



the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

November 2015

As we go into the cooler winter months, we can reflect on the past season, and look forward to next spring. This summer's weather was not the best for sunbathing in the garden, but our plants have enjoyed the cooler conditions in the South of England, while Scotland and the North seem to have had torrential rain for much of the season. As many of you will know, flower bud initiation occurs quite early in the summer preceding flowering. Although the specific time for induction varies amongst species, for a large number of woody plants of the temperate zone it takes place between early May and late July. In our three genera this often links with the passing of the monsoon in their natural habitat. After a flush of vegetative growth in spring, the apical buds pass through a transitional stage, and start to form flower buds by late June. The damp June this year, followed by the short heat wave of early July was the perfect weather, at least in the South of England, to initiate flower buds. It's at this time of year we switch from our spring feed containing more nitrogen, to one with more phosphorus and potassium to encourage budding and to toughen up the plant cells in time for winter. The cooler weather returned in August which suited our plants well, and saved the daily chore of watering. From what I have seen, I think we are in for a bumper flowering season next spring, perfect for our Centenary Celebrations!

And what celebrations we shall have! Charles Williams has been dusting off the records at Caerhays Castle to find early correspondence between members of the Rhododendron Society, and wonderful letters between his great grandfather J C Williams and the plant hunters Ernest Wilson and George Forrest whom he sponsored. He has found photographs, maps and records which have never been published before. Charles has kindly agreed to host a day at Caerhays in April to see this archive and to view the gardens. Some of these Caerhays items will join others from the RCMG, RHS and private collections and move firstly to be on display at the Main Rhododendron Show at Rosemoor, then up to Wisley for our main Centenary Celebrations in May, and finally on to Chelsea Flower Show.

Here the Group is planning an ambitious display adjacent to the Burncoose and Millais Nurseries exhibits, all in a 'plant-hunters' area of the Grand Pavilion near the Hillier display. The Chelsea Flower Show will be another huge undertaking for us, with archive material on display, decorated with choice rhododendrons. The Chelsea organisers are excited to be



Rhododendron 'Queen Louise', an endangered hybrid azalea.

(See article on Conservation, page 7)

Photo: Stephen Harding

working with us, and can see great media opportunities for the press and TV, looking at plant hunting, the changing tastes of rhododendrons over the past 100 years and the social histories of those involved.

But it is not just about looking back and celebrating 100

years. Just as important is to look forward, and wave the flag for our three genera in front of all the media attention, and to appeal to a new set of younger members

with smaller gardens. Sally Hayward's Top 100 Rhododendrons project has caught our membership's imagination, and will surely catch the media's interest next spring, especially as *Rhododendron yakushimanum* has been named as our favourite rhododendron – perfect for today's smaller gardens. We need to show that rhododendrons can have a home even in small gardens, and that our Group is not just the preserve of large garden owners.

Our main Centenary Celebrations from 6-10th May will be based at RHS Wisley Gardens and the nearby Hilton hotel at Cobham. This is conveniently situated just across junction 10 of the M25, and only 3 miles from Weybridge station. It's also about midway between Heathrow and Gatwick airports for our more distant members. I do hope you can join us for at least some of the time. Our main day at Wisley will be on the Saturday, and will include our Centenary plant display and lots

Continued overleaf

of display information about our history and our plants. RHS staff will lead tours of Battleston Hill, and there will also be one by Jim Gardiner, magnolia expert and Executive Vice President of the RHS. On Sunday, our members will start tours of notable nearby gardens, while the Wisley displays will be geared towards the public with workshops and ideas to help them get the most from their rhododendrons. The RHS are helping us to put together a large exhibit with the archive material, photographic images of our new Top 100 which will be compared to the best varieties recommended by my great uncle J G Millais in his book *Rhododendrons* in 1917, and a selection nominated by various members in the 1956 yearbook. This will show the changing tastes in rhododendrons over the years as new varieties became available. There will also be an exhibit of flowers, and we will be looking to members to bring along any of our Top 100 to display for the benefit of others. I hope that the scent of Loderi Group varieties fills the dedicated marquee in front of the main restaurant, for the benefit of the estimated 8000 visitors to Wisley that weekend!

None of these activities happen by themselves, and we are indebted to all those who are helping to pull these ideas into fruition. Next year you can look forward to a bumper Centenary edition of the Yearbook, which the remarkable Pam Hayward is busy putting together as an additional benefit for members. As time goes on, there is no doubt that we will be seeking extra help from the wider membership to help man exhibits, workshops, to meet and greet members from overseas, and to talk to the public who want to learn about our genera. So do please get involved and join our party. Let's use this centenary opportunity to increase our membership further. Thinking of which, welcome to all our new members listed in this bulletin. I think this must be a record!

We have planned three days of garden visits in the Wisley area. We do expect these visits to be popular, so we will limit numbers to some of the gardens so that you can hear your host and see the plants. You can read about the visits elsewhere in this bulletin, and do keep referring to the RCMG website where events will be posted as details are confirmed. This is a major event for the Group, and it would really help if you can please book early to help Judy with her planning.

