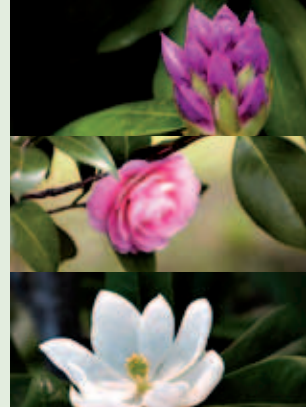




# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Bulletin 102 / March 2010 / [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)



## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Andy Simons

With two unfavourable winters in a row the series of relatively benign ones that preceded them are a distant memory. We have been lulled into thinking that "global warming" was indeed upon us and that we should ready ourselves for growing Vireya Rhododendrons rather than our traditional hardy hybrids. Well those thoughts have been well and truly beaten out of us. The winter of 2009-10 has been (so far) really difficult, when not snowing or freezing, the rain has stopped most other gardening activities. The reason I am particularly upset is that after last year's poor Camellia season this was going to be a great year with large buds forming as quickly as I can remember and plants coming into bloom amazingly early, for example *Camellia japonica* 'Desire' was in full flower for us in November only to be mushed by snow and frost after a couple of weeks.

The thing to remember is that gardening is a long game and that things will turn around. It may be that even this year will surprise us and turn out to be a good flowering one, probably for those hardy hybrids. Most importantly do not get tempted to rip-out a plant that has superficially succumbed to the cold, I am expecting a significant number of casualties but I will not do anything for a good year as many will bounce back even if they seem totally dead in a few weeks time. (However if you are looking for space for that new variety you "just can't fit in" now may be the time to act with at least a partially clear conscience.) If you could all do me a favour and record those plants that indeed did succumb and conversely any that survived unscathed and flowered well regardless, it may produce some interesting results.

If it has not been possible to go out and garden we have at least had the consolation of the 2010 year book to keep us entertained. Pam Hayward has again produced a publication that she and all of us should be justifiably proud of, the breadth and depth of content is exceptional and when presented with such a high production standard we are really very lucky indeed.

Turning to the subject of group activities and hopefully better weather, your committee has been mulling over the best approach for our traditional spring and autumn tours, as an



*Camellia changii* (Syn. *Camellia azalea*)

Photo: Maurice Foster

(see report on page 5.)

example a trip to New Zealand is being considered for the later quarter of 2011. More details on page 4 and in the next Bulletin, if the tour can be developed and made affordable. I know this will be too much for many members but what would you like to

see included in these events? What areas of the UK or abroad should we be visiting? And how much should we be budgeting for? These are all questions I would be interested

in hearing your input on. I would especially like to hear from people who have never been on one of the group tours and the reasons for not doing so.

Best wishes and I hope to see you at one of this year's events, especially the flower shows.

After last year's poor Camellia season this was going  
to be a great year with large buds forming as quickly  
as I can remember

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### Relationship with the RHS and the new constitution for the Group

The Chairman, the Hon Treasurer and I met with the RHS at the beginning of December to discuss a draft model constitution for Special Interest Groups that they had distributed. The RHS side understood that there were parts of our existing constitution that we would feel vital to have retained. It was agreed that we should submit a revised draft for RCM Group use by Christmas, for further discussion with them in January. This we managed to do, but unfortunately the RHS have not kept to the agreed timetable, and by mid February we have had no response. Our Committee reviewed this draft as submitted to the RHS at its meeting on February 16 and some amendments were agreed. A revised version will shortly be submitted to the RHS, and thereafter "the ball will be in their court" and we, as our Chairman has put it, must get on with our real business - the plants.

### Introducing our new Chairman

I was delighted when the Committee elected Andy Simons to serve as Group Chairman from 1st January 2010. As a fellow member of the RHS Rhododendron and Camellia subcommittee I have learnt two important things about Andy; first that although his main love and area of expertise is well known to be camellias, he has a strong feeling for, and knowledge of, both rhododendrons and magnolias; and second, that he is an effective and businesslike Chairman of a meeting. These seem to me essential attributes for a Chairman of this Group, but he also brings one extra - the gift of youth, for Andy is still in his early forties. Could this be a record for an RCM Group Chairman? Like his predecessor, Andy will combine the Chairmanship of this Group with that of the Rhododendron and Camellia subcommittee. He is also a member of the influential RHS Woody Plants Committee and on the RHS Shows Advisory Committee. All of this, I believe, bodes well for the Group at a time when our relationship with the RHS is under review and likely to change. I admire Andy for being willing to take on these important roles on top of a demanding professional career. He deserves all our strongest support - and the best of luck.

### EDITOR'S NOTES

John Rawling

Members will find **Two Inserts** included with this Bulletin.

For those members for whom we do not have an email address, we are sending you a printed copy of the latest **Surplus Plants List**.

The list includes plants from many more members scattered around Britain and the near areas of Europe than ever before. Some of the members are able to send plants around the UK, but only a few into Europe. Postage and packing prove rather expensive.

Details on how to order plants is printed on the list.

The other is the 2010 **Voting Slip** with details of the Committee. Please complete where necessary and post to the Hon Secretary.

**Sadly, I have to report the death of a number of prominent and well-known members.**

**J**ohn Quicke died on November 16 last year at the age of 87, not many minutes after he had walked around his beloved Sherwood garden (at Newton St Cyres, Devon) for the last time.

A Memorial Service was held on January 16th in Crediton Church. Amongst the very large congregation were members of the Group who I suspect, like myself, were much taken by a song written and composed by his daughter Annie and performed by her and Vaughan Gallavan, Head Gardener at Sherwood. I thought the words would be of interest to a wider audience of those who may have visited Sherwood and its collections of magnolias, Knaphill azaleas, berberis and buddlejas, or knew John. Annie has kindly agreed to their being reprinted in the Bulletin. She wishes to acknowledge the much needed help she received from her mother, Prue, and Vaughan Gallavan, in the choice of plants, plant names and their pronunciation. Unfortunately, I cannot reproduce the tune to which the words were sung unaccompanied, but it was memorable.

