



# the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Bulletin 116 / November 2014 / [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)



## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

I feel honoured to be your new Chairman of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group, particularly at such a key moment in our history, but more of that later. Firstly I would like to thank Andy Simons for his Chairmanship for the past four and a half years. Andy was the first Chairman for a long time who had to juggle a full time job, and one that was particularly demanding, with the role of Chairman of the Group. During this time he also managed the difficult negotiations between the Group and the RHS, not just once, but for two time-consuming partnership agreements. So Andy has built us a sound foundation on which we can proceed with our new status and we can now move on and get back to plants – something the Committee and membership will be only too pleased about.

Thinking of the Committee, I have only been engaged as Chairman for the past few months, but I have been staggered and so impressed by the support that everyone has freely offered. I hope that everyone realises just how involved Pam Hayward is with nearly everything to do with the Group, not just the wonderful Yearbook which gets better year after year. A keen plantsperson too, she somehow manages to find the rarest of rhododendrons and organise their propagation before their untimely demise. If you are not on her list, do send her your email address to be kept up to date with interesting news about the Group and our plants.

Have you looked at the Group website in the last few weeks? Our web wizard Graham Mills has performed his magic and has built us a new 'dynamic' website which changes screen format to suit tablets and phones. Ideal for plant lovers on the move, as more and more visitors to our site seem to be! Aided by Steve Lyus and Pam, the layout has been greatly improved, and we now have a website we can be proud of. Let us know what you think of it – it should prove a wonderful resource to members, and hopefully an encouragement for new members to join us. We are still missing photographs for some varieties, especially AGM varieties so do please send in your pictures to Steve. With the nights drawing in, this is a really good way for you to get involved with your Group, and there's even some prizes for the best pictures!

Following approval at the AGM, our Secretary Barry Haseltine, helped by Alastair Stevenson and Philip Evans are seeking to establish the Group as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), a recent 'hybrid' introduction ideal for organisations such as ours. This will provide limited liability for

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David Millais in France

the Group and its officers, with the benefits of charitable status. We are using a firm of recommended specialist advisors who are handling our application, and are currently awaiting a response from the Charity Commissioners.

Next year's AGM is now scheduled to be at the wonderful Bodnant Garden, complete with its 'Himalayan' valley. Rotating the AGM around the regions is a great way of involving more of our membership, but it also means that we can all get to see 'fresh' gardens. Our Events Co-ordinator Judy Hallett is on the case, and we hope to be able to visit several great gardens in North Wales over a 2 or 3 day period during the last week in May. Mark the dates in your diary and come and join us!

I guess not many of you have taken a close look at the unobtrusive logo at the top of this Bulletin. The Greek script around the flower truss signifies 'Rhododendron lovers', but you will also make out the year the Rhododendron Society was formed. The Rhododendron Society was the forerunner of the current RCMG, and was founded at Lanarth, Cornwall on 15th March 1915, seven months after the start of the First World War, when P.D. Williams, C.C. Eley and J.G. Millais declared themselves the exclusive Rhododendron Society. (Note that 100 years later, descendants of those three are still on the Committee!)

*Continued overleaf*

During 1915, the founders invited a few more members to join them on condition that they contributed to the Society 'Notes'. It was not until Chelsea Flower Show, 2016 that they held their first AGM. We shall mark the start of our Centenary year at Bodnant in May 2015, and will run the main Centenary events through the spring of 2016, reflecting 100 years since the first AGM. Again, I count myself fortunate to have the support of a Centenary Sub-Committee consisting of Judy Hallett, Miranda Gunn, Sally Hayward, and John Marston who have proposed some excellent ideas which we are working on.

This Bulletin is now the third edition that our new Editor, Peter Furneaux, has been involved with. He has received valuable help and guidance from Pam Hayward and Ros Rawling to whom he is very grateful.

I hope I have painted a picture of lots happening within the Group. We look forward to bringing you shows, publications, events and tours to inspire you and increase your love and knowledge of our favourite plants. Now we need your involvement and participation in what we are doing. Our Branch Chairmen would love to see more of you at shows, visits and talks, so please attend if you possibly can. We recognise there are some areas of the country where the Group is poorly represented; I would love to hear from you if you feel you could arrange a few meetings with fellow enthusiasts of Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias in your area. The old saying 'the more you put in, the more you'll get out' certainly applies here, and brings to mind Andy and Jenny Fly from Sussex. They had not exhibited at RHS shows before this season, but walked away with a number of prizes at Wisley in April. They enjoyed it so much they entered at Rosemoor two weeks later and came away with another haul of prizes. That's the spirit!

*David Millais*

### EDITOR'S NOTES

*Peter Furneaux*

I need your letters, reports from Branch events and articles.

#### **The copy date for the next Bulletin No.117 is Friday 9th January 2015**

Please send your contributions to:  
email: [peterfurneaux@gmail.com](mailto:peterfurneaux@gmail.com)  
or post to: Peter Furneaux

Lucton Court, Lucton, Herefordshire HR6 9PQ

Transparencies, digital images or line drawings will  
be accepted for illustrations.

### TREASURER'S NOTES

*Alastair Stevenson*

### Subscription Renewals

**A**nnual subscription payments are due on 1 November. If your subscription has expired and you pay by a method other than Direct Debit and do not have an email address, a renewal form is included in this mailing.