David Millais

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Centenary Celebrations, 6-10th May 2016

On the evening of Friday 6th May, we will start staging our flower trusses in the marquee on the lawn in front of the restaurant at Wisley. We welcome blooms from everyone, and we really hope to stage as many of our Top 100 as possible. Saturday will be our main day at Wisley, welcoming in the public to see our flowers, Top 100 plants, photographs and display panels of historical interest. We need as many flowers as possible to give a real 'wow factor' to all the visitors to the event. There will be some very simple judging classes to encourage everyone to 'have a go'. There will be classes for Species, Hybrids, Deciduous azaleas, Evergreen Azaleas, and Vireyas. This will be clear and instructive to our visiting public. All of the exhibits will be judged on Saturday morning to determine the very best exhibit on the day and a new Centenary Cup will be awarded there and then. Hopefully this will be all very simple and an enjoyable activity for exhibitors and public alike. The RHS have hinted that if this is successful, they would consider an annual competition at this time of year, our peak blooming time, so your support in staging this event is really sought. Later in the day there will be guided tours of the rhododendrons, azaleas and magnolias flowering on Battleston Hill. During Sunday, the displays at Wisley will again be open, but it will be a more interactive day for the public, and we will be looking for members to man our information point and give advice on propagation, potting, planting plans and pruning. Perfect to try to gain new members! On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, we will organise tours, hopefully by coach, to a selection of the best private and public gardens within an easy travelling distance.

Accommodation at the Hilton Cobham has been reserved at special rates. There is a dedicated webpage for our Celebrations where you can book a choice of room types for as many or as few nights as you like (*see Bookings section, page 4*). On some of the evenings, we intend to arrange some after dinner speakers to educate and inspire you. Details are still being finalised, and we have yet to confirm one or two very special gardens, so these will be added to the website as plans progress. Special rates at the Hilton may not be held beyond the end of January. Please book early.

For those on a budget, free camping and caravanning will be available at Millais Nurseries.

Draft garden visit programme

■ **Sunday 8th May 2016.** Isabella Plantation and private garden Sarum.

Isabella Plantation, Richmond Park

The Isabella Plantation is a 40 acre woodland garden set within a Victorian woodland plantation planted in the 1830s. First opened to the public in 1953, it is best known for its evergreen azaleas, which line the ponds and streams and are at their peak of flower in late April and early May. Located in the gardens are the National Collection of Wilson 50 Kurume Azaleas (introduced to the west from Japan in the 1920s by the plant collector Ernest Wilson), large collections of rhododendrons and camellias, plus many other rare and unusual trees and shrubs which provide interest all year round. It has recently benefited from £1.6million lottery funding which has enabled restoration, restructuring and replanting of its collections. The garden has recently been described as 'the best garden in England'.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Peter Furneaux

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

**The copy date for the next Bulletin No.120
is 5th February 2016**

Please send your contributions to:

email: peterfurneaux@gmail.com

or post to: Peter Furneaux

Lucton Court, Lucton, Herefordshire HR6 9PQ

Letters or articles on any aspect of our three genera are very welcome as also are illustrations.



Views of the Isabella Plantation, above and below. Photos: David Millais



Sarum, Worplesdon, Guildford

The private garden of Rod and Mary White. Rod is a rhododendron species expert who visited many of the best collections in the country with John McQuire and the late Dr Mike Robinson (who jointly wrote *The Pocket Guide to Rhododendron Species*). Rod and Mary sought a family house with suitable soil where they could move and develop their extensive collection of rare plants. They bought Sarum which at the time had a completely overgrown 2.5 acre garden, and they spent the next two years clearing it, with an almost non-stop bonfire. They have since laid out a good looking plantsman's garden with some of the best forms of species, incorporating extensive companion plantings to add interest and give ground cover.

For the last two years, Rod has been Steward at the Early Rhododendron Competition at RHS Wisley.



A view in the garden at Sarum.

Photo: Mary White

■ **Monday 9th May 2016.** Savill Gardens or Valley Gardens and private garden Pyrford Court.

Savill Gardens and Valley Gardens, Windsor Great Park

The Savill Garden, Englefield Green is where Sir Eric Savill first created his woodland garden in the 1930s. The Savill Garden is a true wonder. It's a garden for all seasons and a place of beauty and colour that's loved by horticulturists and enthusiasts alike. Visitors can journey through 35 acres of interconnecting gardens and exotic woodland. Every garden has its own unique attraction, and during May the collections of rhododendrons and magnolias are at their best.

The Valley Gardens, 250 acres of landscaped garden and woodland containing isolated clumps of native oak, beech, sweet chestnut and Scots pine that were planted as far back as the early 1700s. Sir Eric Savill and Hope Findlay developed it further in the 1940s. Partly inspired by the garden's structure of parallel valleys, they planted whole collections of particular plant groups together. Today, the Valley Gardens, with the Savill Garden, provide a home to National Collections of *Magnolia*, *Mahonia*, *Pernettya*, *Rhododendron* species, Glenn Dale azaleas, hardy ferns, *Ilex* and Dwarf conifers. The most famous of the valleys is the Punch Bowl. A natural amphitheatre of multi-coloured azaleas, it erupts into a riot of colour in early May.