Philip Evans.

### Sherwood garden: in memory of JGQ

Berberis valdiviana, Buddleja colvilei  
Rhododendron argyrophyllum, Sorbus torminalis  
Magnolia sargentiana robusta, Azalea Knaphill Apricot  
Hamamelis mollis Pallida, Symphytum grandiflorum

(Paths we follow find them all:  
View serene, or secret space)

From the gifts of the collectors, the explorers, the hunters  
Who bring plants from the valleys and the slopes of the world  
You chose many special, new treasures to join  
The great grand slow dance of this garden

The plants you loved, and the study you loved  
A life you loved, in this place you loved  
A quiet paradise in these valleys, revealed  
We're looking out at the beauty of the garden

Kolkwitzia amabilis, talkative Ercilla\*, Cornus canadensis  
Berberis thunbergii, Erica carnea Springwood Pink  
Acer palmatum Osakazuki, Camellia reticulata  
Nyssa sylvatica Wisley Bonfire, Daphne bholua

Each day, each week a new story unfolds  
The buds they grow larger and the leaves they unfurl  
Flowers appear, from the plans you conceived:  
And in their own special way, they fulfil what they are

The plants you loved, and the study you loved  
A life you loved, in this place you loved  
A quiet paradise in these valleys, revealed  
We're looking out at the beauty of the garden

*\*Ercilla volubilis (JGQ's Joke)*

**S**tephen Fox died just before Christmas, aged 85. He lived with his wife, Anne, in Little Hayfield, High Peak.

Their home and garden abuts the High Peak moors, near to Kinder Scout and is renowned for his collection of Rhododendrons, especially those in the Taliensia series. I heard the late George Smith once describe Stephen as "one of the leading experts in the world on the Taliensia Rhododendrons".

Stephen went on many treks to the Himalayas, including Bhutan, his final major expedition being to the Tsari Valley in 2000. It was a great privilege to be in his company. His garden abounded with a multitude of plants grown from wild collected seed, often with many specimens of the same species, from different collections, all clearly labelled. Not just a practical horticulturalist, but also inclined to academic study of his favourite species, Stephen prepared a composite Index of the Yearbooks of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group from 1946 to 1997. With an amazing 37,000 references to Rhododendrons alone, it unlocked valuable material for the connoisseur.

He and Anne regularly welcomed visitors to their garden, both from local groups, such as our North West England Branch, the Scottish Rhododendron Society and others from all over the world. All were greeted as long lost friends. On these occasions visitors had to be careful not to enthuse too greatly about any given plant, otherwise their car boots (and interiors, sometimes) would be full with "given" plants, sometimes of large dimension.

Stephen worked for the BBC in Manchester, being responsible, among other things, for the electrical side of "Outside Broadcasts" in the days when these were epic feats of engineering. Prior to retirement his post was Manager Operations.

He had many other interests, including chamber music and, unsurprisingly, computing. He always looked years younger than his age and was of deceptively quiet nature. This could lead one to underestimate his formidable intellect. His response to a question may sometimes have appeared diffident or hesitant. This was not through ignorance but because he would consider his answer fully, before delivering his thoughts with a judicial and almost forensic analysis.

His compliments could also be quite disarming. During dinner one evening, in our mess tent in the Tsari Valley, he made comment on the voice of one of our companions, the late Bill Galbraith, Q.C. Bill was another of great intellect but blessed with a sonorous and mellifluous Edinburgh accent. Stephen turned to him after Bill had finished speaking, saying quietly "Has anyone ever told you your voice sounds like an *oboe d'amore*?" Bill was lost for words, being able to manage only "Well, to be honest, no".

We will all miss his warmth, wisdom and enthusiasm.

*Ted Brabin.*

#### **I also have to report the deaths of**

**Lady Anne Cowdray** of Broadleas Gardens, Devizes, Wiltshire, died in May last year, aged 95. Lady Cowdray restored the 4 acre garden at Broadleas, Devizes, Wiltshire. She gardened on greensand and her garden was described as having sheets of wildflowers and, above all, banks of Himalayan trees and shrubs. The magnolias are the 'Star Turn'

(Courtesy of The Daily Telegraph)

**Violet Lort-Phillips** has died at the age of 100. She served as the third President of the International Camellia Society.

**Jane Hayter** of Yackandandah, Victoria, Australia.

We send our condolences to the families of these members.

#### **NOTE FROM THE EDITOR**

I need your letters, reports from branches, articles, future events etc, to keep the members up to date!

So, please send me your letters and copy

**for the July 2010 Bulletin**

**by 14th June 2010.**

Please send to: John Rawling, Hon. Bulletin Editor,  
The Spinney, Station Road, Woldingham, Surrey, CR3 7DD.

E-mail: [jr.eye@virgin.net](mailto:jr.eye@virgin.net) or Tel. (&Fax) 01883 653341

#### **FOR SALE**

**Peak District Home, if possible to a plant-lover.**

4-bed stone built bungalow with one-acre plantsman's garden adjoining moorland. Many unusual plants and especially notable for Rhododendrons - "... **one of the best private rhododendron collections in the country**". they number several hundred species and hybrids, many from wild-collected seed. Established over 30 years. If anyone is interested, or just curious, then please talk to - Anne Fox 01663 744260



#### **NEWS ITEMS**

**M**illais Nurseries has again been awarded the prestigious **Rothschild Cup** for their impressive display of rhododendrons at the 2009 Chelsea Flower Show. They won a Gold Medal for their exhibit at the Show.