Members who do have email will be sent a reminder electronically. Please help our volunteer renewal team by paying your subscription promptly.

### Direct Debit Subscription Payment

A reminder to those members who pay their annual membership by Direct Debit that subscriptions will be collected from bank accounts on 1 November 2014 and will be identified by "EAZY RCMG" on statements. My continued thanks to members who have signed up for this method of payment. Anyone wishing to change to Direct Debit please send a completed form to me (forms available on the Group website or direct from me).

*Alastair Stevenson, Hon. Treasurer*

01989 780285 [alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk](mailto:alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk)

### GROUP AGM 2015

**T**he Group AGM will be held at the world famous Bodnant Gardens on 27th May 2015 and we hope as many members as possible will be able to join us. National Trust gardeners have kindly agreed to lead tours of the garden, including its 'Himalayan valley' and extensive rhododendron collection, before lunch. The AGM will be after lunch at the adjoining Hayloft Restaurant on the Bodnant estate. Accommodation has been provisionally booked at The Quay Hotel, Conwy, and we are delighted that Chelsea Flower Show Gold Medallist Bleddyn Wynn-Jones of Crûg Farm Plants has agreed to give us an after dinner talk on his extensive plant-hunting trips. We will also visit Crûg Farm, and other notable gardens on the 26th and 28th May. Snowdonia holds many other treasures, so you may wish to extend your stay to enjoy them.

**Discounted accommodation will need to be booked early directly with the hotel. Details will be placed on the Group website as plans develop, or contact Judy Hallett for further information.**

*Judy Hallett*

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### MEMBERSHIP

*Rupert Eley*

**W**e welcome the new members who have joined in the last few months and hope that they will enjoy all the benefits of membership of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group

#### **UK**

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## A feast of camellias

The ex-Editor and I, fearing we might be deprived of our annual overdose of flowers, otherwise known as the Group Tour, decided we would take ourselves to the International Camellia Society biennial Congress, this year being held in Portugal and Spain in March, which we think Group members may enjoy hearing about.

‘As everyone knows,’ Spain and Portugal are much too hot for all our genera and we were not quite sure what we would see, but set out in hope. We decided to do the pre-Congress tour, to see something of Portugal, and arrived in Porto, N. Portugal where we were instantly whisked to our first garden, around Serralves Park, an exquisite pink-washed Art Deco building which is a National monument. We tottered around the garden clutching glasses of white port and saw our first Portuguese camellias.

### Friday 7th March

Porto’s wealth was mainly created from the Port wine trade and in the 19th century horticulture became fashionable and competitive among the city’s wealthy families. Many beautiful gardens were created then with collections of exotic plants and trees. Having your own named camellia became part of this fashion and more than 300 Portuguese cultivars were created at that time.

**The Botanic Garden of Porto**, our first garden of the day, had three metre high hedges of camellias of that era which created separate gardens. The hedges, to us more important than the gardens they surrounded, contained many cultivars, including *Camellia japonica* ‘Dona Jane Andresen’ and ‘Augusto Leal de Gouveia Pinto’, all in full flower.

**Casa de Campo Bello in Vila Nova de Gaia.** This listed property, owned by the Countess of Campo Bello, and dating back to the 14th century, had a traditional Portuguese house and garden layout. There were many old camellias throughout the garden; not all were named, but the terrace walk, beside a tall clipped camellia hedge interspersed with baroque statuary, was memorable, with views over the Douro river, its famous bridges and the city of Porto. The hedge was formed with a mix of cultivars including *C. japonica* ‘Mathotiana’ and led to a fountain surrounded by large ancient single red camellia trees believed to be some of the oldest *Camellia japonica* specimens in Europe, coming from Japan in the 16th century.

In the afternoon we visited the Quinta de Santo Inácio de Fiães, at Avintes, owned by another of the traditional Porto families, the van-Zellers, and we were guided by Joana Andresen Guedes, one of the garden owners and current ICS director for Portugal. This garden had evolved over several centuries; ‘flower filled’ in 1789, it became more Romantic in the 19th century, with ponds and rustic fountains. For our visit the fountains were decorated with cut camellias blooms, placed on the low box hedging. The garden was full of huge trees, including a 50 metre *Eucalyptus obliqua* dated 1870, a 40m. *E. amygdalina*, and the largest *E. globulus* in Portugal. Intricate paths led among mature rhododendrons, azaleas, kalmias and camellias and Luis van-Zeller’s passion for the plants has been inherited by the family, who have restored the formal garden. They are proud to be the birthplace of ancient camellias. *Camellia japonica* varieties ‘Dona Maria Helena van-Zeller’, ‘Luiz van-Zeller’, ‘Jasmim’, ‘Calliope’, ‘Acteon’, ‘Uterpe’, ‘Eximia Alba’ and ‘Urania’ all originated here.