Pyrford Court, Woking.

Pyrford Court comprises about 20 acres of formal and informal ornamental gardens with a woodland garden and an ornamental lake. The site was laid out from 1906 by Lord and Lady Iveagh. Lady Iveagh was strongly influenced by the writings of, and may have consulted Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) who lived not far away at Munstead Wood. There is an extensive collection of early rhododendron hybrids, plus a superb collection of *Wisteria* which should be looking at their best. Plant Heritage are actively involved with the rare plants which have been re-discovered here. Pyrford Court is a very private garden, not normally open to the public, and has been recommended by Jim Gardiner of the RHS.



A view at Pyrford Court.

Photo: Marion Badger

■ **Tuesday 10th May 2016.** Ramster and private garden The Coach House. During the day we will hold our Annual General Meeting and celebratory Centenary Buffet lunch in Ramster Hall.

Ramster, Chiddingfold,

Ramster was laid out by Gauntlett Nurseries of Chiddingfold in the 1900s and is famous for its stunning collection of rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and magnolias which flourish

under the mature woodland canopy. With influences from the Japanese gardens, it now stretches over twenty acres. The carpets of scented bluebells contrast exquisitely with the fiery display of azaleas and rhododendrons in May. In the bog garden a mass of colourful primulas cascade down the rill, and stepping-stones weave a path under the leaves of the giant gunnera. Always peaceful and beautiful, the changing colours are reflected in the pond and lake. In the 1990s former RCMG Chairman John Bond was instrumental in establishing the Group's Hardy Hybrid rhododendron collection here, preserving many old English varieties before they were lost.



Ramster garden, above and below.

Photos: David Millais



The Coach House, Cranleigh.

The private garden of Tony and Carolyn Townsend. The garden consists of 22 acres on the south side of the North Downs. The Townsends bought the derelict Coach House and overgrown garden in 1979. After converting the property into a lovely house, they started on the gardens and after the great storms of 1987 and 1990 took down many large trees. During the last 15 years they have cleared undergrowth and *Rhododendron ponticum* to reveal old plantings dating from approx. 1920, and have made extensive new plantings of rhododendrons and magnolias, *Cornus* and hydrangeas. They have made ponds and even rebuilt a stone folly bought from Chelsea Flower Show to give wonderful distant views to the South Downs. Carolyn is Chairman of the Friends of the RHS and has recently joined the RCMG.

Bookings

Details will appear on the Group website shortly to enable you to book accommodation directly with the Hilton Cobham at reduced rates.

The full programme and costings are still being finalised. As

soon as possible details will be posted on the RCMG website and we will keep you informed by email of new developments to encourage you to make your booking as early as possible. The link to the booking page for the Hilton Cobham is: www.hilton.com/en/hi/groups/personalized/C/COBHNNH-ARCMG-20160506/index.jhtml

For those without internet access, please contact Judy Hallett, Events Co-ordinator, on 01981 570401 to express your interest in attending, so that the booking information can be posted to you.

Judy Hallett

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Last year we did receive a large number of excellent photos of our AGM plants, but there are still quite a number not represented at all on our site. The list of current AGM plants can be downloaded from www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/docs/MissingAGMImages2014.pdf. Those marked in red are varieties which were new entries to the AGM list as part of the 2012 review. This year you will see that I have been sent the largest number ever of pictures of vireyas and *Camellia reticulata* varieties (from an enthusiastic new Australian member). I would still like to focus on those AGM plants, so please check what you have in your photo collection **and** then check our website to see if we need your image. For some popular plants I have stopped adding any more images.

Stephen Lyus

BRANCH REPORTS

South West Branch

Visit to Knightshayes Court May 5th

We gathered at Knightshayes National Trust garden on a whole day visit, and were greeted by Michael Hickson who then gave us a talk in, incidentally, one of the very few Real Tennis courts in the country. It was a wonderful privilege to hear from Michael himself the history of the development of the garden. He had been there with Lady Amory as the present garden was created some fifty years ago, and had been Head Gardener there for over forty years from 1963.



One of the forms of *Rhododendron Loderi* Group seen at Knightshayes Court.
Photo: John Marston

Michael led us through the top of the garden (including 'Michael's Wood' named after him) planted with an amazing range of rare trees and shrubs, including a memorable massed area of a great many echiums which had colonised a recent clearing. He was a fount of knowledge and identified many of the older trees and shrubs without labels. After lunch, Ed, the recently appointed Head Gardener took us round, and we were able to help him with identification of the older rhododendrons. Notable among the rhododendron plantings were various forms of *Rhododendron* Loderi group in flower, some in spectacular bloom as in the photograph. I have been to Knightsayes many times over the past thirty years and, in my view, it is one of the greatest of English gardens and seems to be in good hands for the future.

