



the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Andy Simons - Chairman

As somebody who spends most of his time in London, I was disturbed to see a recent BBC report on a threat to Plane trees (*Platanus*) including the London Plane and its parents *P. orientalis* and *P. occidentalis*. Reading through the relevant Forestry Research Pathology Advisory Note, I realised that this was not a new story but rather a re-hash of a long-acknowledged set of complex concerns surrounding fungal diseases impacting on a number of the Plane family members. I took a crumb of comfort from these reports that at least a way of blaming rhododendrons for spreading these diseases had not been found!

However, the issue did get me thinking further on the subject of Plant Conservation and Protection, with the impact of *Phytophthora ramorum* and *P. kernoviae* still being felt across the country in terms of garden access, plant movements and actual plant losses. What should or can the RCM group do to help? The two questions are: should the RCM group be more focused on the conservation of species and cultivars across the three genera and if so what steps should we take? As many of you will recall we have already had some experience with support for the micropropagation of some less well known rhododendron varieties and it could be argued that this type of work should be expanded across the three genera in order that plants of the rare, unusual, hard to propagate, unfashionable or non-commercial type could be made available to established plant collections as some form of insurance policy against extinction. The problem with this course of action is that inevitably the number of plants produced will be in excess of those necessary to fulfil the 'insurance policy' and consequently these additional plants will need to be fed and watered by someone and then appropriately disposed of. The surplus plants could of course be made available as an adjunct to the existing Surplus Plant List although this would still leave the issue of looking after the plants pending their distribution. Furthermore it does not take much imagination to see that the Group would be drifting towards the actions of a commercial nursery; this is an area that I do not believe we wish to venture into as it hardly sits well with the aims of the Group and I am sure would be a point of concern for the RHS itself.

Having explored and balanced these negative concerns, I still think the Group needs to do something; this position is amplified by the economic pressure that all specialist nurseries



Vico Morcote, the late Sir Peter Smithers' garden.

To be seen on the Group Spring Tour – see details on page 3.

Photo: Ace Cultural Tours

are under which means they find it very hard to continue stocking unfashionable plants.

Assuming we do take steps at the minimum effective level to protect and propagate 'at risk' plants, which plants should we select? You will have seen that the Rhododendron Species Conservation Group (RSCG) in Scotland is making efforts in

Should the RCM group be more focused on the conservation of species and cultivars across the three genera and if so what steps should we take?

this direction with the cataloguing of collections and the selection of plants for propagation. This lead seems in parts to be a model that we in the Group could follow in some form, however with three

genera to worry about, the scale of effort will inevitably be small initially with the hope that momentum could be built over time.

Consequently, the first step in selecting the 'at risk' plants will be to understand what plants we have already. We are looking to learn from the RSCG in order that this activity can be progressed. I would welcome thoughts and suggestions from the membership on this important issue and any other topics you believe the Group should be tackling, including declining membership and winter plant losses. I thank those who have already taken the time to respond on these issues.

Turning to the subject of plant competitions, it seems likely that, with the assistance of the RHS Shows Department, we will be holding a Late-Flowering Rhododendron Competition. This will permit the more modern hybrids to be displayed, something the traditional show timings have not allowed. Please keep an eye out for more details on this, especially those of you in the northern counties.

First, an apology!

The Bulletin front page photograph on the last issue (106, July 2011) was incorrectly attributed. This was in fact a photograph of the plant at Achamore but photographed by Maurice Wilkins of Arduaine Gardens. My apologies to all.

Obituary - Ambrose Congreve

Ambrose Congreve was born on April 4 1907, the son of Major John Congreve and his wife Lady Helena (*née* Ponsonby), a daughter of the 8th Earl of Bessborough.

The Bessboroughs were friends of Lionel de Rothschild, the creator, in the years after the First World War, of the noted gardens, with acres of rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias, azaleas and other flowering woodland plants, at Exbury, in Hampshire. It was childhood visits to Exbury that ignited an early love of gardening in Ambrose Congreve (at the age of 11, as he recalled) and it was Lionel de Rothschild's taste and style of gardening that provided the inspiration for the later plantings at Mount Congreve.

Congreve's greatest passion was gardening, and at Mount Congreve, his Irish Georgian family seat near Kilmeadan, Co Waterford, he established gardens of world renown, noted especially for their magnificent displays of flowering woodland plants. The collection of rhododendrons that he built up there is one of the largest in the world.

Congreve divided his time between Mount Congreve and a large house in the St James's area of London, where he entertained lavishly. He employed numerous indoor and outdoor staff and a succession of fine *chefs de cuisine*, including, for a time, Albert Roux, who went on to co-found Le Gavroche restaurant in London.

The main part of his scheme at Mount Congreve is woodland, with magnolias (300 varieties), camellias (600 varieties), rhododendrons (3,000 varieties) and azaleas, Japanese cherries and maples (250 types) and much else besides, including half a mile of hostas.

These plantings are overlooked by 18th- and 19th-century plantations of oak and beech (Congreves have been living there for 300 years), and there are more than 16 miles of paths winding in and around them, now and again affording fine views of the River Suir.

Four acres of walled garden are arranged into May, June, July and August borders, each filled with varieties of herbaceous plants, including special iris beds and hydrangeas in north-facing beds. Runs of every sort of vegetable that can be grown in Ireland are interspersed with rows of aster and chrysanthemums for Mount Congreve House.

Ranges of glasshouses provided grapes, peaches and nectarines for the table, and there are displays of orchids, collections of rare fuchsias and begonias, and of almost extinct varieties of cyclamen. Hibiscus, gerbera and great stands of tall carnations were all for use in the house.

Ambrose Congreve was a tall, slender man who retained a full head of hair (latterly snow-white) into his second century. But for deteriorating eyesight, he remained remarkably little altered by great age.