### Saturday 8th March – Villar d’Allen in Porto

Another 19th century aristocratic Porto family created Villar d’Allen as a summer retreat in 1839, keeping the formal garden with its ancient camellias including the *Camellia japonica* varieties ‘Rouvroy’, ‘Lady Eleanor Campbell’ and a rare ‘Orandako’. Joao Allen and then his son Alfredo, Viscount of Villar d’Allen, enlarged the garden and created a Romantic garden, with lakes, ponds, waterfalls, a pergola, many fine trees and flowering shrubs. They wanted botanical collections and were enthusiastic propagators of camellias, naming them after their family members, which they do to this day. *C. japonica* varieties which originated in this garden include ‘Alfredo Allen’, ‘Alberto Allen’, ‘Viscondessa de Villar d’Allen’, ‘Perola de Villar d’Allen’, ‘Madame Jules Mechlynch’ and ‘Luis de Mello Breynner’.

It was a warm and sunny spring day when we set forth around the garden, and we were fortunate to have hostess Dona Isaura Allen to take us round. She is both charming and knowledgeable and as we walked she picked named blooms to present to us as we went along.

Then it was on to the opening of the **19th Camellia Show of Porto** at Porto Town Hall. It is always interesting to see how others arrange these things and this show consisted of a number of large circular tables, each for a different grower/competitor. The cut camellia blooms were then arranged in various patterns covering the tables, with an overwhelming impression of colour and variety. Most were named and we had fun spotting our favourites. With our 150 guests adding to the Portuguese visitors at the show, the hall was densely packed with a colourful mixture of people and flowers and it was a unique opportunity to enjoy the flowers at their peak.



Mr Jose Allen and D Isaura Allen

Photo: John Rawling

We progressed from there to the **Soares dos Reis National Museum**, where a camellia art exhibition had been arranged to coincide with the Show. As well as 19th century paintings and beautifully illustrated books, there were earlier ceramics from China and Japan, showing camellias and two beautiful 17th century polychrome screens from Namban recording the Portuguese trading in Japan at that time. Portuguese navigators made their first contacts with China in 1516 and a little later with Japan. As trade with China and Japan grew, plants came back to Porto which was a trading port. When camellias first arrived in Portugal from Japan they were known as Japanese roses.

We noticed as we travelled about the city that even small gardens in Porto had their own camellia tree or bush and it has been called the City of Camellias. Camellias here flower throughout the winter bringing cheerful colour to the winter months.

### Sunday, 9th March – Casa do Casal at Santo Tirso

This was the home of the late Jose Gil – President of the Portuguese Camellia Society. At the end of an avenue of oak trees the imposing gateway opened into an entrance courtyard



quartered with beds of grand camellia trees. The fountain in the centre of the courtyard was decorated with blooms of many of the camellias in the garden.

This was a delightful space but not big enough for all the plants Jose Gil wanted to grow, so he converted an orchard, and with 4 hectares he grew every variety imaginable. There were at least 6000 camellias planted there, including ancient tea plants of *Camellia sinensis* and many *C. reticulata*, and virtually every plant seemed to be in flower on our visit.

We walked among a forest of flowers: here was a bush of *Camellia japonica* 'White Nun' and nearby, 'White Empress', both with huge white flowers with pronounced stamens; there was 'Augusto Leal de Gouveia Pinto' again, with its formal pink double flowers with a delicate white edge to each petal; and there was 'Kumagai Nagoya', a large red single Higo camellia with many white petaloids in the centre; and 'Miji Rainbow' – red with white splashes, variable colouring with wonderful bosses in addition.

This was a collection from all over the world and all nationalities could spot their domestic favourites, but all were impressed by the 8 foot columns of shade-protected *Camellia chrysantha* with its intensely waxy yellow blooms, flowering in the central courtyard of the house.

Another thing we were discovering was that, much like the large Italian gardens, Portuguese and Spanish gardens followed the 19th century style of sculpting camellias trees. We had seen camellia hedges carefully pruned in the Porto Botanic Gardens and at our next garden, **Casa do Campo** in Celerico, they excelled at camellia topiary. These ancient camellias were shaped into umbrella, mushroom and pyramid shapes, and the hedges were shaped around small courtyards with windows created through them. We wound our way uphill on the stepped paths through the topiary to the swimming pool and a violin trio, and then progressed on to lunch with wine tasting and good food.

Our farewell dinner to Porto that evening was held in the Arab Hall of the Palácio da Bolsa, the Stock Exchange Palace. A national monument, its walls were covered with amazing azulejos (tiles) painted with the history of Porto, fantastically coloured in blues, greens and gold.



*Camellia japonica* 'Augusto Leal de Gouveia Pinto' Photo: John Rawling

## Monday – Journey to Spain

On our journey we visited the Camélias Flavius Nursery where Antonio Assuncao is dedicated to the propagation and preservation of old Portuguese cultivars. And then to the Palácio de Vila Flor in Guimaraes, to view nationally listed 180 year-old camellias: *Camellia japonica* 'Alba Plena' and 'Bonomiana' as well as 'Conde do Bomfim' and the rare 'Flor da Roma'. The trees were as stately as any English oak tree.

## Tuesday 11th March – Spain

The city of **Pontevedra**, capital of the Province of Galicia is set on the River Lerez and was a stop on a pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, with an interesting walled town at its historic centre. The welcome ceremony was quite formal in the imposing Pazo Provincial. We entered on a red carpet through an avenue of musicians in national dress playing bagpipes and tambourines. In a white and gold painted hall there were welcome speeches from local dignitaries and from the Japanese ambassador currently supporting their international link with Pontevedra. Pat Short, President of the ICS, was able to draw together all these disparate factors to add her own warm welcome to all.