John Marston

Visit to Kilmarth, St. Austell. Cornwall June 19th

Stepping out of our normal comfort zone of 'Spring' garden visits, our first excursion into a Summer visit turned out to be one of our great successes. Kilmarth has a garden of some 6 acres divided into different compartments specialising in herbaceous planting, wild flower meadow and a maze. Our visit coincided with the garden extending the hard landscaping and the erection of a new glasshouse which will complement the existing the two pavilions, one over-looking St. Austell bay with stunning views and the other a Dutch Pavilion with reflecting pool. This is certainly not a typical Cornish garden and because of that makes Kilmarth one of Cornwall's unique and beautiful gardens. Our delightful, knowledgeable host, who serves on the RHS Herbaceous Plant Committee, Nutty Lim, was so welcoming and entertained 22 members to a delicious lunch for which we were very grateful.

Kilmarth is a strictly private garden so we as a group were very fortunate to visit and owe Nutty our deep gratitude. A cheque for £550 was presented to Mrs Lim for the Helford River Children's Sailing Trust.

Barry Champion

The North West Branch Tour – 2016

Next April, from 18th to the 22nd, the NW Branch will be visiting Hampshire, staying at the Holiday Inn, Winchester. En route from our starting point at Ness Gardens, Wirral, we will visit the Harcourt Arboretum near Oxford.

Tuesday 19th will encompass Exbury Gardens in the morning and Furzey Gardens in the afternoon. On Wednesday we will visit the Hillier Arboretum in the morning and Little Barn Garden at Wood Green in the afternoon. Thursday will see us at Ramster a.m. and Millais Nurseries p.m. The final garden, on the return journey home, will be Upton House, near Banbury.

Members from other branches are most welcome to join us for all of the tour or for day visits.

Cost of the tour, from £515.00

Price includes: 4 nights' dinner, bed and breakfast at the Holiday Inn Winchester. All rooms have private facilities.

Not included (per person):

Single room supplement: £100.00

Insurance: £18.50 (under 65); £37.00 (65-74); £55.50 (75-90)

Further information from Ted Brabin, NW Chairman.

Tel. 0151 353 1193 or email to angela.brabin@btinternet.com

Wessex Branch

Visit to Nymans October 24th

We were fortunate to be given a guided tour of the garden by Philip Holmes, an expert plantsman who has worked at Nymans for many years and thus has much first-hand knowledge to share.

Our walk commenced at the highest part of the garden, with dramatic distant views. Soon, Philip drew our attention to an enormous *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, the Dawn Redwood, towering above us. This specimen was one of the first to be planted in England and now has a bold buttressed trunk which was clothed with lovely salmon russet foliage. Group members will no doubt already be aware of the story and considerable merits of this tree.

We proceeded down through the interesting young pinetum, largely replanted after the Great Storm of 1987, then across open parkland towards the ruins of the main house where we again had lovely views over the wooded valley within the Nymans estate. Despite the overcast day, the autumn colours were wonderful, especially the glowing red of *Acer rubrum* 'October Glory', butter yellow leaves of *Ginkgo biloba*, the bright deep russet of the *Taxodium distichum*, and the orange of a particularly nicely shaped *Nyssa sylvatica* growing in the valley.

The Messel family created Nymans and were also responsible for breeding three different and famous plants that are still widely grown. Philip showed us the original plants of each of these during our walk.

Arguably the best, and in flower on the day, was *Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay'. The first tree is situated near the Dawn Redwood where we commenced our walk and other specimens in the woodland areas were pointed out later. In a sheltered situation numerous lovely white flowers are produced from August right through to the frosts. Combine that with glossy evergreen foliage and a well-behaved columnar habit and surely we have the perfect tree for companion planting.

The other two famous plants, a camellia and a magnolia, were both named after Leonard Messel. The camellia grows adjacent to the wall at the entrance to the main house and had plenty of flower buds for next spring. It was incredible to see the original parent trees of *Magnolia* 'Leonard Messel' (*Magnolia kobus* x *Magnolia stellata* 'Rosea'). The trunk of *Magnolia kobus* had become very large with many twists and curves and completely dwarfed the *Magnolia stellata* that was now growing beneath its canopy.

The magnolia that really caught our eye was *Magnolia sargentiana* var. *robusta* and its huge seed heads that hung like grapes.

The pod had split to reveal masses of orange seeds inside. To maximise their ripening potential, these hang from the seed pods on thin white umbilicus strands. Quite an incredible sight! As we continued through the garden, we eventually came through the intimate walled garden with the dovecote embedded in the wall. How lovely to see *Camellia sasanqua* 'Narumigata' flowering against the outside wall as we passed through.

A surprise was the sight of the banana plants growing up against the walls in the ruins of the house. Philip told us that they have been growing there for three years without winter protection.

Close inspection revealed a great many choice plants of borderline hardiness growing in the shelter of the house. Particularly beautiful was a stand of *Nerine bowdenii* 'Stephanie' with large flowers in luscious salmon-pink; so much nicer than the usual rather stark pink of the species.