At his centenary lunch celebration, he quoted what he described as an old proverb: 'To be happy for an hour, have a glass of wine. To be happy for a day, read a book. To be happy for a week, take a wife. To be happy for ever, make a garden.'

He was appointed CBE in 1965. In 1987 he was awarded a Veitch Memorial Medal by the Royal Horticultural Society, and in 2001 a Gold Medal (for a Great Garden of the World) by the Botanic Gardens in Boston, Massachusetts.

Ambrose Congreve was in London for the Chelsea Flower Show in May 2011 where he died on the Tuesday night. His wife died in 1995, and there were no children of the marriage. He is survived by his companion of many years, his former secretary, Geraldine Critchley.

(With acknowledgement to the *Daily Telegraph*)

Obituary - Nigel Holman

It is with sadness that I have to report the death in October of Nigel Holman of Chyverton gardens, Cornwall. Nigel spent his life at Chyverton and was described as a passionate magnoliaphile and planted much of 'one of the finest magnolia collections in the country'. Members will, no doubt have read his article in the 2011 Yearbook.

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 next issue

BY 10TH February 2012

for the March 2012 Bulletin

Please send to: John Rawling, Hon. Bulletin Editor,
The Spinney, Station Road, Woldingham, Surrey, CR3 7DD.
E-mail: jr.eye@virgin.net or telephone 01883 653341

TOURS

Judith Hallett

Spring Tour 2012 –The Gardens of Lake Maggiore

Next year's Spring Tour, to Lake Maggiore, will be earlier than usual (20-26 March) when we hope to see magnolias and camellias at their best, with the added bonus that we shall then be able to enjoy our own gardens in April and May!

We are delighted that Ivor Stokes will accompany the tour. Those of us who were on the 2009 tour to Pembrokeshire will recall Ivor's extensive knowledge of our genera and I'm sure that his presence will once again contribute greatly to our appreciation of the gardens we shall be visiting.

As you will see from the itinerary, we have included a varied mix of public and private gardens, as well as nurseries. On several occasions it will be a real privilege to be shown around the gardens by the owners.

This promises to be a popular tour; to secure your place send your registration form to ACE Cultural Tours as soon as possible. Numbers are limited!

Judy Hallett

Spring Tour, March 2012

Itinerary

Day one – Tuesday March 20th

AM Flight to Milan. Arrive 1035 and transfer to Hotel Pallanzo in Verbania.

Afternoon: visit to Villa Taranto. Created by Captain Neil McEachern from 1931 and now one of Italy's most visited gardens. Dinner in local restaurant.

Wednesday March 21st

Morning: visit to Villa Anelli, the garden of Andrea Corneo (President of the Italian Camellia Society) followed by lunch (at own expense).

Afternoon: visit to the Rusconi Clerici family's villas – Villa L'Eremitaggio and Villa Rusconi Clerici with extensive collections of *Camellia*.

Free evening.

Thursday March 22nd

Morning: dedicated to nursery production (Fiori Tipici del Lago Maggiore) with a propagation nursery (Tecnoverde) and a wholesale nursery (Comagnia del Lago).

Lunch in Pallanza (at own expense).

Afternoon: Visit to Villa San Remigio in Pallanza and Villa Giuseppina (Monte Rosso – Verbania).

Free evening.

Friday March 23rd

Morning: Private visit to the home of Countessa Mirella Motta, her husband is a *Camellia* and *Rhododendron* specialist, their house is right on Lake Orta and has a terrace with breathtaking views.

Lunch at own expense.

Afternoon: Giardino Botanico Alpina which, at 800m above sea level, enjoys superb views across the lake (weather permitting).

Dinner in local restaurant.

Saturday March 24th

Morning: en route with luggage for Hotel Riposa, Ascona. We will visit Isola Di Brissago, an island purchased by the Ticino Canton in 1949 and developed as a botanic garden for the canton.

Lunch in Ascona at own expense.

Afternoon: Visit Otto Eisenhut's Nursery, with hundreds of cultivars of *Magnolia*, *Camellia* and *Rhododendron*, and the nearby Parco Gambarogno, developed by Eisenhut since 1955.

Free evening.

Sunday March 25th

Visit to the garden of the late Sir Peter Smithers above Lake Lugano with talk by Amelia Smithers, his daughter.

Lunch at Montagnola (at own expense).

Afternoon visit to Rolf Stockmann's garden, Director of the Swiss International Camellia Society.

Private visit to Alfred Schnyder's garden.

Dinner at a local restaurant.

Monday March 26th

Early morning visit to Isola Madre, the lake's original garden, founded in 1616 by the Borromeo family. We will be shown around by the head gardener, we will then take a water taxi to Isola Bella, where there will be an opportunity to have lunch (at own expense) and visit the palace and astonishing baroque terraced gardens.

Evening flight from Milan to arrive London at 8pm.

The cost of the tour is £1390 per person: to include accommodation in a twin room, return flights, breakfast, three dinners, all coach and ferry costs, administration, visits and gratuities, local guides

and tour manager throughout. (With own flights £1210 per person) Not included: Travel insurance, single room supplement (£275 per person) remaining dinners and lunches.

Further information from Ace Cultural Tours.

Tel. 01223 835055 or email: ace@aceculturaltours.co.uk

Other queries to Judy Hallett, 01981 570401

or email: judy.hallett@googlegmail.com

MEMBERS NOTES

Preservation of rhododendrons

The gardens of this country have collected and bred rhododendrons for the past two centuries or more and between them have many specimens of interest, a number of which are unique. Many of those gardens which are fortunate to have such plants, and which are becoming rare, old or threatened by disease, are taking steps to preserve them and are propagating them for the benefit of future generations. This is different from the propagation on a commercial scale which, important as it is, is far from the same thing; the quantities are smaller and the varieties are so numerous as to make it commercially unviable.