Members may have recently heard on Radio 4, **Gardeners Question Time**, the recommendations to visit the restored glasshouse at

**Wollaton Hall, Nottingham.**

**The Camellia House** is the oldest cast iron glasshouse in Europe and sounds as if it definitely worth a visit.



### Spring 2010

There are still places available, by special request, for our tour of the gardens of East Germany – 11th to 15th May 2010. Don't miss this opportunity to visit some of the finest rhododendron gardens around Dresden. We shall be staying at the first class 4\* Ringhotel Residenz Alt Dresden, where we are assured of every comfort!

Reservations should be sent to Arena Travel as soon as possible using the booking form enclosed in the last issue of the bulletin.

(Mislaid your form? Contact Arena Travel on 01473 660800 (or the Bulletin Editor) to request another!)

### Autumn Weekend 2010

The joint ICS/RCMG Autumn weekend will be held from Friday 29th until Sunday 31st October, staying at The Old Bell Hotel in Malmesbury. Full details of this event will appear in the next Bulletin. (We shall certainly be visiting Westonbirt, in all its Autumn splendour.) If you would like to be kept informed of the itinerary and cost of the weekend do contact me or check the group website.

(judy.hallett@googlemail.com or 01981 570401)

### New Zealand 2011

As I have mentioned in previous bulletins it is our intention to visit New Zealand in the late summer/early autumn of next year (Spring in New Zealand).

Andy Simons has been working on an itinerary and I set out below an overview of our plans, hoping that you will agree that this is an opportunity not to be missed. We anticipate it will include:

- Ayrles Garden
  - Camellia Haven Nursery
  - Magnolia Grove
  - The Jury Garden
  - Pukeiti
  - Woodleigh Gardens
  - Rhodohill Nursery
  - Waipahihi Bot. Gardens
  - Waiau Woodland Gardens
  - Timaru Botanic Garden
  - The Dunedin Rhododendron Association Garden
- and also many private gardens, a wine tour, and a visit to the Otago Peninsula Albatross Colony!

**This promises to be a very busy and exciting tour!**

A few members have already told me of their interest in this proposed tour; and in order to get a clearer picture of just how many members intend to come do contact me as soon as possible. It would be most helpful, for planning purposes, to hear from you by June this year. This will enable me to get a firm costing from Arena travel so that we can all start saving!

Once again with a new Chairman for the Group, I have persuaded him to undergo a short interview with the Editor for this publication. My subjects will hopefully reveal a little of his background, experience and hopes for this Group for the future. I list his responses below.

### *What was it that encouraged your interest in rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias?*

From a small child one of my family's regular holiday destinations was the New Forest, and an obligatory day out during these trips was a visit to Exbury Gardens. Like so many members of the group it was this garden that infected me with the interest in our plants. Initially Rhododendrons dominated my interest from an almost technical point driven by their diversity but unfortunately our garden at that time was highly alkaline and Exbury hybrids did not take well to long term pot culture so a gradual transition to Camellias occurred. Of course we now live on acid sand so the Rhodos and Camellias have to fight it out for my attention while *Magnolia grandiflora* looks on.

### *Many members know of your great interest and knowledge in growing and showing Camellias and the success you have achieved in competitions. Do you have a wider interest in horticulture generally?*

As you become more active in the "plant world" you become exposed to the diversity of plant groups and some people migrate to become generalists. I have consciously held back from that path. The reason being that I believe the development of garden camellias is on the edge of a golden age, perhaps literally as yellow flowering hybrids make it into our gardens and other newly discovered species increase the range of plant types. However I am hiding rather an unfortunate secret, Orchids, we are nearing the position that orchids and gardening books will literally stop us getting into the house. We have an extensive collection of several dozen Phalaenopsis and Odont. types.

### *Are you able to grow rhododendrons yourself, or the space even to grow magnolias?*

Although the camellias dominate I do have a small rhododendron collection with even a *R. sinogrande* lurking somewhat unhappily in our dry-cool garden. As space has permitted I have gathered a few of the Exbury hybrids that I could not have attempted in our previous garden, so 'Lionel's Triumph and a good 'Naomi' surprisingly thrive in our dry condition, I am still on the hunt for 'Jocelyn'. Magnolias are a problem, I would aspire to a collection but just lack the space. However an expired Laburnum tree will offer the space for one magnolia. I welcome suggestions as to which one?

### *What is it that makes Camellias such a strong interest for you?*

You are seeking a tangible answer to an intangible question. However camellias give so much and ask so little. The quality of the most humble of Camellia flowers has an X-factor or star qualities that make them appear difficult and exotic. This apparent exotic nature is really only matched by orchids (in my mind at least). Easy to grow once established, free flowering over a long period with an ever increasing range of colours the huge variety of Camellias is really addictive.

### How do you see the Group developing over the next five years or so?

The group must provide its members with services that they value as well as supporting the 3 plant genera. Modern life has so many calls on time and money that we can feel defensive about the long term future of the group, I do not share these fears. Change will be necessary with greater integration of the group within the wider RHS being key. I do not believe we should seek to stand alone but rather be an intrinsic part of the RHS representing our plant genera and acting as a source of knowledge and experience not only for the group members but the wider RHS. Part of this transition will see the group committee and the RHS Rhododendron and Camellia plant committee coming closer together and potentially merging under a new more open approach to RHS plant committees.

### What do you see as the priorities for the Group and its future?

We have seen the steady evolution of the bulletin and yearbook into undeniably world class publications, this progress has underpinned the continued strength of the group and it is essential that we maintain this quality almost at any cost. This emphasis on communication is vital in getting our message out and attracting and developing new members. Like it or not the internet will be an ever increasing part of all our lives and we should build on the group website integrating much greater interactive elements to the site such as question and answer sessions or even making committee meetings or the AGM available to download (*surely a must for any members with insomnia*). Having emphasised the use of the internet it is important to remember that gardening is a practical activity and the group's meetings and tours must remain front and centre.