Continued overleaf



Camellia sasanqua 'Narumigata'.

Photo David Millais

As Philip was explaining the new summer planting around the Loggia (hired for their wedding venues), a plant with incredible autumn colour caught our eye and we all made a beeline for it. It was *Enkianthus perulatus* which is an ericaceous species and extremely hardy. This particular plant was growing in an island bed adjacent to the heather and rock gardens and was the best and most compact of three specimens planted at Nymans. Despite the cloudy day the bush seemed to glow like burning embers, with deep red colouring enhanced by hints of flame-red towards the tips. Everyone agreed that this was the bush of the day and we think a few orders were placed the next day!

Jim Inskip from our group has kindly sent us a link about *Enkianthus* in Cultivation from *The Plantsman*, June 2011. We are sure members will find this very interesting and informative: www.arboretumwespelaar.be/userfiles/file/pdf/110600_EnkianthusInCultivation_KC.pdf

We were educated about so many trees and shrubs in the most pleasant and informative way on that day. We all agreed later in the café that staff such as Philip are priceless. We went home with our knowledge greatly improved!

Andy Fly, Jenny Fly and Brian Long

Ericaceous peat-free compost trial

23 of our members obtained a free trial bag of the Dalefoot compost. Please could they now send me (emailslyus@yahoo.co.uk) comments of their experiences, as well as any photos of healthy strongly growing plants that Dalefoot might like to use in their advertising.

They would particularly like to know if you would buy this product if it was available in a retail outlet near you.

If you think that the mix should be modified, that again would be very useful feedback. I have had one enthusiastic response so far.

I would expect your trials to not be complete this year, but hopefully you can see more healthy growth next year.

Please note that my email is correctly shown above – it somehow got changed in the March Bulletin.

Stephen Lyus

APPRECIATIONS

John Rawling 1937-2015

John was well known in the Group for his interest in most of the events that were happening at any one time, attending committee meetings, lectures, judging shows, manning stands and many more things, but particularly for having edited the Bulletin for 13 years – an impressive 36 issues. When John took over the Bulletin, it was a simple black and white newsletter without any pictures. John soon changed that! His first issue was produced in full colour and when he handed it over to the current editor it was a sophisticated, highly regarded multi-page publication.



John Rawling photographing a *Roscoea* in Yunnan. Photo: Ros Rawling

John was a grandson of the founder of Rawlings, Opticians and Ophthalmic Specialists over the SE of England, and he practised in Caterham and Purley, where he remained for the 40-plus years of his working life. He became an early specialist in contact lenses and was a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers.

What very few, if any, of the Group would have known, however, was the breadth and the range of activities that John undertook. In fact, it is quite astonishing that he ever had any time to garden and yet it was one of his passions.

He was Councillor for Chaldon on Tandridge District Council for 24 years and Chairman of the Council twice during that time. He was heavily involved in Chaldon Village having been Chairman of the Governors of St Peter & St Paul's School, Chairman of the trustees of Chaldon Village Hall and Le Personne Benevolent Trust amongst other organisations. He dug the first sod for Tandridge Leisure Centre and was heavily involved in the setting up of the Douglas Brunton Centre in Caterham and the East Surrey Museum. Despite all the work that these interests involved, John was a keen plantsman and joined botanical trips to Bhutan as well as to Yunnan and Sichuan provinces in China to see his favourite plants growing in their natural state.

In his quiet, modest and unassuming, smiling way, John was a giant in the giving of service to his fellow beings and he will be much missed in many places and by many people.

He is survived by his wife, Ros, sons Richard and Michael and daughter Jenny.

Barry Haseltine

Mark Flanagan MVO, VMH

It is with very great sadness that we report that Mark Flanagan passed away on the 24th October 2015 following a short illness.

Mark was a champion of our three genera and much more besides. As Keeper of the Gardens in Windsor Great Park for the last twenty years he had nurtured the great collections with a passion, and in recent years, and much to our delight, brought examples back to the show benches. As we understand it, the Queen bestowed Membership of the Royal Victorian Order on Mark in the days preceding his death. This is an Order recognising distinguished personal service to the monarch. As a recognition of his contribution to the wider horticultural community, we can now also report that Mark was posthumously awarded a Victoria Medal of Honour by the RHS on the day preceding his funeral.

Mark was an able and innovative Chairman of the RHS Woody Plant Committee, introducing reforms to its operation which have brought a whole new generation into its membership, ensuring its future and relevance. Part of that re-shaping encompassed a much closer relationship with the RCM Group, of which he was also a Committee member, to the mutual benefit of both bodies. His work will leave a meaningful and productive legacy.

The Group benefited richly from Mark's talent as an author and, as Editor of the yearbook, I can personally attest to the care and professionalism he devoted to everything he wrote for us.

I think it a fitting tribute to Mark to remind you of an article he wrote for us for the 2010 yearbook. 'One corner' is a piece you may not have read before and even if you have I would urge you to read it once more and think of the author as you do. He will be much missed by many.

Our thoughts are with Mark's family and close friends.