The simplest method is to attempt to root cuttings which may or not be successful, particularly when the plants are old and struggling; the very time when preservation becomes a major issue. Recently the onset of *Phytophthora* has added urgency. Micropropagation (MP) has been found to succeed where other methods have failed and is the only way to propagate clean plants from those which are diseased. I have been fortunate to receive help in this from the MP unit of Duchy College located in Camborne, Cornwall which is approved for the propagation from diseased plants. This is a teaching facility of the College which is also available for the assistance of gardens in need; it is in the hands of Ros Smith, the micropropagation manager. I am most grateful to the College and to Ros for the help given.

A number of gardens have plants under propagation with her, thus preserving our heritage but it appears to me that these gardens are doing much the same thing without any coordination. In these circumstances knowledge of the efforts being made by each must be of value. This could be resolved simply by each garden publishing a list of the plants it is preserving and then leaving it to them to rationalise the situation to their mutual advantage.

Readers of previous editions of this Bulletin will have read of the work I have been involved with, in conjunction with Bodnant Garden, and I list now the plants involved from the garden..

John Harsant john@harsant.uk.com

Rhododendron species: *R. albrechtii* and *R. bracteatum*.

Rhododendron hybrids: most raised and grown at Bodnant:

Rhododendrons 'Alan', 'Amba', 'Aspansia', 'Asta', 'Astarte', 'Astel', 'Astrow', 'Beads', 'Bodnant's Beauty of Tremough', 'Bodnant Yellow', 'Calrose', 'Cardinal', 'Coalition', 'Coreta', 'Cornubia', 'Edusa', 'Elsie Phipps', 'Gill's Crimson', 'Gill's Gloriosa', 'Latona', 'Michael McLaren', 'Mikado', 'Neda', 'Penjerrick', 'Red Queen', 'Redwing', 'Richard Gill', 'Rose Perfection', 'Ruby', 'Seta', 'Shilsonii', 'Varna'.

Dear Mr Rawling,

In the current Bulletin (106), July 2011, our Chairman, Andy Simons asks 'Why are we losing membership?'

Part of the answer must be that our genera seem to have gone 'out of fashion'. I remember going to Chelsea in the 60s and the show gardens were full of deciduous azaleas. The stands in the pavilion were equally colourful with rhododendrons and azaleas. I admit I haven't been to Chelsea for many years but, judging by the television reports, rhododendrons don't exist – not a sight of David Millais's stand.

Likewise the Gardening Press doesn't seem to pay much attention to rhododendrons etc. For example, (and I keep an index of these things), I can find only 37 articles on rhododendrons, including 8 on azaleas, in *The Garden*, *The English Garden* and *Gardens Illustrated* between 1983 and 2009.

Much the same happened with Alan Bloom's island beds and Adrian Bloom's heathers and conifers. I was a great fan of both, and still am, but they went right out of fashion.

The current rage is, of course, grasses, very largely due to the example and writing of Piet Oudolf. In the magazines quoted above there are 41 articles on grasses between 1991 and 2010. They will run out of steam in a decade or so!

Maybe rhododendrons are regarded as elitist. I certainly remember an outcry against 'those great blobs of pink'. I have some sympathy with that view but contrast it with Michael Haworth-Booth's (1970) description of the deciduous (especially the Ghent) azaleas – 'hardiness, vigour, beauty of form, fragrance, freedom from pests and diseases, purity of colour, perfect "drawing" and finish'.

We have a problem of course in that the genera are, by and large, ericaceous. The demise of peat has added to the difficulty of growing them in adverse soil conditions. There is a school of thought which says that we should accept our soil as it is and grow only the plants suitable to that soil and situation. Whilst I fully understand that view, I have no problem in improving my soil structure and drainage, adding sulphur and ericaceous compost. After all, vegetable growers feed their tomatoes – don't they – so why shouldn't I feed my azaleas? There is a company in Cumbria who have succeeded in producing an ericaceous compost using bracken as the basic ingredient – maybe they should be better known.

These then are, I believe, some of the reasons for a declining membership. The answers are not easy.

I have been gardening now for the best part of half a century, have been a member of the RHS and the RNRS since 1970 and have grown evergreen and deciduous azaleas and some small rhododendrons for most of that time. Why then have I only recently joined the RCM Group? I am not sure that I know the answer to that question – maybe I just didn't know of its existence!

Somehow we need to attract the 'man in the street' or should I say 'the man in the weekend garden'! Or, to put it another way, we need to reach a wider gardening audience. By all means continue with the rhododendron species in their series etc. After all we are a specialist group, but maybe a little more attention should be paid to the smaller hybrids. The acquisition of folding display panels is good news. Perhaps we need to tackle the TV gardeners

and educate them in the finer things of the horticultural world!

I think the garden centres need to be persuaded to stock more evergreen and deciduous azaleas, camellias and the smaller rhododendrons. I live near one of the largest garden centres in the country which was until recently privately owned. They used to stock a large selection of azaleas etc. But since it was taken over by one of the largest chains there is hardly a rhododendron to be seen. They may argue that they can't stock plants that people don't want to buy. So we have a chicken and egg situation.

These then are the thoughts of an amateur gardener which I hope may be of some help to those more knowledgeable and better placed than I am to move things forwards.

I am sure others will have written along similar lines and I look forward to hearing the committee's thoughts.

Dr. John M. Parry, *Waterside Cottage, Tyrley Wharf, Market Drayton, Shropshire, TF9 2AH*

Arising from other letters received on the subject of the falling Group membership there is a point that the Group wish to emphasise, which is that under its new Constitution within the RHS, it is not mandatory for members of the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group to be subscribing members of the Royal Horticultural Society itself. This should therefore not discourage students, or new members from areas further away from the Society's gardens and activities, from joining the Group or taking part in its activities.

The Editor.

The Winter of 2010/11

The letter below is from a regular and active member of the Group. His location is where one would anticipate that he benefits, to some small extent, from the Gulf Stream. However, the last winter shows that there were few places in the UK that were unaffected by the extended and very cold spell, last winter.