**The Formal Congress in Pontevedra** was held for three mornings in a comfortable modern theatre, with translation headphones provided to each member of the audience. Scientific papers in many languages were presented on camellia diseases, reviews of research undertaken, reports on historic camellias, and progress on camellia products as well as tourism and how it can support the plants and the people who grow them. All were reviewed and discussed. Meetings of directors proceeded in the background and at the final dinner, presentations were made to gardens which had successfully applied to become International Camellia Gardens of Excellence, including Het Leen, in Belgium, visited and reported on last year in our autumn bulletin.

The RCM Group is currently applying for charitable status and part of that process involves the need to provide evidence of its activities, educational, scientific etc. We found it interesting to see how another society demonstrates its involvement and commitment to the plants.



Musicians at Rubiáns

Photo: John Rawling

In the afternoons we visited two recently designated International Gardens of Camellia Excellence. First was **Pazo de Rubiáns**, which is a lovely 18th century manor house, its garden surrounded by vineyards. In the warm sunshine we were entertained by musicians in costume and offered the finest jamon iberico among other ingredients of a delicious buffet, and then we strolled among the camellias, carefully named and recorded by the owner, Marchioness Paloma Rey Fernandez-Latoure, in a restoration work of 20 years. The second garden, **Parque Botanico do Soutomaio**, surrounds a picturesque restored medieval castle. The garden contains a number of listed trees, including araucarias, chestnuts, *Magnolia x soulangeana* and *Cryptomeria*. It also has a comprehensive selection of large flowering camellias, among which were *Camellia japonica* 'Cidade de Vigo', *C. reticulata* 'Dream Castle' and *C. x williamsii* 'Debbie'.

As we flew home we concluded that there is much for a camellia lover, or indeed lover of any of our genera to enjoy in each of these gardens. Both countries are making huge welcoming efforts to promote the gardens in these less economically vibrant areas to draw in tourists and we urge members to go before the rush!

Ros Rawling





*Camellia reticulata* 'Dream Castle'

Photo: John Rawling



*Camellia japonica* 'Saudade de Martins Branco'

Photo: John Rawling



*Camellia japonica* 'Pomponia Pedrotia'

Photo: John Rawling

## BRANCH REPORTS

### New Forest Branch

It was some years since we last visited Minterne, the home of the Digby family since the 18th century, so it was good to visit the garden again on a rather misty morning in late April.

Lord Digby welcomed us, and gave a short talk on the history of Minterne and the garden. The valley containing the garden is unusual because the soil is greensand whilst on either side the land is calcareous. Lord Digby's ancestors subscribed to plant hunting expeditions to the Himalayas and China and many of the species growing in the garden are from the seed collected on these expeditions. Unfortunately, over the years some of the plant labels have been lost, and the Head Gardener Ray Abraham has even resorted to a metal detector to try and locate them. He has identified about 100 plants so far.

After the talk, Ray escorted us round the garden. It is a pity that so many of the hybrids created in the garden were not registered and named. Probably the most famous hybrid raised and named is *Rhododendron* 'Minterne Cinnkeys' (*cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* x *keysii*). A lovely cross of *R. cinnabarinum* ssp. *xanthocodon* and *R. keysii*, and unnamed, strangely, was in full flower and brightened up the morning. Wild garlic grew profusely amongst the rhododendrons and Ray commented that it kept the weeds down! At the part of the garden furthest from the house, one of the small lakes had been dug out to clear the silt and the banks then planted up with candelabra primulas. The lovely shuttlecock fern, *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, populated another area nearby. *Davidia involucrata* nearby was just coming into flower and was covered in its gorgeous bracts. Alongside the stream feeding the lake were several large leaved rhododendrons – a magnificent *Rhododendron montroseanum* and two hybrids of *R. basilicum*, the first with *R. sinogrande*, the second with *R. falconeri*.

The streams running through the garden add greatly to its charm, with cascades and waterfalls opening into a succession of small lakes.

After the tour of the garden we were invited into the house for a glass of wine and to look at the records and projects for the future development of the garden.

We were very interested to learn that Ray has set up a tissue culture unit to propagate plants from the garden. He told us of the extremely high standards of hygiene necessary, the processes involved, and the very close control of humidity and temperature in the unit.



*Matteuccia struthiopteris* at Minterne

Photo: Robin Whiting



*Rhododendron yuefengense* at Millais Nursery

Photo: Robin Whiting

*Continued overleaf*



Our second visit in mid-May was to Millais Nurseries near Farnham in Surrey to see the 6 acre woodland garden. We seemed to be magically drawn to the sales area of the nursery at the beginning and end of our tour, and at least one of our number succumbed to temptation.