Pam Hayward

Editor's note: a full appreciation of the life and achievements of Mark Flanagan will appear in the 2016 yearbook.

CONSERVATION REPORT

Things have been progressing on the conservation front and we now have a list of some 1400 rhododendron hybrids deemed to be at critical risk of being lost forever in our UK gardens. We have posted this list on the Group website and request that as many of you as possible take a look at the list and let me know if you have, or know the whereabouts of any of the listed plants.

Plants which are readily available in the UK nursery trade have been omitted at this stage in order that our efforts are targeted towards those plants under immediate threat.

Any comments on the list are very welcome as you may not think that some of them have any garden merit and are not worth saving, but we need to know.

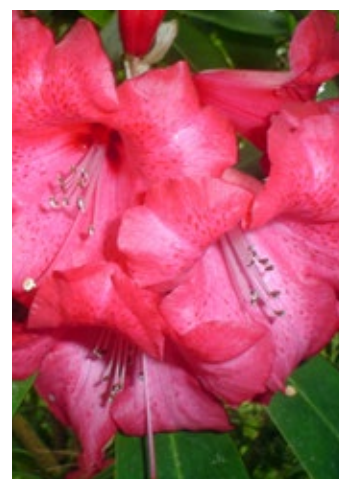
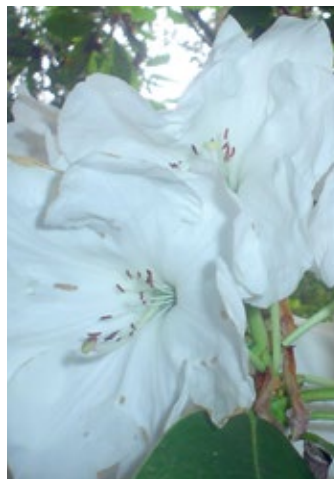
Plant Heritage have very kindly supplied this information which has been assessed under their "Threatened Plants Project". They are currently working on listing varieties of threatened *Camellia* and *Magnolia*.

Please do take the time to look at the website list and provide me with any information on the plants. We need to act urgently so that some of these "treasures" can be propagated and given new homes to safeguard their future.

Stephen Harding



Rhododendron 'Royal Mail' is on the list of endangered hybrids.



Endangered hybrids *Rhododendron* 'Nimbus' and *R. 'Rouge'*.

Photos: Stephen Harding

Vireya Rhododendrons - a new conservation project!

Earlier this year, I sent out an email to all UK members asking them to let me know what Vireya rhododendrons they were growing.

This request had been prompted because I had noticed a sharp decline in the number of Vireya trusses being exhibited on the show benches. Vireyas are always popular with the general public at shows and often remarked upon for the brilliance of their colour and exotic-looking corollas.

I have 'dabbled' in Vireyas for over a decade but not always been successful, it has to be said. They are tricky to please, downright 'divas' in their capacity to turn their toes up in a huff without obvious explanation and, frankly, not always the most beautiful things out of flower. Once seen in bloom though, all is forgiven and the struggle continues! If you have the space and can keep them well-ventilated and a little more than frost free in the winter, every rhododendron grower should have one to drool over.

Less than a decade ago it was possible to buy Vireyas in the UK from several sources, and a fairly wide choice at that; there were probably 150 different species and hybrids available. Christopher Fairweather held a National Collection of over 300 plants and there were some very serious amateur growers in the UK.

My research revealed there is a rather different picture today. The National Collection has gone in its entirety, several important but smaller private collections have dwindled or disappeared due to the cost of heating, unfortunate accidents, a general lack of knowledge about caring for them or loss of interest.

Continued overleaf



Rhododendron laetum.

Photo: Simon Begg



Rhododendron jasminiflorum ssp. *jasminiflorum*. Photo: Michael Hare

Whilst we still have a fantastic species collection at Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, global plant protection laws mean that plant material will never be available to the UK amateur. RBG Kew has very few plants left in its collection and RHS Wisley only a very modest number.

Glendoick is now the only UK supplier of these fascinating plants and it appears they are scaling back due to lack of demand. At the time of writing there were just twelve species and hybrids available for purchase on their website.

And what about our members and the results of my email? Twelve growers came forward to give me information and whilst this may not be definitive, I can report that amongst our membership, here in the UK, there are around 300 *Vireya* rhododendron plants extant representing 182 unique varieties, both species and hybrids. What is important in this statistic is that only 37 of those 182 have duplicate plants. That is 'critical' status as far as I'm concerned which is why I have chosen to write this piece.

Now you may say 'fair enough, let's just recognise *Vireyas* are for enthusiasts in more favourable climates to grow, forget about them and move on', but maybe we should step back and see if it's possible to rescue the situation.

The same email generated replies expressing interest from members who had never grown *Vireyas*, welcoming the chance to have a go and to take on raising plants from cuttings.