Dear Editor,

Now, in August 2011, I am **evaluating the garden** after the devastating weather of December 2010. The high-low thermometer inside my cold greenhouse recorded –12C of frost over several nights, but I have no records of the outside temperatures.

My garden is situated just over a mile from the coast – as the crow flies – with an annual rainfall of 35 inches. In garden A, high at the east and sloping down at the west end, garden B, high at the south, sloping down at the north. Both sites have a ph. of about 7 (neutral), soil medium loam overlying marl then clay. Garden B has slightly more small stones (pebbles) in the soil.

I list some of the plants killed outright by the frost which include the following:

Tree fern *Dicksonia antarctica* – bought ten years ago as a five foot trunk, with label attached 'Otway Hills, Victoria'. The top of the fern was well insulated and covered up, but still died.

Acacia pravissima from Wisley about six years ago.

Fremontodendron 'California Glory', a large shrub, about twenty years old.

Cornus capitata – several plants, grown from seed about six years ago.

All small plants of *Crinodendron hookerianum* (Lantern Tree).

One large-leaved rhododendron, about twenty years old.

Gunnera manicata, was covered but still died.

Other plants partially damaged by the frost:

Several rhododendrons – badly damaged losing exposed leaves

and flower buds (the worst affected being *R. macabeaenum* with all the flower buds and the leaves from the top – it was the middle of June before new leaves began to appear.

R. maddenii ssp. *crassum*, home grown from Group seed list about ten or twelve years ago, lost all flower buds and about a quarter of the leaves.

Nerium oleander overwintering in a large pot in a cold house, but again badly damaged, did not ‘wake up’ until July.

Sophora microphylla, new leaves did not appear until July.

Nerine bowdenii – 95% of stock dead.

A large Collection of *Zantedeschia aethiopica* ‘Crowborough’ originally started with one plant bought at Logan Gardens twenty years ago, now only 5% remain left.

All large plants of *Crinodendron hookerianum* survived, but badly damaged, only a few ‘red lanterns’ produced.

The only magnolia affected, *M. grandiflora* ‘Exmouth’, purchased at Ness about twenty years ago, all the top-half damaged, no leaves, some new leaves low down but as yet no flower buds. Also a small plant of *M. grandiflora* ‘Gallisonniere’ was slightly damaged.

Euphorbia mellifera, cut down to ground level, has started to regrow.

Plants of *Rhododendron yunnanense* show some dieback, about half the normal number of flowers.

R. liliflorum Guiz163, all flower buds dead.

All the camellias survived the winter weather but some were badly damaged, *C. ‘China Clay’* lost all its flower buds and most of its top leaves. *C. ‘Kramer’s Supreme’* lost most of its flower buds.

Ceanothus ‘Concha’, three large shrubs survived, lots of die-back and not many flowers.

Eucryphia x ‘Nymansay’, another plant about twenty years old, lost leaves off the top growth but has recovered and is flowering OK.

(This year’s very dry spring affected vegetables, early potatoes (Arran Pilot) were small with a light crop. This also made it difficult to get climbing beans and sweet corn started. Growth picked up later in the season and the early plums (Rivers Early Prolific) were picked in July giving an excellent crop (makes a good crumble!) The early peas and broad beans did OK.)

Derek Faulkner, Blackpool.

Dear Editor,

I can recommend Chamonix as a summer holiday destination if you enjoy walking in the mountains. This summer was exceptional --- for the rain!



Strolling along high mountain paths I was highly impressed by the acres of a low growing, pink flowered shrub that I could not identify.

Just imagine my surprise, prompted by a street name and a hotel in the town, when I discovered it was:



Rhododendron ferrugineum!

Yours, ‘Embarrassed of Ross-on-Wye’.

(AKA Group Treasurer, Alastair Stevenson.)

BRANCH REPORTS

South West Branch – Spring Visits 2011

16th March 2011 Porthpean House and Tregrehan Gardens near St Austell.

To avoid the worst of the early season weather, we usually programme our garden visits to begin in April. This works well but is rather hard on our camellia enthusiasts because high season for camellias is usually well past by April. So this year we decided to make amends and to brave the weather.

Thus it was that, on 16th March, we gathered on the cliff tops at **Porthpean House**, just east of St. Austell. Needless to say the weather was perfect; the sun shone, a limpid sea splashed on the rocks far below and red admiral, peacock and comma butterflies glided sleepily around us.

Charlotte Petherick, our hostess, well known for her prowess with camellias both in her garden and on the show bench, led us around her collection, demonstrating as she went the depth of her knowledge and experience of the genus *Camellia*. It was an education in every sense of the word and our notebooks were soon full.

There were plenty of rhododendrons and magnolias too but my abiding memory will be of a great, spreading, white magnolia that dominated one end of the garden. Mrs. Petherick was unsure of its identity so our experts convened and soon declared, nem con, that it was a particularly good form of *M. cylindrica*. A superb plant!

Our second visit was to **Tregrehan Gardens**, only a few miles away, which allowed plenty of time for picnics on the Porthpean cliffs.

There are so many important gardens in Cornwall that it may sound invidious to single out Tregrehan as one of the most important but it has many claims to this distinction. It is large, beautifully situated on a sheltered hillside, and has flourished there for more than 200 years. There is an amazing collection of giant conifers including many 'champions' and woody plants from all over the world. In particular the garden has always been associated with the hybridising of camellias, and many older hybrids may be found there – hence our visit.

Tregrehan came into the ownership of botanist, plant collector and woody plant expert of international renown, Tom Hudson, relatively recently and we were very fortunate to have him as our guide. His impact on the gardens has been truly astonishing. The 19th C. hard landscaping has been extensively restored as has the parkland and the range of Victorian glasshouses but it is in the arboreta that his work is now concentrated and where space has been made for more woody plants from all over the world – not least many of his own introductions.