### Are there any topics you would like to see presented or discussed in the 'Bulletin' (or the Yearbook)?

Generating content for the groups publications is a continual struggle, as I have said previously we must support our members requirements. In turn members need to let the committee know what they are concerned about and what better mechanism than the bulletin, or for more complex issues the yearbook. Consequently a greater emphasis on members' questions would be useful including members' photographs. Following this theme of members involvement the availability of the more rare or newer varieties is an issue in the UK and perhaps a "plants wanted" section could be introduced for the rarer non-commercial plants.

## CAMELLIAS

Maurice Foster

### A summer flowering camellia - *Camellia changii*

Last February we visited the garden of Bob and Derelie Cherry at Kulnura, about an hour's drive north of Sydney. We have visited quite often over the years and we know we will always see something of rather more than passing interest among Bob's extensive collection of rare plants. Camellias are one of his specialities and apart from his 'Paradise' range of sasanqua hybrids, now grown across the world, Bob has one of the finest and most comprehensive collection of Camellia species to be seen anywhere. It was one of his more recent additions to this collection that stopped us in our tracks.

Camellias do not flower in February at the height of summer in Australia – our equivalent of July, but hotter – but this species, *Camellia changii*, was in bloom, and what a flower. It was of a luminous, but not offensive, vermilion red, of stunning clarity and seen to perfection against the backdrop of its dark green foliage. The flowers were about 4" across, the 7-8 petals ovate-ovobate and notched at the end. *Camellia changii* has also been known as *Camellia azalea* as the leaves tend to be arranged in a whorl at the end of the shoots, rather like an azalea and the flowers bear a rather superficial resemblance to those of an azalea. The habit is compact and bushy, the plant growing to 1.5 – 2m.

Not only were the flowers striking, but the plant is reported to also have the capacity of growing continuously in suitably warm conditions and thus flowering throughout the year. Where conditions are less warm, the species produces new shoots once or twice a year and will flower in summer and autumn. The potential for hybridists is evident.



*Camellia changii*

Photo: Maurice Foster

Discovered in 1984, *C. changii* is limited to a small area in Guangdong province in China where the climate is subtropical, with both sun and rainfall plentiful. According to 'Collected species of the genus camellia' it has some frost tolerance having survived -5C, so it may be an excellent candidate for cool greenhouse treatment in the UK or indeed in the open in favoured gardens.

It is endangered in the wild, where there are only an estimated 1000 plants, but Chinese propagators are reported to have produced many thousands of plants in cultivation, so it will not be too long before this 'new' introduction becomes widely available.

Members of the International Camellia Society will be familiar with the species as it was the subject of a paper by Professor Gao Jiyan (a co-author of 'Collected species' with Dr Clifford Parks) at their recent congress in Cornwall, but other Group members seeking more information about this fascinating and striking species will find Professor Gao's paper in print as the cover story in the 2008 edition of the ICS yearbook. There is also a reference with photographs in our own 2009 Yearbook in the article by Gary Long on his visit to China, as well as further information on the internet.

Maurice Foster, Jan 2009

Note: For further information on *C. azalea* C.F. Wei (Syn *C. changii* Ye), see the articles in the International Camellia Journal 2009, just published by the International Camellia Society.

Ed



## Where to live to grow Rhododendrons – the Sequel

This is a follow up to the article I wrote in the March 2008 Bulletin (#96), of my search for suitable areas of the UK that we should focus upon. Those of you that are very observant will have noticed that our change of address was highlighted in the last Bulletin, so we have moved.

We had realised that to make the exercise feasible we had to first choose a county-sized area. It seemed obvious to concentrate on the western side of England as this is noticeably warmer than the east and then somewhere north of Birmingham as this often has a good balance between rainfall and warmth. Following several fascinating forays over this area, ranging from Shropshire to Cumbria, we found that Cheshire fairly quickly stood out as the county to concentrate upon. The soil maps showed that most of this county has acid soil; there are excellent communication options with the rest of the UK and there are a significant number of interesting large towns and cities.

As Cheshire is quite a distance away from where we were living, we hoped that we could do most of the searching online. We still had painful memories of the previous move, of trudging around numerous Estate Agents who never really listened to our requirements and ending up with an ever growing mountain of paper on completely inappropriate properties.

I am pleased to say that we did achieve this aim. Needless to say there were many, many hours of tedious trawling through estate agents' websites. The better ones have very good filtering options on all sorts of house attributes, so it was generally a fairly quick exercise to examine the possibilities on each site. A crucial additional tool was Google maps as this allowed us to view a bigger picture of the area around any possible house. It was amazing how many times we found that a sewage farm, motorway or waterway was close by, but not mentioned in the description!



'Meadway' The new garden

Photo: Stephen Lyus

As the garden size was a crucial attribute, it was interesting to notice that if one visited an estate agent, they had no way of quickly selecting their houses with gardens of about an acre. For most of them, the fact that there was a garden was all they had bothered to record! As we had these "odd" requirements, quite a number didn't think it worthwhile even recording our needs. However, online it was different as the better sites such as "globrix" allowed one to filter the "outside space" for 1, 2, 3 or many acres. They are even able to identify a south facing garden. This seemed to be excellent on the face of it, but we quickly realised that estate agents are very wary about committing

to such exact statements, as they might be liable in any future law suit if they are wrong! So, we found that using 1 acre and "extensive garden" gave us access to the full set of properties that were available and of interest to us.

So, by these means we trawled the Cheshire area and in March found a likely candidate in the Wirral. I know it is strictly speaking now in Merseyside, but it was once in Cheshire and still has Chester postcodes. So, Helen went to visit with her trowel and soil collecting bags. The acidity was found to be between 6 and 6.3, so one Friday I went the long way home from Bradford via Liverpool to check it out for myself. It still puzzles me that the owners were unsure whether Rhododendrons would grow there as I found that they had six in situ, with labels, as well as some large deciduous azaleas and every other house in the cul de sac had substantial rhododendrons, magnolias and camellias in their front gardens! I found later that this acidity is due to the red sandstone that is a feature all over this area. One point that had not occurred to me, but became apparent when we examined this house, is that the homes at the ends of cul de sacs often have large gardens of a triangular shape.