So now, as well as asking for details of other *Vireyas* which may be growing in the UK but not relayed to me by email, I would like to explore the idea of a Plant Guardian Scheme to re-establish *Vireya* rhododendrons in the UK in a sustainable way. Current growers have expressed a willingness to share material and to add varieties to their own collections, and I am willing to co-ordinate the initiative. Maybe we could even ask every member to take on just one plant to help build some security into the situation through building a robust but dispersed population.

Please let me know your thoughts by email, telephone or post.

Pam Hayward, Woodtown, Sampford Spiney, Yelverton, Devon PL20 6LJ Email: pam@woodtown.net 01822 852122

MEMBERSHIP

Rupert Eley

New Members

A notice of new members could not be published in Bulletin 118 due to lack of space. New members who have joined the RCM Group since February 2015 are listed here. In the interest of confidentiality, a reduced amount of information is published. We welcome all our new members and hope they will enjoy all the benefits of membership of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group.

The editor wishes to apologise to Miss Sidney Nisbet of Arkansas for the error in the Membership Report in Bulletin 117.

UK

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mr Christopher Parsons | Newton Aycliffe, County Durhan |
| Mrs Veronica Cross | Stoke Lacy, Herefordshire |
| Mrs Val Anderson | Torpoint, Cornwall |
| Mr Tony Schilling VMH | Ullapool, Wester Ross |
| Mr Bill Dunwoodie | Glasgow |
| Mr Robert Vernon | Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire |
| Mr Malcolm A. Stewart | Addlestone, Surrey |
| Mr Patrick H.S. Haworth | Castleton, Aberdeenshire |
| Mrs Marlene Storah | Todmorden, West Yorkshire |
| Dr Chris Higson | Woldingham, Surrey |
| Mr John Greenall | Wootton, Staffordshire |
| Mr Ryszard Palej | Storrington, West Sussex |
| Mrs Amicia Oldfield | Doddington, Kent |
| Mr Colin Clark | Galmpton, Devon |
| Mr Robert J. Pickard | Winkleigh, Devon |
| Mr David Cooper | Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire |
| Mr John Swainson | Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire |
| Mr John Brightwell | Sevenoaks, Kent |
| Mr Harvey Stephens | Windsor, Berkshire |
| Mrs Trudy Breen | Liphook, Hampshire |
| Mr Ashley Basil | Lymington, Hampshire |

Europe

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Mr Elmar Wipper | Südbollenhagen, Germany |
| Mr Mathias Kurstjens | Klarup, Denmark |
| Mr Patrick Rombout | Meise, Belgium |
| Mr Alexandre Anagnostides | Varengeville-sur-Mer, France |
| Mrs Kari Lundgreen | Skien, Norway |

Asia

| | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| Mr Kozo Kawano | Hachiouji-shi, Japan |
|----------------|----------------------|

Oceania

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Mr Roy Bilbie | Tamborine Mountain, Queensland, Australia |
| Mr J.A.Somers | Karaka Bays, Wellington, New Zealand |

USA

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Mr Arlen Hill | Stanwood, Washington |
| Mr James Speight | Dallas, Texas |
| Miss Shelby Singleton | Burnsville, North Carolina |
| Dr Bryan M Harvey | Rogers, Arkansas |

Report on Membership Survey

Earlier this year over a three month period we undertook a survey of our membership's views. 325 people responded which is over half of the membership which shows that the members care about the group and that the results reflect the membership's views.

The results of the survey have now been analysed. Key points that emerged from the multiple choice questions were:

- Membership is old, male, have large gardens and have been members for a long time.
- 30% live outside UK so we need to look after them.
- Most interest is in rhododendrons then magnolias then camellias.
- Conservation is more important than Education or Research.
- Most interest is in Yearbook, Bulletins and Website. I guess that is a reflection of our dispersed membership. Relatively low level of Seed List interest.
- The Seed List is more important for overseas members than those in the UK.
- Happy with subscription level.
- Plant Information is a key part of the website.

We also had a number of questions where members could write in their views. We have analysed these comments by attempting to group them on common themes.

Overall as you would expect they reflect the responses given to the multiple choice questions. There was a bit of a surprise that some members did not know some things such as 'Didn't know we had a website'. We obviously need to spread the word about our activities more.

Across the whole set of comments you can find a set of themes (in no particular order):

- There is a wide range of experience amongst members.
- Members are helpful & friendly to one another.
- The members are old and we need more younger people.
- The saga of the status with the RHS annoyed people.
- There is a demand for more basic information about growing our genera.
- We should have more scientific papers/information.
- We concentrate too much on species. We concentrate too much on hybrids.
- We need a much larger number of branches.
- We need more detailed information about each of the plants on our website.
- We should do more of everything.

We have published on our web site under 'Information' on the menu, a page from which you can download:

1. Analysis of the Multiple choice questions.
2. Analysis of the text comments.
3. The actual text comments.

and view at your leisure. I will be happy to answer any questions that you might have if you contact me on:
graham@tregoningmill.co.uk or phone 01326 280382.

The committee will be working in the coming months to more fully satisfy the needs of the members as indicated by the survey. We are hoping that the Centenary Celebrations will help with issues such as gaining more members, as will a new Student membership category.