David Millais guided us on our tour and pointed out the many lovely rhododendrons and trees planted by his father, Ted Millais, and latterly by David himself. Indeed it was good to see much new planting, both of trees and rhododendrons. The winter storms had created havoc in parts of the garden; several large pines had been brought down, causing damage to some of the rhododendrons. Among the splendid plants were a fine *Rhododendron cinnabarinum* ssp. *cinnabarinum* Roylei Group BLM234 and a superb *R. augustinii* 'Bowood Blue'. *Magnolia* 'Daphne' is becoming very popular and it was easy to see why with its lovely flowers, foliage and a good habit. Not many camellias in the garden but the later flowering hybrid *Camellia* 'Spring Festival' was putting on a good display. A treasure much admired was *Rhododendron yuefengense* with its unusual but fine foliage and it was well set with flower buds to bloom later in the season.

In the afternoon we made our way to Richard Thornton's home at Headley Down. Richard and his wife, Susan, started the garden when they moved there in 1995. The plot was long, fairly narrow and steeply sloped, and extended to about one third of an acre. It was covered in grass and heather and uncultivated. A good deal of heavy work and soil moving was carried out in the early stages to create a paved area near the house and to terrace the garden. 19 years later, the garden has reached full maturity. Richard's taste in gardening is catholic: all the way from sink gardens and alpines to trees. He told us his philosophy: 'If it is Chinese and woodland, I want it.'

Among the many rhododendrons were orchids, trilliums, a spectacular *Arisaema griffithii* and a fine *Podophyllum* 'Spotty Dotty'. Although the soil is sandy, the fertility must be very high, as all the growth in the garden was luxuriant, helped no doubt by the irrigation system installed.

At the end of our visit we were able to relax on the patio with a very welcome cup of tea and delicious cakes kindly provided by Susan.

Our last visit in mid-June was to the garden of Melbury House. This 50-acre garden is set in parkland amongst the rolling hills of west Dorset. We were shown round by Gareth Jones, the head gardener. He told us that the soil conditions are not favourable to rhododendrons, mainly due to drainage problems, but a few are grown in one of the beds.

Melbury has been owned for 500 years by the same family, one which has a passion for trees. Indeed one of the trees is believed to be 900 years old. One of the first trees we saw was a young chestnut, *Aesculus indica* 'Sydney Pearce', flowering for the first time, but there are many mature oaks, *Cornus*, acers and other trees throughout the garden.

Much of the garden is covered in a lawn stretching down to a large lake. A gravel path leads down to the water and runs alongside it and beside areas of grass which were left uncut for the wild flowers and orchids to multiply. Nearing the house the path went past a border designed by Penelope Hobhouse. Further on, we entered some walled gardens laid out with roses and herbaceous plants, and then to the kitchen garden which provided vegetables and cut flowers for the house. The whole garden was immaculate and a great credit to Gareth and his small team. The collection of leaves is highly mechanised and

these are composted together with other garden waste. Gareth proudly showed us the end result – a fine well-rotted mulch. Not exciting for some, but I think most of us would have liked a trailer load to spread around our favourite plants.

Robin Whiting

### South West Branch visit to Exeter University and Killerton gardens

We gathered at Reed Hall in the oldest part of the 350 acre campus of Exeter University where there are many plantings dating back to the days of the Veitch nursery. We were met by Iain Park, Superintendent of Grounds who has, at full complement, 31 garden and ground staff. Our group were led off at considerable pace by the enthusiastic Iain to explore the very varied parts of the campus. It was obvious that there had to be much juggling between maintaining amenity areas for graduations and other university functions, and looking after listed trees which are getting rather old, with many rhododendrons having reverted to their ponticum rootstocks.

A massive expansion of the campus, with new buildings everywhere being constructed, obviously gave Iain many difficulties, not only trying to preserve the listed trees and amenity features, but no doubt fighting the University for every penny of funding for the grounds. Other areas had low maintenance grass beds and heather-covered banks and some attractive mixed plantings at important road and pedestrian junctions. Two wooded valleys were planted with many camellias which had reached large sizes including an attractive semi-double red which was spotted again in many different areas. A thousand *Magnolia stellata* and *M. kobus* had been planted in 2000, but were over at the time of the visit. The valleys were full of potential for more inspired plantings.



Iain Park and some of the SW Branch Group Photo: John Marston

A small group made a detour to see the National Collection of *Azara* in and around the walled garden.

Iain was presented with a plant of *Magnolia* 'Columnar Pink' originating from our past Chairman Maurice Foster's garden.

We moved on to the National Trust's estate at Killerton, and were guided through the garden by Kate Tuke, Head Gardener, and Cameron, her assistant, who was incredibly knowledgeable about the plants. Among our number was Dick Fulcher who had once been Head Gardener here, and whose knowledge of the place enhanced our enjoyment, and he pointed out, with Kate, the developments which had happened since his day.



Kate Tuke introducing Killerton gardens

Photo: John Marston

A greater contrast between this garden and the Exeter University campus could not be imagined. Here was planting and gardening of the highest order. Interesting camellias, rhododendrons, magnolias and other flowering shrubs and rare trees of considerable age sat above sheets of wild flowers cascading down the banks, which in the past might have been mown at considerable cost, but were now providing jewel-studded ground cover. There had been considerable tree losses due to autumnal gales, but clearing up had been so successful that these were not really noticeable. Many older areas of the garden had been cleared, and one of the most successful of these was the old quarry, now home to many interesting plants from arisaemas through scented rhododendrons to small trees such as *Carrieria calycina*. As one climbed up through this, one could look back down onto the gardens below. One also could walk on paths along the contours of the slopes which gave good vantage points to view plants above and below.