After that it was just a matter of agreeing a price and selling ours. We sold in four days, but we did not move in until the 23<sup>rd</sup> September. That part of the experience could fill another article; the whole buying and selling process in England is still a mess, made even more expensive by the ridiculous HIPS which no party in either transaction ever used.

Wirral has a lot going for it: Ness Gardens, Bodnant, Tatton Park, Lake District all relatively close; Chester and Liverpool easily available by local train (free if you are old); and a climate that has been described by the locals as "no extremes of anything".

Moving my plants was relatively painless as most had never been in the ground. I found a "man with a large white van" to transport them. Unfortunately the floor area of the largest van was nowhere near big enough to cater for the numbers I needed to transport. The solution to this issue was to borrow some of those roll cages with 2 or 3 shelves that are used to transport potted plants in the trade. The final element of this logistical challenge was to use a large range of the multi-pot trays nowadays made freely available by most garden centres to their customers.

To conclude, I am amazed to be able to say that we only had to physically visit this one house! Now comes the difficult part, that of designing and creating an appropriate garden.

## LETTERS

Dear Editor

### Rhododendron flower initiation.

Following the paper reported on by Dr Ken Cockshull I have read with interest various contributions on the above topic. Having been involved with the commercial production of Rhododendrons and various Research and Development groups on behalf of the Nurserystock Industry over many years I feel it is appropriate to comment.

It is important to put this work strictly in context. It is aimed at commercial producers, producing young plants in containers. The objective is to produce a large well balanced plant of appropriate size and shape for the container in which it is sold and essentially, for the plant to be heavily budded. All this is to be achieved as quickly as possible to enhance profitability. As we know in a genus as diverse as *Rhododendron* it is dangerous to generalise but usually young, immature plants, growing naturally in the soil, do not produce significant numbers of

flowering shoots in the early years after planting. It may take several seasons (often only after 7-9 growth flushes) before the plant settles down and enters into what might be regarded as a mature rather than juvenile phase and hopefully begins flowering profusely and reliably. Even if some varieties of container grown *Rhododendrons* flower well at a young stage (and we know they do) it is certain that some types, often with special features such as attractive flower colour, or foliage, or form, will stubbornly refuse to cooperate and produce few or no flowers in the early stages of the production cycle. Not surprisingly therefore the industry has for many years encouraged and commissioned research into the factors involved in the control of vegetative growth and floral development in *Rhododendron*.

Early work involved an investigation of the factors which initiated flower buds together with more empirical studies into the influence of plant growth regulators (growth retardants) such as B-Nine (daminozide). Investigations into flower bud initiation showed that in *R. 'Roseum Elegans'* (an important "Iron Clad" in the US. and N.Europe) the shoot tip develops floral initials in the long days of late May and early June. Development then continues so that by mid October until the onset of dormancy in late December development is very well advanced to a point where anthocyanin pigment is accumulating in the petals and the female and male parts of the flower are almost fully complete. The following spring full maturity of the initials in early May allows blooming by the middle of the month. It seems reasonable to assume that this sequence mirrors the development of virtually all of the rest of the *Rhododendron* species and hybrids from the temperate regions with obvious variations to allow for early and late blooming and the effects of climate.

The information outlined above has been brought together to provide programmes for the culture of *Rhododendrons* in containers where a specific type of plant is required by the market. Apart from appropriate feeding and plentiful water application it can involve the artificial increase of day length (essential in short days) by providing supplementary light (usually 4 extra hours between 10 pm and 2 am) to enhance growth and produce the maximum number of shoots capable of initiating flower buds. But this growth needs to be controlled to promote and encourage flower initiation. This can be achieved by treatments with growth retardants. Without this treatment the young well fertilised and well watered plants can, and often do, produce extra vegetative growth rather than flower buds. Plants grown in natural long days will also require growth retardants if they are shy bloomers. Today some 40 years after the work was first carried out the most commonly used retardant is still daminozide (B-Nine or similar products) but more recently paclobutrazol (marketed under the names Bonzi, Pirouette etc.) has been added to the options (others –Phosphon and CCC used in the original work are no longer available).

By now you may be wondering where withholding water fits into the picture. There has been and still is a strong move by nurserymen to improve the efficiency of irrigation and conserve water supplies. It was the case that two-thirds of all producers watered container crops by overhead sprinklers. This resulted in a wastage of the water applied by up to 75%. As part of the efforts to change this situation government funding has supplemented the industry's input to finance investigations into more efficient water use. To date it has been shown that reducing water applications to a wide range of container grown plants can enhance quality by improving shape and balance and in some cases increase flower or fruit production. Investigations are ongoing and embrace better control systems, application methods, monitoring and the husbandry related questions of species choice and requirements. It is not surprising therefore

that a group as important as the *Rhododendron* and *Azalea* should have been investigated.

The first work on this took place in the late 1990s using container grown *Rhododendron* cv. 'Hoppy', a *R. yakushimanum* hybrid. The objectives were to replace or reduce the need for pruning and /or growth regulator treatments and to produce shapely plants carrying more flowers than the untreated controls. The results showed that severe water restriction during July and August resulted in stunted plants which did not recover until the following season. Severe drought in June-July resulted in fewer flower buds than less restricted regimes. Best results with most flowers were achieved by some water restriction (25% less) in September- October. However these results were not significantly better than plants exposed to a +50% more water regime. The implication of this is that it may be safe for growers to reduce water applications slightly towards the end of the season and that doing so could even enhance flowering.