And my own particular memories? I will never forget the Tregrehan specimen of *Rhododendron* 'Cornish Red'. It was at least 15m high and covered a tennis-court sized area – a true giant in the land of these giants. And altogether less obtrusive but very beautiful: *Illicium anisatum* covered in its soft yellow flowers.

One word of caution – beware the siren song emanating from the Tregrehan plant sales area or you will leave with a car-full and worry all the way home where you are going to plant them!

30th April 2011 Heddon Hall and Greencombe near Porlock.

For a change we ventured to the far reaches of Exmoor in the north-east corner of our region on yet another lovely spring day. **Heddon Hall** is on the edge of the village of Parracombe and is a fine Regency parsonage surrounded by a true gardener's garden with an eclectic collection of rhododendrons, magnolias, herbaceous plants and ferns (a pteridologist was laid on to lighten our darkness). Of particular interest to us was that much of the collection had been planted by our member, Jane Keatley, who had the distinction of having made two expeditions to bring back seeds for the garden. She was there to show us round.



M. 'Gold Star' at Heddon Hall

Photo: Sally Hayward

Of particular interest to us was the fact that much of the collection had been planted by Jane Keatley who has the distinction of having made two expeditions to China and the Far-East to bring back seeds for the garden. She was there to show us round.

The old parsonage gardens, including the walled garden and the shrubberies, had been cleverly and beautifully restored using more modern plants, many collected by Jane herself. The botanists and taxonomists in our ranks were frequently uncertain about what they were seeing and it was amusing to hear Jane patiently explaining that the plants in question had been collected by her and not yet reliably identified. A truly fascinating garden. Our congratulations to Jane and our thanks for her patience!

In the afternoon we travelled eastwards along the coast with its massive and spectacular cliffs until we arrived at Porlock. Here on the edge of the village is **Greencombe**, the garden developed and supervised by the remarkable Joan Loraine for more than forty years.



Above - Two views of the gardens at Greencombe.,

Photos: Sally Hayward

We visited the garden in January 2011 to carry out our usual reconnaissance. That was our first meeting with Miss Lorraine who immediately dispensed with any conventional small-talk and demanded to know whether we had seen "the protistum in

the garden". Not being at all sure what a protistum was and failing to impress her with our rather vague reply, we were peremptorily packed off into the garden to find out.

A minute or two later we were standing in front of quite the most magnificent rhododendron that I have ever seen – *Rhododendron protistum* in all its glory; probably 15m high and half as much wide, clad to the ground with large, healthy, glossy leaves and weighed down by huge trusses of cherry red flowers. All the authorities I have been able to consult deem it to be tender but there it was, apparently unaffected by one of the coldest winters on record!

Sadly our group visit was not until the end of April but we were still able to admire *Rhododendron protistum* looking as healthy as ever. Indeed the whole garden is breathtaking for the range of rare woody plants growing there and for the woodland plants flourishing beneath them. There was an fine collection of rhodos but forms and hybrids of *R. fortunei* were particularly noticeable on the day of our visit..

The garden is situated on the north slope of a wooded escarpment about a mile inland from the shores of the Bristol Channel. It is noticeable that the greater part of the garden has overhead cover and is wholly or partially shaded all day. Also very apparent was the extensive use made by Miss Loraine and her gardener of homemade leaf mould/compost – I counted 4 different stations throughout the gardens where it was made and stored.

I have never seen a better planted and cultivated garden than Greencombe or a more inspirational one.

6th May 2011 Lancoffe and Trebartha on Bodmin Moor

And so back to Cornwall! **Lancoffe** is a large secluded 17th C. mansion with extensive collections of our three genera, located virtually within the outskirts of Bodmin itself. It has been planted and tended for nearly 50 years by Richard Gilbert and his family and he was there to explain it all to us.

Just about everything planted here has flourished even though this is a relatively cold part of Cornwall; many specimens are very large indeed. This includes many of the shelter plantings but Richard has recognised the problem that this could become and is taking decisive action in several places, felling groups and avenues of massive conifers especially spruces. This will not only improve light levels and competition for root space but will provide wonderful opportunities for new plantings! I believe that this is a valuable lesson which several gardens we have visited could follow to great advantage providing, always, that care is taken not to let too much wind in.

On the day of our visit there were many plants to see and admire but deciduous azaleas in wide variety were looking particularly good. But I will always remember our visit to Lancoffe for two amazing climbers. At the entrance to the walled garden a superb clear pink wisteria had quickly framed the archway and then set off happily along the wall and up into the branches of the trees it encountered along the way. Even more astonishing were several plants of the double Banksian Rose. They were somewhat overshadowed by the dominant conifers already discussed but had set off in all directions looking for more light. On the day of our visit great swathes of soft yellow flowers hung from their conifer hosts at least 20m above our heads – an astonishing sight.

In the afternoon we moved to the large **Trebartha** estate which lies along the easterly edge of Bodmin Moor, a few miles

from Launceston. It was in its heyday in the Victorian era when the house was surrounded by many acres of gardens including 'picturesque' wildernesses, walled gardens, formal layouts and streams and lakes. Arboreta and pineta climbed up the lower slopes of the moor, and the River Lynher was re-channelled and incorporated into the grand design, a fate that befell it at other grand houses along its course to the sea at Plymouth. The extensive plantings were particularly rich in early rhododendron hybrids which had been augmented by fashionable introductions in the subsequent decades.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Trebartha was purchased by the Latham family who owned a nationwide firm of timber importers and merchants who hoped to partially offset the inevitable loss of their traditional sources of supply – the estate had extensive plantations of softwoods. Today the big house has gone and so has most of the formal landscaping and disaster has overtaken many of the rhododendrons. So many of them have *R. ponticum* in their blood or as their rootstock that, in the end, the tangled thickets and the high local rainfall have made infection by *Phytophthora* inevitable.