Path at Killerton

Photo: John Marston

A magnificent tree of *Davidia involucrata* was in full and magnificent flower. The majority of these trees in commerce are of the variety 'vilmoriniana' and as luck would have it, a tree of just this variety was flowering nearby, which afforded an opportunity of comparison between the two. Straight *Davidia involucrata* was larger in flower and leaf by a considerable margin, and could have been awarded 'plant of the trip'.

Kate, Cameron and the garden staff were congratulated on maintaining a truly magnificent garden which was not resting, but continually evolving.

John Marston

## Jeremy Deeble Peter-Hoblyn 1939–2014

Jeremy Peter-Hoblyn of Lamellen died suddenly at home on August 19th after a short illness. With his wife Felicity, eldest daughter of renowned plantsman and rhododendron enthusiast, Walter Magor, and their children, they moved into Lamellen at St Tudy in Cornwall in 1974 and took over the garden which in turn was being restored by Walter Magor, who had taken on the house and garden in 1961. It had been a wilderness of neglect after the death of its creator, Felicity's grandfather, Edward Magor, in 1941. A past Chairman of the Group, Walter corresponded with all the great and influential members of the rhododendron community until his death in 1995.

During Jeremy's time at Lamellen, the access paths throughout the garden were improved, and he and Felicity created new areas to the west and back of the house, planting many magnolias and rhododendrons and extending the shelter belts around at house.

Jeremy was a Cornishman and an engineer, and until his retirement was Chief Executive of a USA-based company, which involved a great deal of travelling, leaving Felicity to run the garden.

After retiring in 2004 he and Felicity moved into a converted barn, renting the house for holidays and family gatherings. They built a new propagation unit and further improved the paths in the garden so that they were accessible for a motorised vehicle. This has made transport of materials and plants (and people) a great deal easier.

Felicity is continuing to look after the garden, as the third generation to do so, and their son Edward has recently become interested too, so perhaps with a fourth generation, the important garden at Lamellen has a secure future.

John Marston

## Rosemary Foster

Many members will be very sorry to hear that Rosemary Foster, wife of former Group Chairman Maurice Foster, died on 15th September after her long brave fight with cancer.

Rosemary was a talented artist and also a knowledgeable plantswoman herself, working with Maurice to create their garden at White House Farm in Kent, but also judging camellias at many shows, both for the Group and the ICS, contributing to the Historic Roses Group and travelling with Maurice to represent the Group and support many members' gardens throughout the world.

The rose appropriately named for her *Rosa* 'Rosemary Foster', is a delicate single pale pink, but demonstrates exactly that fighting spirit that Rosemary later showed. Her warmth and friendship will be missed by her many friends in the Group.

Ros Rawling

Ed. I know members will join me in sending sympathy to both families at losing these valued members of the RCMG community.



Unfortunately, we have no option but to make big changes to our Seed List for 2015, as we will be unable to list any new wild collected seed for the time being.

Following approval of the EU Regulation on 19th March 2014, the UK Government is consulting on the implementation and enforcement of the Nagoya Protocol. The National Measurement Office will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the legislation which is designed to support the country of origin from where plant material has been obtained. Whilst the mechanism for this is still unclear, it is apparent that we will be unable to offer any new wild collections of seed without a licence from the country of origin. Severe penalties are proposed including up to 2 years imprisonment and an unlimited fine.

We do hope that collectors will be able to obtain licences in the future, and that, working with all the relevant authorities, we can find a way to recompense the country of origin so that we can continue to offer wild collected seed. However, in the meantime we suggest you stock up with seed from previous years as it may be very scarce in the future.

## MEMBERS' LETTERS

Dear Editor,

### Rhododendrons with split corollas

Some 20 years ago, whilst working at Clyne Gardens in Swansea, South Wales, I noticed a small group of self-sown, large-leaved, young rhododendrons bearing their first flush of flowers. Clyne has a good mature collection of both *Falconera* and *Grandia* species and these young plants were undoubtedly going to be hybrids between them.

Clambering across the stream to get a photograph, I was amazed to see that, instead of the usual 'bell-shaped' corollas, each flower had split into separate petals. The appearance was most interesting, giving an unusual feathery airiness to the trusses. This effect was not restricted to just the odd truss, each bush was covered with similar flowers. Being unsure that they would appeal to other growers, they were left to themselves as curiosities and no attempt was made to propagate them.

They were still there and flourishing when the IDS visited Clyne in May 2014 and, on the tour round the garden, I was surprised to see yet another good sized plant, nowhere near the others, whose flowers bore thin white strap-like petals, which contrasted markedly with the rusty indumentum on the ovary.

The number of the individual petals on each flower accorded with the normal number of lobes found in these two subsections, which suggests that the corollas had, for some reason, just divided to the base. There were very few, if any, stamens evident, almost all had aborted or become misshapen and twisted.

Around the same time this Spring, I had another couple of plants, of similar parentage and flowers, drawn to my attention, one grown by Claire Mansel Lewis, at Stradey Castle, Llanelli, that may have been a gift from Clyne and another by Marlene Storah, growing in her garden in Todmorden in Yorkshire.