The work was reinvestigated by another team in the early 2000s (the work referred to by Dr. Ken Cockshull in Horticulture Week) using again container grown *R. cv. Hoppy* and *R. cv. Scintillation*, for further interest *Azalea Hatsugiri* (Kurume) was added. Basically the conclusions were that:-

- floral initiation is inhibited by soil water deficits and stressed (dry) plants had significantly lower percentages of floral initiation than well watered (+50% more) plants.
- photoperiod was dominant over water availability in causing the initiation of flowers.
- the number of nodes produced before floral initiation was significantly reduced by reducing water availability ( in this respect water stress could be considered to produce a similar effect to plant growth regulators). This stress resulted in earlier floral initiation and in the extreme, premature flowering (premature anthesis) was induced. Also interestingly more flowers per inflorescence were produced on water stressed plants.

It was thought (hypothesis only) that the inhibition of floral initials might be due to the production of abscisic acid (ABA) by the water stressed roots and a trial was carried out to investigate this. It was demonstrated that the application of abscisic acid to well watered *Rhododendron* plants did indeed inhibit floral initiation.

Finally another possibility for enhancing flowering in *Rhododendron* is worth discussion. In the late 1970s Margaret Scott at the Efford Experimental Horticultural Station in Hampshire demonstrated the effect of phosphate (as superphosphate) on many species of woody plants showing that at moderate and certainly high levels it had a negative effect on growth, in extreme cases causing stunting and even death.

For a number of species it could encourage flower formation even on quite young plants and recommendations for the treatment of container grown *Camellia* cvs. were made and are still used today.

In the USA recommendations for the use of superphosphate as a top dressing were made to improve flowering in field grown *Rhododendron*. In the UK it is recommended to apply 28gm of single superphosphate per 5 litre pot (approx. 23cm in diameter). It is suggested an application of 8oz. of single superphosphate per square yard of land as a top dressing not later than early April may promote flowering in recalcitrant individuals. Strictly at owners risk!

B.E.Humphrey, Saxmundham Suffolk.  
E-mail.: humphreygarden123@btinternet.com



Dear Editor

Having recently been reading about the lives of plant hunters, it struck me as a bit strange that nobody appears to have made an epic film of their exploits.

There is definitely no shortage of actors to play the leading parts. I am sure that Brendan Gleeson would be delighted to play the part of George Forrest, for instance.

If Metro Goldwyn Mayar reads this publication, as I am sure he does, he might take the hint.

*Dan Ryan, Ballymacarbry, Waterford, Eire.*

## BRANCH REPORTS

*Robin Whiting*

### New Forest Branch - 2009

**Furzey Gardens** near Minstead in the New Forest was the venue for our first visit in mid April. The head gardener Peter White greeted us and gave us the early history of the garden. The land comprising Furzey gardens was originally part of the estate of Minstead Manor, but was sold in 1921 to pay off the gambling debts of the lady owner. Hugh Dalrymple was the lucky new owner of a 16<sup>th</sup> century cottage and about 8 acres of land all for £300. He then set about improving the land by bringing in topsoil and manure. He subsequently funded Frank Kingdon-Ward and George Forrest in their plant hunting expeditions.

Unfortunately the records of the seed accessions do not tie up with any of the plantings, and there are also many plants without labels. It was at this point that we noticed, with mild concern, that Peter had a roll of plant labels in his hand and we realised we were going to have to work for our guided tour. We did put names to a few of the rhododendrons and managed to resist the usual fallback, "must be a hybrid".

There are many fine plants in the garden, and some obviously of a great age. A huge azalea was the largest that any of our party had ever seen. A very handsome *Enkianthus perulatus* with its pure white blooms towered over us in another part of the garden. A charity has run Furzey Gardens since the 1970's and provides horticultural training for young adults with learning difficulties, and they assist the two gardeners.

The second visit in early May was to **Malthouse Gardens** at Chithurst in a lovely part of Hampshire. We were met by Graham Ferguson the owner. He told us the history of the property and how the 6 acre garden was started in the 1920's by Leslie Stent. Of particular interest was to learn that Graham was the son in law of Michael Haworth-Booth, the nurseryman, garden designer and author. The books he wrote are classics and are as relevant today as when they were first written. It was good to know that more than 100 of the hydrangeas he bred are now at the Malthouse together with many of his azalea hybrids.

Graham has a splendid, if slightly outrageous, sense of humour. He was referring to one plant and commented that it looked as if an unhealthy seagull had sat on it! He guided us round the steeply sloping garden, pointing out and naming the many lovely rhododendrons and azaleas. He did ask us to put names to some he didn't know, but having heard that Mr Davidian and others of his ilk had been round the garden naming plants, most of us thought it best to keep our own counsel. Part way round we enjoyed tea and biscuits provided by Mrs Ferguson. Refreshed, we went up through another part of the garden accompanied as before by Graham's faithful spaniel "Scrubber". I thought it best not to ask how she got her name! One of the last rhododendrons we were shown was 'Leonore', a hybrid of *auriculatum* and *kyawii* registered by Edmund de Rothschild, receiving an AM

in 1948 and known then as 'Leonora'. It was obviously not in flower, but a magnificent plant nonetheless.

A splendid and most enjoyable day.

*Robin Whiting*

### SE Branch show 2010

#### At Tilgate Park, Crawley – 17th & 18th April

The South East Branch has been holding a spring show for many years; initially held in a local school, but it was then really only for the benefit of the members and it was not seen by the public at large. A breakthrough to enable the public to appreciate the fantastic quality of the many flowers arose when the owners of Borde Hill Gardens in Sussex, Mr and Mrs Stephenson Clarke, offered space for the International Camellia Society to celebrate the anniversary of the Borde Hill raised Camellia 'Donation', and the branch show was invited to join in with the display. From 2004 to 2006 the main RHS rhododendron competition was also held there, with the International Camellia Society continuing with their show, and the South East Branch providing the Magnolia competition. In 2007 the RHS show moved to Rosemoor, where it has remained until now, although this is probably the last year at that venue. The attraction to Borde Hill of having a spring show was the extra visitors who paid to visit the gardens on the show weekend, but in the end, the income didn't justify the expenses, so a new venue has had to be found.