DEFRA has insisted that all infected plants be removed and the owners, many of whom still live on and around the site, faced a crisis. In the end Caroline Latham was given charge of the operation. By the time of our visit she was well into the clearance process, her bulldozers having removed thickets of rhododendrons all along the banks of the river and around the sizeable lake. Inevitably this has aroused the ire of the same family members who had given her the task but it was the only viable course to have taken – tinkering around the edges of such a huge project would have served no useful purpose. All we could do was to applaud her efforts thus far and give her all the encouragement we could muster.

The day was truly beautiful and we stood on the site of the old house looking towards the river and lake, and the picturesque valleys and plantings beyond. Caroline led us into this area and we found many fine rhododendrons, specimen trees and other exotics, which would undoubtedly recover and flourish when the clearance was complete. The archaeology of the old landscaping was all around us and we could but dream of seeing it restored. Caroline has had the great good sense to appoint Barry Champion to advise her – we wish them well with a truly gargantuan task.

I had been concerned that there might not be enough for our party to see but it was well into the evening before the last of us went home!

Colin Brown

Footnote:

All six gardens described above displayed, to a greater or lesser extent, the effects of the record low temperatures experienced last winter. It was the second such winter in succession and was experienced throughout the South West. Temperatures of –8 to –10 centigrade were common place. After two such winters one would expect a degree of understanding of the effects the low temperatures on plants from our three genera to be emerging. Instead all still seems to be confusion and contradiction! No two gardens seem to have been similarly affected.

Why have the maddenias in one garden been severely damaged but serenely unaffected in another? Why have large leaved rhododendrons such as *R. macabeaenum* been slightly scorched here and totally defoliated elsewhere? I remain totally baffled and can contribute only two initial conclusions – neither rocket science.

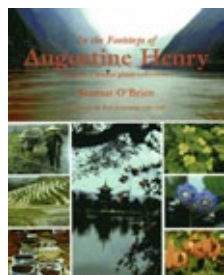
Firstly, microclimate has a major influence on the outcome, good or bad. How else can one explain the Greencombe *R. protistum* surviving unscathed on a coast that experienced some of the winter's lowest temperatures? Yet little seems to be understood about the constituents of a microclimate and their relative influence on the extent of low temperature damage.

Secondly, the date of the severe cold seems, often, to play a key role. In my own garden on the edge of Dartmoor, a large and mature thicket of mimosa (*Acacia dealbata*) survived the 2009/2010 winter unscathed, flowering magnificently in due season. And yet it was killed to the ground in 2010/2011 by a slightly warmer minimum temperature. The difference was that, in the first winter, the lowest temperatures occurred in January and in the second in December. The extra month to harden off seems to be decisive. I remember many normally hardy rhododendron species and hybrids being severely damaged in my North Wales garden by a December frost.

It will be interesting to hear of other growers' experiences and conclusions.

Colin Brown

BOOK REVIEWS



In the Footsteps of Augustine Henry

Seamus O'Brien

104pp 170mm x 240mm

£7.95 (plus post)

Garden Art Press, 2011

300 x 237mm, 376pp,

£40 Hardback

Available from the Group – see Publications Advert

In his foreword, Roy Lancaster states that this book tells 'not one but two stories, detailing, on the one hand, the travels and discoveries of Augustine Henry and his Chinese plant collectors between 1885 and 1900, and on the other, the author and his colleagues' experiences in revisiting those hallowed places and reliving the excitement of plant hunting more than a century ago.' Although this is certainly true, it is not quite the whole truth, since, in my opinion, it also tells the much bigger story of the golden age of plant discovery, at the centre of which was Augustine Henry.

Until this book was published, the life and works of Augustine Henry had been scarcely written about and I would guess that if one were to ask most rhododendron growers what they knew about him they might not even make the connection with that most lovely of species, *Rhododendron augustinii*. If they were to learn how many other rhododendrons he is associated with they would be even more surprised. The really staggering statistic is that Augustine Henry was responsible for 1,726 new plant discoveries in China of which 1,338 were new species. In just five years this amazing Irishman made collections of almost 20 per cent of the entire flora of China – 6000 distinct species.

If it weren't for a chance event this book might never have been written, and we would be the poorer for it. The Irish Garden Plant Society floated the idea of staging an exhibit at the 2000 Chelsea Flower Show based around the plant collections of their countryman, Augustine Henry. Seamus O'Brien, the author, was chosen to research and plan for the display. The rest, as they say

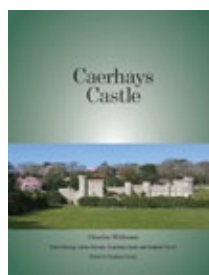
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What resulted was the kindling of a passionate interest in Augustine Henry, his life and his achievements which produced an irresistible urge to retrace his steps, and to be honest, having read the book, I can quite see why!

O'Brien's meticulous research, photographic archive and elegant writing style blend together perfectly to produce what, for me at least, is one of the most enjoyable and informative books of its type to be published. He achieves a real and vibrant sense of time and place, both when relating Augustine Henry's experiences in the past and his own a century later. He also manages to convey the sheer energy, drive and determination of Henry and the pivotal effect this would have on the future of plant hunting in China. What came as a particular surprise to me was the career Henry pursued after he came back from China and just how influential he was in the world of forestry.

Not all plant hunting books are written by plantsman but the reader is fortunate in this case since the author is curator of Kilmacurragh Arboretum, part of the National Botanic Garden of Ireland, and a leading authority on the temperate flora of China. Plants are expertly woven into the text: initial discovery, subsequent introduction, plants in cultivation recalled and described with authority, providing real interest and relevance.