Marlene's plant was given to her as a seedling by Philip Brown, who was then at Portmeirion in North Wales.

I would be intrigued to hear if this is a relatively common phenomenon or is there something special in our water here in Wales!

Ivor T. Stokes



Rhododendron 1 at Clyne Gardens (see letter from Ivor Stokes)

Photo: Ivor Stokes



Rhododendron 2 at Clyne Gardens

Photo: Ivor Stokes



Stradey rhododendron

Photo: Claire Mansel Lewis



Todmorden rhododendron

Photo: Marlene Storah



Dear Editor,

### ***Rhododendron* 'Argosy' x *macabeanum***

**S**omewhere around the year 2000 I purchased, under the Group scheme, seed donated by the late Ted Millais which he described as 'Argosy' x *macabeanum*. Quite why I bought the seed I cannot now remember, but I think I must simply have been intrigued to discover what a combination of *Rhododendron auriculatum*, *R. fortunei* ssp. *discolor* and *R. macabeanum* might end up looking like. In 2005 I was able to plant out a seedling in our North Cornwall garden, which continued to grow on with good hybrid vigour. In 2013 I noticed it had produced a single truss in late June, and this year, at about 6ft in height, it had several trusses in flower by June 15th. My picture illustrates (I hope) that the *R. macabeanum* characteristics are dominant. The truss of apparently nine flowers and the individual corollas somewhat resemble a white *R. macabeanum*, well set off by the prominent central purple blotch. The foliage also is *R. macabeanum* rather than 'Argosy'-like, although smaller in dimension and without underside indumentum. David Millais has told me that his father was aiming for a plant with the late flowering habit of 'Argosy' ie July, but with the foliage and yellow colouring of *R. macabeanum*. Consequently they did not continue with the cross, and I can well understand that as a commercial decision.



*Rhododendron* 'Argosy' x *macabeanum*

Photo: Philip Evans

However, seeing the plant, late on a dull June afternoon with the substantial trusses luminous in the gloom, I was quite impressed. After all, a June/July flowering quasi-*macabeanum* with trusses of this quality, even if they have lost the yellow, is not to be sniffed at and makes a novel extension to the rhododendron season. Other members must have bought the seed at the same time – it would be interesting to know of their experience. Incidentally, by contrast, I planted 'Argosy' itself in the garden in 2001 ie four years earlier, possibly in a bad position, where it has done much less well and has yet to flower.

Philip Evans

Dear Editor,

### **Len Beer and his *Rhododendron glaucophyllum***

**I**n his book *Plant Hunting in Nepal* Roy Lancaster relates how, early in the spring of 1971, he was in his office working on the compilation of *Hillier's Manual of Trees and Shrubs* when the telephone rang. Picking up the receiver, Roy heard a voice at the other end say "I am leading an expedition to E. Nepal – can you come?" The voice was that of Len Beer, a Devonian brought up at Ivybridge and, at that time, in charge of the University of North Wales Botanic Garden.

Len had trained at Dartington Hall gardens and then spent a year at Hillier's nursery where he had met Roy Lancaster. The expedition he was planning was to Barum Khola, a valley overlooked by mighty Makulu (27,800ft). Len was to go on his own in June to reconnoitre the area, being joined in September by Roy Lancaster and Dave Morris for the seed harvest. Shares in the expedition were offered, each shareholder receiving a proportion of the seed collected. Alpine expert Kath Dryden and I took a share between us. Among the seed collected was a generous packet of *Rhododendron glaucophyllum* of which we had half each and both managed to raise several seedlings.

*Rhododendron glaucophyllum* had been found, together with *R. ciliatum*, in a gully where it made low thickets over a large area. It is a dwarf species of up to 60cm in height and a little more in spread. Its 3–5cm long elliptic leaves are dark matt green above and distinctively glaucous white beneath. Trusses of up to ten bell-shaped flowers, 2.5cm long are freely produced and are normally rose-pink although, as time would tell, those from seed collected by the expedition were all white.

In time both Kath's seedlings and my own reached flowering size and we eagerly waited for buds formed the previous autumn to gradually develop until, in May, they opened to surprise both of us. All of the seedlings proved to be white flowered but one of Kath's was of more compact habit and bore flowers larger than any of the others. In May 1977, Kath Dryden exhibited this plant at Chelsea Flower Show where it received an Award of Merit subject to naming. Len Beer had tragically died of cancer the previous year and it seemed fitting to commemorate him by naming this excellent dwarf shrub in his honour.



*Rhododendron glaucophyllum* 'Len Beer'

Photo: Barry Starling

*Rhododendron glaucophyllum* 'Len Beer' did not prove easy to propagate but in time a number of cuttings were raised. Interestingly, when raised from selfed seed, a number of the seedlings were the rose-pink of the type plant. Following a request from Len's widow, a cutting-raised plant was forwarded to her and then, after being contacted by Len's mother, still living in Ivybridge, plants were provided for her and other of Len's close relatives. I value the memory of delivering plants to Len's 90 year-old mother and reminiscing with her about his early interest in plants and dogged determination to see them growing in the wild. Now, over 40 years since the seed was collected from that remote valley in Nepal, *R. glaucophyllum* 'Len Beer' still flowers regularly and abundantly, reminding me of the intrepid plantsman who, a year after the expedition, enthusiastically related some of the highlights of his trip over a pint in an Essex pub.