The Borough of Crawley, Sussex, owns the huge historic Tilgate Park, laid out over a century ago by one of the many Sussex owners who took a great interest in the plants coming back from the Far East – largely our genera. As part of the educational remit of Crawley Council, there is a Nature Centre which has a classroom, a green zone exhibition, cafe, a number of craft shops and some space for a marquee. The Borough, through one of our members, Nick Hagon, has invited the branch to hold the show there on **17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April**; the ICS will again join in and hold their spring competition. The use of a public park's facilities should open the show up to a much greater number of the public, as the Park is fully open to whoever wishes to go there. The Borough also see it as an opportunity to make their visitors more aware of the beauty and range of the flowers in our genera.

The arrangements for showing are the same as in previous years and judging will take place after 10.15 on the 17<sup>th</sup> and the show will be open to the public from 11.30. Schedules and full details for the rhododendron and magnolia part can be obtained from Everard Daniel (e.daniel4@ntlworld.com) and those for the camellia competition from Pat Short (patricia\_short@btconnect.com).

We need more of our members to show – it isn't difficult – just bring along the good blooms that you have and put them in the vases (provided)! Whilst it is helpful to know in advance how many entries there will be in each class, no-one should feel inhibited from coming along with things that they haven't notified in advance. Nature doesn't always respect the plans that one has made! But if you don't want to show, then come along to see what others have done – entry to the Park is free, but there is a small charge for the car park.

*Barry Haseltine*

### West Midlands Branch

#### Visit to Spetchley Park Gardens

Some 15 members gathered on the 31 October, the final opening day of the season at Spetchley Park for a tour led by Head Gardener, Kate Portman.

A few miles to the east of Worcester this 30 acre garden, with distant views to the Malvern Hills is largely a Victorian



creation, though with earlier origins. Amongst its claims to fame is the use of the Gardener's Cottage by Edward Elgar, who was inspired by the wind in the pine trees ('*Pinus nigra*') during his composition of the Dream of Gerontius. The garden was one of the very first opened to the public under the National Gardens Scheme in 1924.

The garden is entered through the well sheltered Melon Yard, containing a wide range of tender climbers and a venerable Keswick Codling apple. Pathways lead through walled herbaceous areas full of rarities and gems, climbers, shrubs, trees and herbaceous plants all cleverly intermingled. We walked past a wizened walnut *Juglans nigra* 'Laciniata' which had littered the ground beneath with fallen laced leaves.

The substantial stand of *Pinus nigra* remain dominating the eastern border of the garden providing the original shelter belt to the gardens and an impressively tall architectural evergreen backdrop to the current planting.



*Nyssa sylvatica*

Whilst there are substantial numbers of Rhododendrons and Magnolias, the main interest at this time of year is the varied collection of trees and shrubs. These include *Acer*, *Cornus*, *Cercidiphyllum*, *Daphniphyllum*, *Euonymus*, *Malus*, Roses and many tree and shrub rarities, some quite tender. These are punctuated by venerable Hollies, Yews and Cedars

Members vied with one another to identify those not labelled! Amongst interesting specimens were *Mahonia gracilipes*, *Sorbus thibetica* 'John Mitchell' (with its huge leaves) and a magnificent *Acer griseum* as a centrepiece to one of the sections of the Fountain Gardens, which contain 36 beds. A "Varnish tree", *Rhus verniciflua* with clusters of caustic yellowish fruits was



*Acer rubrum* 'October Glory'

pointed out to us, and we walked through a covered archway of *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' which had been spectacular earlier in the year both in flower, leaf and autumn colour.

A large lake forms a dramatic feature of the garden and has a striking Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) on its edge with some of the most extensive "knees" that I have seen. A weathered wooden alligator lurks below

looking alarmingly authentic. The lake edge has the added interest of an eel trap - no eels though that day.



Members enjoying the Autumn Colours

Photos: Alastair Stevenson

A most interesting and enjoyable visit and the garden is recommended to members.

Alastair Stevenson

## MEMBERSHIP

Rupert Eley

We are very pleased to welcome the new members below, and hope they will enjoy the many benefits of membership.

## GROUP NOTICES

Pat Bucknell, Hon Secretary

### NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2010

This is to be held on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2010 at 2.30 p.m. at RHS Garden Wisley There will be a workshop on late flowering Rhododendrons in the morning. Wisley has a good restaurant and café for lunch. We really would like more people to attend and support the Group at our Annual General Meeting.

#### The Committee

Mr. Ivor Stokes and Mr. Stephen Lyus have served their present three year term on the Committee in 2010 Both are willing to be re-elected for a further term.

The Chairman: .....Mr. Andy Simons  
Vice Chairman:.....Mr. Philip Evans  
Hon. Treasurer: .....Mr. Alastair Stevenson  
Hon. Secretary: .....Mrs. Pat Bucknell  
Hon. Yearbook Editor: .....Mrs. Pam Hayward  
Hon. Membership Secretary:.....Mr. Rupert Eley  
Hon Bulletin Editor: .....Mr. John Rawling  
Hon. Tours Organiser: .....Mrs. Judy Hallett  
Group Archivist:.....Mrs. Pam Hayward,  
Convenor of the Seed Bank:.....Mr. Henry (Chip) Lima  
and Webmaster:.....Mr. Graham Mills  
are all continuing in post.

Other mid-term Committee members continuing in post are: Mr. Eric Annal, Mr. John Harsant, and Mr. Thomas Methuen-Campbell.

**Your voting form is enclosed**

## GROUP WEB-SITE

Graham Mills

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

We continue to add further photographs of plants in our three genera and progressively at a higher resolution.