Like all titles emanating from the Garden Art Press, this is a beautiful publication, well designed and lavishly illustrated. As to criticisms, well, no book is absolutely perfect and apart from the usual beef about a few poorly reproduced images and the odd typo, and the occasions when there wasn't absolute clarity about which plant collector was responsible for discovery and which for introduction (but that could be the result of my own deficiency!), my main criticism would be reserved for the lack of a list of all the Henry introductions rather than simply producing a list of plants named for him. This is a very large book – 376 pages – and I really do think it would have been possible to include all 1,726 particularly as I would have liked to see all his rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias in print!



Caerhays Castle

An introduction to its history, owners and gardeners

Charles Williams, Peter Herring, Jaimie Parsons, Courtenay Smale & Stephen Tyrrell

Pasticcio, 2011

270 x 210mm, 260pp, £30 Hardback

Available from: Caerhays Estate Office

Tel: 01872 500025 or Email: estateoffice@caerhays.co.uk

Last year I contributed to the *Bulletin* a book review which included the recently published *Caerhays Castle Garden Guide*. Charles Williams has gone further in 2011 and produced a comprehensive history of the entire estate.

Presented in discrete sections covering the Landscape, Buildings, Families and Gardens of Caerhays, and, using specialist authors to contribute chapters relevant to their expertise, the result is an authoritative and fascinating read. Worth reading alone is the chapter devoted to speculation about the derivation of the word 'Caerhays'!

Concentrating on what matters most to readers of the *Bulletin*, there is an excellent chapter on the plant hunting trips sponsored by the Williams family followed by the main event – an entire section devoted to the gardens, their history and development, all beautifully illustrated. Once again it is the sense of excitement

for the future which shines through; Caerhays should be held up as an example to all the major gardens to emulate.

Much of the garden and plant information is common to both the earlier publication and to this one and if it is this aspect that is of singular importance, there is no need to invest again. However, there is so much more of interest in this book which throws light on Caerhays' enduring success in the face of all manner of challenges and I would certainly recommend it as a bookshelf title.

Pam Hayward

MEMBERSHIP

Rupert Eley

We heartily welcome our **New Members**.

We hope they will enjoy the benefits of belonging to the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group within the RHS.

GROUP NOTICES

Pat Bucknell, Hon Secretary

Annual General Meeting 2012

The 2012 Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 2nd June 2012 at RHS Gardens Wisley, at 12.15p.m. in the Lecture Hall.

There will be a Late Flowering Rhododendron Show and Workshop in the morning concluding with the AGM before lunch. The afternoon will then be free to go out into the gardens or to help show our rhododendrons off to the public, who for the first time will be invited to share and enjoy our display, making it a day well worth attending.

More details in the next Bulletin.

We had a record number of members present for the 2011 AGM. The Workshop was lively and interesting, with many plants and blooms – both rhododendrons and azaleas – submitted for discussion.

Please make a note of this date and do come to this AGM.

Subscription Renewals 2011

The Group's membership year runs from 1 November to 31 October. Subscription renewals are due for payment on 1 November. If your subscription has not already been renewed and you have an active email address you will have received a renewal form by email on 1st November. **If you do not have an active email address and have not renewed, you will have received a form with this mailing.**

The Group is very fortunate to have a Membership Secretary with a small team who are prepared to devote a great deal of time and energy to administering the subscription renewal process, and it is easy to forget that this service is given voluntarily. To save time and unnecessary additional costs, please act on this reminder now. Payment can be made easily online via the Group website www.rhodogroup-rhs.org – you do not need a PayPal account to use this facility. Alternatively, use the form provided and send it back to the Membership Secretary as detailed.

Pam Hayward

GROUP WEBSITE

Graham Mills & Stephen Lyus

www.rhodogroup-rhs.org

Information available from our web site

The RCMG web site has had content added to it over many years and should now be seen as a valuable source of information on many aspects of our three genera. For those of you that have not visited it recently I would urge you to have another look. The address is: **www.rhodogroup-rhs.org**

You will find under **Plant Information**:

- Cultivation details
- Dictionaries of plant details and photos under various types of appropriate groupings
- Listings of AGM plants
- Information on our Group collections

Group Information is the place to go for online renewal of your membership and Branch and Committee details.

The **Services** section comprises a variety of topics including:

- The Seed list
- Surplus plants
- Forthcoming Events and Meetings
- Publications available for purchase

A comprehensive list of Web Links to other sites for Gardens, Nurseries and Societies that cover our genera, both in the UK and around the world

If you view the Members' photos page you will see there are only a small number so far this year. If the number of photographs does not increase substantially before the end of the year then this will probably be the last year of the competition. I am sure that there are large numbers of interesting photographs taken by you members during the good weather we experienced this spring. Not only would you be adding to the web site but you could also win a prize. Further details of the competition and how to send photographs are given on the web site.

The final section gives you access to the new photos that members have submitted during the course of the current year, which for 2011 is rather bare.

If anyone can think of additional information that we should add into the site, please send your ideas to Graham Mills or to Stephen Lyus.

Seed Distribution 2012

The delights of growing plants from the Group Seed List.



R. dalhousiae var. *rhabdotum*.

Photo: The Editor

From the RCMG seed list Seed No. 01047 (Seed ex-KR 1286).

As you know, Margaret Miles has become the Group's new Seed Convenor, and together we are devising the best way of developing the seed distribution process to better reflect the needs of members.

Traditionally, the Seed List has been sent out with the yearbook, principally because it saved a considerable amount in postage charges.

The printed list was usually not published until the same time as the yearbook, in any event, and it therefore made sense to combine the mailing in that respect as well. The result of course is that seeds could not be ordered until well into February.

In recent years I have been able to produce the list much earlier, and that, coupled with the fact that we now have a majority of members with electronic means of communication, opens the way to send the list out by email the moment it is ready. The costs saved in reducing the number of printed copies required will enable us to post copies out to members who do not yet have email or access to the internet.

For the 2012 Seed Distribution, therefore, I propose to post a printed copy of the list to non-email members three working days before I send the list by email and simultaneously ask our webmaster to launch the list on the Group website.

