of a guided tour of Killerton's garden with Chris Trimmer and Alison Crook

Alison has begun to arrange specialist plant gatherings which she calls 'monographs' looking at particular genera in detail for the purposes of accurate identification and to see what can be learned about them from all aspects; botany, conservation and horticulture. The subject of the first of these held last year was *Narcissus*. Delegates gathered for a week at a hotel venue in Plymouth surrounded by many hundreds of daffodils brought in for study and identification.

Similarly for *Rosa* this year. Alison hopes to arrange a similar in depth look at *Rhododendron* next year. Because of such a narrow window of opportunity to look at rhododendrons in flower, it was hoped that this monograph would not clash with our RHS, Group and Branch rhododendron shows and competitions.

Chris outlined the practical aspects of propagation and the move to a (secret) site in Devon from NT Knightshayes' walled garden. This has state of the art propagation technology, soon to be made even more so with new 'cold' facilities designed to extend the duration of the grafting window which, due to a warming climate, has halved to about six weeks. Quarantine areas for plants newly brought in and sterile conditions throughout the whole area strictly observed; cleanliness is paramount.

After lunch we reconvened as two groups in adjacent rooms with Chris Trimmer demonstrating rhododendron propagation in one and the other with Alison chairing an open and fruitful discussion on sharing and improving resources to create robust and meaningful datasets; methods of identifying and tracking plants propagated by the unit to the garden and the use of GPS and QR codes to identify specific taxa and their exact position in gardens. Work in progress, but already happening in a few gardens. Chris showed the rest of us the various methods he uses to propagate rhododendrons, from cuttings to grafting and air-layering. Standouts for me were:

1. The hydroponic unit which mists the cuttings from beneath. They hang down, supported individually, making it very easy to lift and inspect each one for the appearance of roots.
2. The use of individual substrate units in modular trays which expand when soaked in water. Again, individuals can be inspected for progress without root disturbance.
3. The use of open sided air pots which encourage roots to grow out rather than circle the inside of a closed pot. They are made of plastic, but can be re-closed and used again and again.
4. The healthy, large plants of rhododendrons growing happily in a peat-free mixture which, unfortunately, is not yet available for the

*Continued overleaf*



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amateur gardener, although the manufacturer is now aware of the demand from specialist growers such as our Group to make bagged supplies available in smaller quantities.

Very generously, Alison had negotiated free passage for the group to go into the garden past the reception desk. It was a beautiful day and Chris was able to answer our questions on identity and show the results of some of the conservation work in the garden. An example of this were the young Cedars of Lebanon grown from seed from the ancient stand in the Lebanese mountains, thus preserving this precious genetic material. There are probably more Lebanon Cedars in British gardens than in Lebanon.

Highlights of the garden for me were: a wonderful flowering Sweet Chestnut, *Castanea sativa*, with very long showy flowers, and a initially puzzling, freely-flowering tree looking like a hornbeam, but which was actually *Ostrya carpinifolia*. Further along, more evidence of collaboration with the International Conifer Conservation Programme at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh were young Chilean trees on the hillside which kept company with the most massive and healthy specimen of *Saxegothaea conspicua* (Prince Albert's Yew) I have seen.

We thanked our hosts for making this an excellent and rewarding day, and some of us beetled home to try our hand at propagation. A donation was made by the SW Branch towards the work of the PCC, which is a very valuable resource worthy of our support.

John Marston

\*For further reading, Alison recommends the RHS 2017 report (in collaboration with the Universities of Sheffield and Reading) *Gardening in a Changing Climate* downloadable online.

[www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/climate-change](http://www.rhs.org.uk/science/gardening-in-a-changing-world/climate-change)

Photos by the author.

## PLANT NEWS

### Plant Heritage Threatened Plant of the Year 2023: it's a rhododendron this time!

Having delighted in a camellia winning last year, through our enthusiastic voting this time around, we have ensured a rhododendron got the top spot in 2023!