#### Seed List

By the time that you read this the seed list will have been available for some time on our web site. It is intended to keep the list open all year with updates to the list as seed becomes out of stock. First come first served!

#### Garden visits

Our favourite season is about to arrive, so please look at the large number of wonderful gardens that we have suggested on our website (under Services and then Links). Each name is a link to that garden's own website, so that you can easily find out opening times and directions. Hopefully you will be reminded of ones you have enjoyed before, as well as ones that you always meant to visit.

#### Member's Photograph Competition

Our web site benefited from another 35 excellent photos in 2009, which I hope you have all had a chance to review? However, the numbers presented this year are only a third of those supplied in the first year that the competition was run. I do hope that the paltry 2 Camellia pictures does not really represent our members' interests in this genus?

The 2009 winners were:

#### Rhododendrons:

Class 1: Subgenus Vireya:

*R. rousei* supplied by Robin Whiting

Class 2: Other Rhododendron species:

*R. auritum* supplied by Russell Beeson

Class 3: Rhododendron hybrids:

*R. 'Anita Dunstan'* supplied by Robin Whiting

#### Magnolias:

*M. obovata* supplied by Robin Whiting

#### Camellias:

*C. 'Madame Lourmand'* supplied by Koen Camelbeke

These winning photographs can now be viewed on the home page of our website. As can be seen, Robin Whiting almost swept the board! Details of the 2010 competition and how to send in your photographs are given on the web site.

If there are additional features that you would like to see added to the site then please contact [webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org)



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*The following publications are offered to Group Members exclusively and are sold in support of the Group. Previously advertised titles not featured here may still be available – please enquire.*

#### Pocket Guide to RHODODENDRON SPECIES

John McQuire & Mike Robinson

704pp RBG Kew 2009

Full Price: £59 Member's Price: £42

Postage: UK £5.50, Europe £8.50

Rest of World £15.50



#### NEW TREES John Grimshaw, Ross Bayton & Hazel Wilks 992pp RBG Kew 2009

Approximately 1,000 species are described and illustrated. Each species account provides a botanical description and discussion of the tree in the wild, and its performance and cultivation in the garden.

Full Price: £99 Member's Price: £76

Postage: UK £8 Outside UK: please enquire.

#### SEEDS OF ADVENTURE Peter Cox & Peter Hutchison

Full Price: £35 Member's Price: £27

Postage: UK £4, Europe £6, Rest of World £10

#### CAMELLIAS: The Gardener's Encyclopedia Jennifer Treharne

Full price: £35 Member's Price: £23.50

Postage: UK £5.50, Europe £10, Rest of World £19

Please make cheques (Sterling) payable to: *The Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group*. Payment may also be made by Mastercard or Visa or via PayPal to [rcmgpaypal@woodtown.net](mailto:rcmgpaypal@woodtown.net)

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03/10



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# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group forthcoming events



MARCH / 2010

13

## Ardingly College

Plant Hunting in Yunnan with the Group  
Talk by John Rawling

**South East Branch**  
Barry Haseltine  
01342 713132

27

## Barton House

Visit to member Hamish Cathie's Garden

**West Midlands Branch**  
Alastair Stevenson  
01989 780285

28

## Dibden

Visit to the garden of Ray Thornton

**New Forest Branch**  
Martin Gates  
023 8025 2843

APRIL / 2010

11-17

## Tour to Cornwall

**Lakeland RCM Society**  
Robert Smith  
015394 43041

15

## Mylor, Truro

Visit to the garden at Carclew

**South West Branch**  
Colin Brown  
01647 277268

16

## Duchy College

Visit to the micro-propagation unit and afterwards Tregye Garden

**South West Branch**  
Colin Brown  
01647 277268

17

## Farnham

Visit the garden of John McQuire

**New Forest Branch**  
Martin Gates  
023 8025 2843

17-18

## Tilgate Park

SE Branch Annual Show & ICS Camellia Show

**South East Branch**  
Barry Haseltine  
01342 713132

24

## Dorothy Clive Garden

Garden visit

**North West Branch**  
Ted Brabin  
0151 353 1193

24-25

## Rosemoor

**RHS Main Rhododendron Competition**  
& SW Camellia and Magnolia Competition.

**RHS & South West Branch**  
Colin Brown  
01647 277268



MAY / 2010

1-3

## Ness Gardens

Annual Show

**North West Branch**  
Ted Brabin  
0151 353 1193

2

## Ramster

Annual Show

**Wessex Branch**  
Miranda Gunn  
01428 644422

4

## Bowood House

Tour of the Rhododendron Gardens led by Lord Lansdowne

**West Midlands Branch**  
Alastair Stevenson  
01989 780285

4

## Barnstaple

Visit to John Marston's garden Gorwell House & Marwood Hill garden.

**South West Branch**  
Colin Brown  
01647 277268

7-10

## East Anglia

Gardens Tour

**North West Branch**  
Ted Brabin  
0151 353 1193

11

## Spring Show

**Lakeland RCM Society**  
Robert Smith  
015394 43041

11-15

## Dresden Eastern Germany

Group Spring Tour

**North West Branch**  
Judith Hallett  
01981 570401

22

## Heaslands

Garden visit and local branches plant sale

**South East Branch & Wessex Branch**  
Barry Haseltine  
01342 713132

27

## Windy Hall

Visit to the Kinsman's Garden at Windy Hall

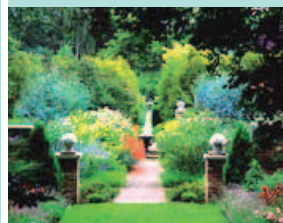
**Lakeland RCM Society**  
Robert Smith  
015394 43041

29

## Newby Hall

Visit to Newby Hall near Ripon

**Lakeland RCM Society**  
Robert Smith  
015394 43041



29

## Buckfastleigh

Visit to gardens of Malcolm Dunstan at Hayford Hall

**South West Branch**  
Colin Brown  
01647 277268