Barry Starling

Letters continued overleaf

## Notes from a dry garden in August

**M**ost gardeners are a bit jealous of others who apparently have better conditions for the plants they love. I am particularly envious of those with woodland gardens blessed with the well-drained but moist soil which is said to be essential. Those who garden on heavy clay may curse the unyielding soggy clag when they are trying to create a planting hole. Others, like me, who do their best on dry and hungry gravel, sometimes wish there was a bit of natural water somewhere near the surface. That thought did not survive last winter, when we had heavy rain for weeks on end, which reduced some gardens near me to swamps, whereas I could start digging immediately and take advantage of ideal planting conditions.

Most years, even in winter, I find that the deeper I dig the drier it gets. This year I found that there was, for once, a reservoir of moisture deep in the soil. What a difference that has made to the performance of the garden in the months that followed.

Most plants (and I am writing mainly of rhododendrons and camellias) produced excellent growth in spring and early summer, extracting water from this reserve without the need for the extra watering I often find I need to do even this early in the season. The prolonged heatwave in July (I write from near the coast of Dorset) put things back to normal – the soil (for want of a better word) is once again dry deep down and the few downpours we have had have done little to change this.



*Rhododendron auriculatum* flower truss.

Photo: Russell Beeson



The new foliage of *Rhododendron auriculatum*

Photo: Russell Beeson

For established plants, I generally do very little watering, even when I see leaves wilting in the hot sun, but I do make some exceptions. For example, I have a large plant of *Rhododendron auriculatum*, a seedling given to me some years ago by a friend, which has flowered for the first time this July and August. This wonderful species has an unusual growing pattern and does seem to respond to special treatment. For ten months of the year it is ignored but when it suddenly leaps into flower and growth in late summer, often in very hot weather, it is worth deluging it with water regularly to ensure it gets every chance to put on the strong growth necessary for next year's flowers. Another remarkable thing about this species is that all the previous year's leaves drop immediately the new year's growth appears. Despite these peculiarities, it is a very tough plant, repeatedly performing well in climates much more testing than that of the south of England.

All newly-planted shrubs are now potentially suffering and frequent hose watering has become necessary. The good growth of May and June has thereby been largely preserved and most plants are budding up well for next year. Of course the recent winter was also remarkable for being, in my area at least, virtually frost-free, so most shrubs flowered earlier than usual. Late frosts can often be devastating in such conditions but fortunately we escaped them.

My garden is quite small and I am constantly struggling to create new planting areas to accommodate the produce of my propagation efforts. Last winter, as an experiment, I developed a gently south-facing grass slope, half shaded by rowans and a neighbour's pines, into a bed mainly for dwarf rhododendrons. Although ominously full of roots, the soil seemed nicely moist (as a consequence of all the heavy rain) and in good condition for planting stuff out from pots. A mulch of half-rotted shreds completed the process. All was well for a few months, but wishful thinking has been overtaken by the reality: the thin soil dries out very quickly and I am only keeping plants healthy by watering every few days in the summer. Planting pot-grown rhododendrons in soil that is prone to drying out is always dangerous because one cannot see the state the root ball is in. One or two have succumbed and I fear it is because the root balls just dried out and stayed dry. My hope is that, after the second winter, perhaps with a thicker mulch, roots will have become more established and the plants will grow well with rather less watering. We shall see! So far though, *Rhododendron valentinianum*, *R. hippophaeoides* 'Haba-Shan', *R. pumilum*, 'Snow Lady' and several others all look very healthy.

One of the advantages of having a small garden of course is that you get to know it intimately and can usually find the time to water those plants that really need it. It's no good telling me that I should restrict myself to plants that are suitable for the conditions. If I did that, I would grow little other than *Cistus*, heathers and brooms. Nice as those plants are, I happen to want to grow lots of rhododendrons as well, which means that gardening is labour-intensive. What does that matter if it's a labour of love?

**Postscript:** After weeks of disappointment and false dawns, the rain did finally arrive, on August Bank Holiday, just in time to transform the garden from a gasping semi-desert into an apparently lush piece of heaven, though past experience tells me that the rain will not have penetrated very far. Never mind – it should be enough to see us through the rest of the summer.

Russell Beeson



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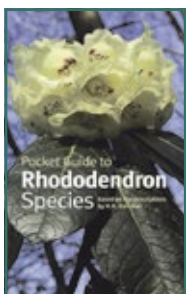
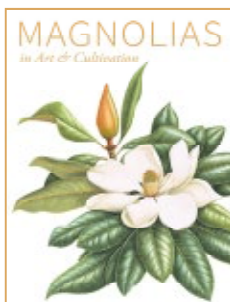
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			<b>17</b> <b>RCM GROUP</b> <b>Evenley, Northants</b> <hr/> Visit to Evenley Wood Garden Judy Hallett judy.hallett@gmail.com 01981 570401	<b>9/10</b> <b>North West Branch</b> <b>Ness Gardens</b> <hr/> North West Branch Show Ted Brabin angela.brabin@btinternet.com or 0151 353 1193
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