This is the nomination detail submitted to Plant Heritage:

#### 'The Dowager'

This hybrid rhododendron is a cross between R. 'Muriel' (a rare Leonardslee-raised hybrid of *falconeri* x *grande*) and R. *arboreum*. It was raised by the Dowager Lady Loder, Sir Edmund Loder's widow, who managed the Leonardslee estate from his death in 1920 until 1945 when her grandson Sir Giles Loder took over. It was named 'The Dowager' in honour of Lady Loder by Miss E. Godman of the South Lodge estate which is on the other side of the road from Leonardslee. The two estates often shared plant material and the two families were good friends. Miss Godman also introduced the plant in 1968 and it received the RHS Award of Merit in the same year when exhibited by her.

At Leonardslee we have only a single extant plant of this hybrid and it is unknown if any plants exist elsewhere, although it is unlikely. It is not available commercially through any nursery, and for these reasons it has been evaluated by Plant Heritage as an 'Endangered' cultivar.



*Rhododendron* 'The Dowager': Threatened Plant of the Year 2023  
Photo: Elliot Chandler

It has formed a medium-sized tree with a silvery indumentum under the leaves and pink and white flowers very early in the season, usually in March.

'The Dowager' forms part of the recently awarded National Collection status from Plant Heritage for our Loderi and Leonardslee-related rhododendron hybrids. We have recently sent material from this clone to the Duchy College in Cornwall to be micropropagated so that we can ensure its continued survival.

Pam Hayward/Jamie Harris

### An update on the Database Project

It is now four years since I commenced working on the RCMG Database of Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias extant in the United Kingdom, based on the lists of plants supplied to me by members of the Group, by organisations such as the RHS, National Trust and Forestry England and by large private gardens.

Each list that I receive is sorted into hybrids and species, and then the hybrids are checked against the International Register for the genus to ensure that names are correct. I also note hybrids that are not currently registered, and keep this aspect under review, reporting to the International Registrars for their checklists. As an observation, I find that, whilst camellia and magnolia growers appear keen to get their new hybrids registered, there seems to be an increasing reluctance for rhododendron hybridisers to agree to officially record their new introductions which is a great pity.

The plan is to display list extracts from the database on the Group website, which will be updated every six months to show the progress made. These lists will simply show the individual cultivar names and the numbers recorded in the database. No personal or location details will be published.

Recently, I have been working on the rhododendron hybrids, currently 10,882 entries, 3,970 different cultivars of which 2,101 are showing as unique. There are 325 cultivars not listed in the Register. Of our members, 71 have so far shared their information with me.

I have now extended the rhododendron hybrid database to include details of the key UK hybridisers/raisers of the cultivars for example Magor, Aberconway, Hydon, de Rothschild, Mangles, Hanger and more. I am running checklists of their hybrids, kindly supplied to me



by the Registrar, and this has enabled me to assist Bodnant, Exbury and RHS Wisley in tracing Aberconway, de Rothschild and Hanger hybrids no longer growing in their original gardens.

This Project relies entirely on the information that has been supplied to me. I am extremely grateful for your help so far. If you have not yet sent me your lists of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias, can I encourage you to think about doing so please? Maybe you are thinking that you have nothing unusual or 'rare', but you would be surprised how many times the 'lost' rarities have appeared in the least expected gardens. Every single record entered helps to clarify the cultivars that are safely conserved and continues to highlight those in danger of extinction. I confirm that all information supplied to me is held in complete confidence, and your details are shared with no-one. If it transpires that you have a cultivar that we are searching for, I, and only I, will make contact with you to discuss the possibility of obtaining propagation material.

Please send your lists, including where possible details of where you sourced your plants to me at [rcmconservation@gmail.com](mailto:rcmconservation@gmail.com) If you have submitted your list in the past and have some additions/deletions, I would also be pleased to hear from you.