I anticipate we will gain at least a month by making this change, hopefully more if our seed collectors get their lists to us in good time.

If any member with an active email address particularly requires a printed copy to be posted to them instead, please send me an email to that effect as soon as possible. However, it would be greatly appreciated if members could make use of the emailed version instead.

Conversely, if any member has not been receiving Group communications by email but has an active email address, could they email me so I can send them the list electronically when the time comes.

More developments are planned, so watch this space and your inbox!

Pam Hayward email: pam@woodtown.net

The following publications are offered to Group Members exclusively and sold in support of the Group.

Back issues of the yearbook from 1946 and previously advertised titles not featured here may still be available – please enquire.

PLANT HUNTING TITLES SPECIAL OFFER EXTENDED!

Flowers of the Amazon Forest – Margaret Mee £16.95 (RRP £25)

John Lindley – William T. Stearn £13.95 (RRP £19.95)

Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges – Kenneth Cox et al £24.50 (RRP £35)

Seeds of Adventure – Peter Cox & Peter Hutchison £24.50 (RRP £35)

Plantsman's Paradise – Roy Lancaster £27.95 (RRP £39.95)

Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker – Ray Desmond £19.95 (RRP £29.50)

See leaflet enclosed with March Bulletin or email for details.

Price as quoted for each title **plus**

£5 postage per UK order (up to 5 books)

£6 per title for orders from Europe and **£10 per title** for orders from outside Europe. Please enquire about postage costs if you are outside the UK and wish to order more than one title.

In the Footsteps of AUGUSTINE HENRY

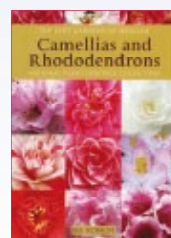
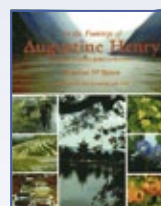
Seamus O'Brien

376pp Garden Art Press

Full Price: **£40** Member's Price: **£27.95**

Postage: UK **£5** Europe **£6**

Rest of World **£10**



The Lost Gardens of Heligan **CAMELLIAS and RHODODENDRONS**

Bee Robson

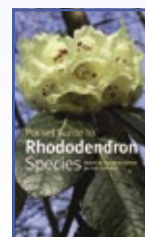
96pp Barman 2010

Full Price: **£9.95**

Member's Price: **£8.50**

Postage: UK **£1.50**

Europe **£3** Rest of World **£5**



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**

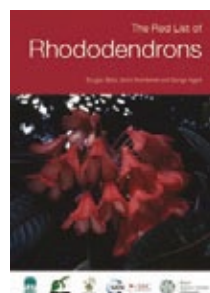
Please make cheques (Sterling) payable to: *The Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group*. Payment may also be made by Mastercard or Visa or via PayPal to rcmgpaypal@woodtown.net

Contact: Pam Hayward, Woodtown, Sampford Spiney, Yelverton, Devon PL20 6LJ Tel/Fax: +44 (0)1822 852122
Email: rcmgpublications@woodtown.net

PUBLICATIONS

11/11

THE RED LIST OF RHODODENDRONS



Botanic Gardens Conservation International has recently launched a new report assessing the conservation status of *Rhododendron*. A quarter of the 1157 currently known species are under threat of extinction.

Download the 131 page report free at:
www.bgci.org/ourwork/rhododendron-red-list/

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the
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group

BULLETIN BINDERS

Further to my note in the Bulletin 106 of July this year, I have been able to supply a small number of binders for issues of the Bulletin to members. These binders hold up to eight years of Bulletins (25 issues) and cost £12.50 each, plus postage. I now append photographs of the binders. Please let me know if you are interested in obtaining a binder, to my address. *The Editor*



John Rawling
Hon. Bulletin Editor
The Spinney
Station Road
Woldingham
Surrey, CR3 7DD
Email: jr.eye@virgin.net
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the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group forthcoming events



DECEMBER / 2011	JANUARY / 2012	MARCH / 2012	APRIL / 2012	MAY / 2012
13 Lakeland RCM Society Plant hunting in Bhutan Alan Oatway Judith Johnson 01229 889 678	7 North West Branch Ness Gardens Tim Lever 'In search of the pink poppywort in the steps of Ludlow & Sheriff above the treeline in central Bhutan' Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193	14 Lakeland RCM Society Holehird Sally Beamish, Head Gardener at Brantwood, Coniston 'Outside influence – exciting times at Brantwood' Judith Johnson 01229 889 678	14/15 South East Branch Tilgate Park Crawley. SE Show Barry Haseltine 01342 713132	6 Wessex Branch Ramster Annual Show Miranda Gunn 01428 644422
	FEBRUARY / 2012 11 North West Branch Ness Gardens Tim Baxter 'Why it would be so much easier if it were labelled – recording Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias' Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193	20-26 Group Spring Tour to Lake Maggiore Judith Hallett 01981 570401	14/15 North West Branch Ness Gardens Branch Show Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193	JUNE / 2012 2 RCM Group AGM RHS Garden Wisley Pat Bucknell 01503 220215
	14 Lakeland RCM Society Holehird Robert Jamieson, Head Gardener at Howick Hall, Northumberland. 'Seed collecting for the Howick Arboretum' Judith Johnson 01229 889 678		21/22 RHS Main Rhododendron Competition plus SW Branch Camellia and Magnolia Show Rosemoor Pat Bucknell 01503 220215	23 South East Branch Crosswater Farm, Farnham Visit to Millais Nurseries to see their collection of Denny Pratt and other late flowering azaleas Barry Haseltine 01342 713132
			23-27 North West Branch Tour of Cornwall Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193	
			28 South East Branch Borde Hill Garden Visit to Gores Wood, Borde Hill. led by Andy Stevens, Head Gardener Barry Haseltine 01342 713132	