*Sally Hayward*, RCM Database Manager

## MEMBERSHIP

**W**e welcome the following new members and hope they will enjoy all the benefits of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group.

*Philip Eastell*

### UK

Barry Healey	Hampshire
Alison Clarke	Essex
Jonathan Riley	London
Audrey Tam	N Ireland
Lauren Basham	Cornwall
Philip Putwain	Cheshire
James Parker	Surrey
Emma Bouchard	Hampshire
Pippa French	Oxfordshire
Claire Margetts	Kent
Leighton Giles	London

### EUROPE

Lee Behegan	Ireland
Sam Hoey	Ireland
Hester Forde	Ireland
Robert Miller	Ireland
John Fraher	Ireland

### WORLD

James Fox	Washington State, USA
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### GARDEN MEMBERSHIP

Sheringham Park	Norfolk
Furzey Gardens	Hampshire
Cannizaro Gardens	London
Worth Park Gardens	West Sussex
North Carolina State University	USA



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# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

## Forthcoming Group & Branch Events

### OCTOBER 2023

**Sat 28th 10am**

#### **South West Branch**

RHS Rosemoor  
Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH

**Branch AGM & Autumn Meeting  
Plant Sale, Quiz, Bring & Tell**

**Lecture by Seamus O'Brien**

(Curator of the National Botanic  
Garden of Ireland, Kilmacurragh)

**'In the footsteps of Joseph Hooker'**

£10 per person

*Trainee gardeners and horticultural  
students free*

Dr John Marston

01271 267091

artavianjohn@gmail.com

### NOVEMBER 2023

**Date to be announced.**

#### **Wessex Branch**

Venue to be confirmed.

**Surrey, Sussex or Berkshire  
Autumn Meeting**

**A day of talks, Social dinner and  
Garden Visit**

Sian Thomas

wessex@rhodogroup-rhs.org

### MARCH 2024

**Sat 9th / Sun 10th**

#### **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 2024

**Sat 6th / Sun 7th**

#### **RHS**

RHS Garden Wisley

**RHS Main Camellia, Early  
Rhododendron & Spring  
Ornamental Plant Competitions**

Georgina Barter

020 7821 3142

georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

**Sat 20th / Sun 21st**

#### **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

### MAY 2024

**Sat 4th / Sun 5th**

#### **RHS**

RHS Garden Harlow Carr

**Harlow Carr Rhododendron  
Competition**

Georgina Barter

020 7821 3142

georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

### JUNE 2024

**Sat 1st / Sun 2nd**

#### **RCM Group**

Trewithen Gardens

**Group AGM & Centenary Cup  
Competition and Show**

Robbie Sampson

secretary@rhodogroup-rhs.org

### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

#### **Chairman**

Graham Mills 01326 280382 chairman@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Vice Chairmen**

Barry Cooke 01932 863719 vc2@rhodogroup-rhs.org

David Millais 01252 792698 vc1@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Secretary**

Robbie Sampson secretary@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Treasurer**

Philip Eastell 07749 278992 treasurer@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Membership Secretary**

Philip Eastell 07749 278992 membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Plant Committee Chairman**

Pam Hayward 01822 852122 plantchair@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Yearbook Lead Editor**

Vacancy. Correspondence to yearbook@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Bulletin Editor**

Peter Furneaux 01568 780828 bulletin@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Events Co-Ordinator**

Vacancy. Correspondence to events@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Webmaster**

Graham Mills 01326 280382 webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Advertising Officer**

Philip Eastell 07749 278992 advertising@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Archivist**

Pam Hayward 01822 852122 archivist@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Communications Officer**

Mark Bobin 07776 287686 communications@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Convenor of Group Seed Bank**

Tim Atkinson seeds@rhodogroup-rhs.org

#### **Outstanding Garden Scheme Co-Ordinator**

Nick Butler ogs@rhodogroup-rhs.org

**WEBSITE: [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)**

Members are more than  
welcome to attend events  
at any branches

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