However, in order to undertake action in some areas such as 'More Branches' and 'More events' we need more volunteers to help. At the current time we also have vacancies on the committee for a Treasurer, a Yearbook Editor, Events Co-ordinator and International Branch Chairman to take over from long standing volunteers, as from the next AGM. If you are happy with your membership then why not volunteer to make it even better.

Graham Mills

TREASURER'S NOTE

Alastair Stevenson

Direct Debit subscription payments: A reminder that subscriptions paid by direct debit will be taken from accounts on or around 1st November 2015 and will be identified by "EAZYRCMG". Subscription rates remain the same as last year.

Gift Aid: As I am sure you will be aware, the Group has recently been established as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation number 1161254. This gives us the ability to claim Gift Aid relief from qualifying member subscriptions and other gifts to the Group from UK taxpayers. This will give us an additional 25p for every £1.00 of qualifying income which we can then use to further our charitable aims.

If you have an active email address you will have received a link to register your Gift Aid status. If you have not done so yet it would be much appreciated if you would visit www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/information/giftaid/ or simply follow the link on the Membership tab on our website to do so.

If you do not have an active email address, a paper form is enclosed with this Bulletin which we would be very grateful if you could take the time to complete and return to us.

SEED LIST 2016

IMPORTANT NOTICE

In the past, members without an email address have automatically received a printed copy of the Seed List. In fact, very few orders come from these members and in an effort to reduce unnecessary printing costs, we have decided to make this a proactive process and ask that members contact us to request a printed copy if they are unable to receive one electronically. There will be no charge for this service.

Please write to Pam Hayward, Woodtown, Sampford Spiney, YELVERTON, Devon PL20 6LJ or phone 01822 852122.

Dear Editor,

What's in a name?

There are two different cultivars in gardens labelled *Magnolia x soulangeana* 'Alba superba'. Two typical examples are on Battleston Hill at Wisley and in the Valley gardens at Windsor. The illustrations on this page show that the Wisley and Windsor flowers are quite different, in shape, petal width and colour. The cultivars also differ in other respects.

Trying to unravel the origins to establish which is the 'authentic' 'Alba superba' is fraught, as descriptions in the literature lack detail.



Magnolia x soulangeana 'Alba superba' Windsor form.

Photo: Maurice Foster

Millais (1927) describes his 'Alba superba' significantly as 'ten days to a fortnight later than *M. denudata*', and 'upright' in habit. The tepals, 2" across at the broadest part have 'a faint pink tinge along the outer centre line'. Bean confirms the existence of two clones. He describes the Millais plant, but goes on to state that a plant 'in commerce under the same name seems to be different, the tepals being narrower, the leaves being elliptic or fairly oblong-ovate'. This brief description is closer to the Wisley tree, although he adds that the habit is dense and erect which does not agree as the Battleston plant is tall and spreading. It also has the Millais pink tinge along the centre line. Although the Supplement to Bean states that there is 'little doubt' that the Millais description is correct, the two descriptions seem a trifle confused.

Jim Gardiner describes the Wisley plant as 'among the earliest (*x soulangeana*) clones to flower', a significant difference to the later flowering Millais plant, and at odds with my own specimen, acquired more than 30 years ago from the Windsor plant. This conforms more closely to the Millais description, as relatively late flowering, quite broad-tepalled, and with a faint basal pink tinge. It is also upright and notably compact.

Can one conclude that the Windsor form, closer to the Millais description, especially in its later flowering, is likely to be the original and authentic 'Alba superba'?

The evidence is mixed and reference to earlier 19th C descriptions from the Belgian raisers, if extant, might provide more helpful detail.

All this is not just an academic discussion about nomenclature. It has some practical significance. The Battleston Hill clone at Wisley is relatively early, has the more shapely, poised flowers, with a more distinct pink suffusion, on a large spreading tree. It is an excellent form of *M. x soulangeana*.



Magnolia x soulangeana 'Alba superba' Wisley form.

Photo: Maurice Foster

However, the Windsor clone, by contrast, is late flowering, usually escapes all but very late frosts, is neat, upright and compact in habit, and its flowers are relatively weather resistant. All these qualities make it an excellent and, indeed, a better choice of the two for a situation such as an open position in smaller gardens in cold areas.

Which cultivar would you get if you bought an 'Alba superba'? It is listed by 11 nurseries in the *RHS Plant Finder*. I have never bought one, so I freely admit it is guesswork, but it is probably the form at Wisley or even some other *M. x soulangeana* clone, like 'Amabilis' or 'Alba'.

Any helpful comments on all this would be welcome.

Maurice Foster

Dear Editor,

This is the story of an arguably unexceptional Azalea that has captured my heart and my attempts over many years to learn more about it.

Over 35 years ago when we were living in Surrey I purchased a small evergreen azalea that was labelled as 'Truus'. It was in flower when I purchased it and the pure white flowers attracted me. I liked the plant very much so when we moved to Hampshire we dug it up and transported it down the A39.

I could not find any information on this plant in any of our books which always intrigued me. When we went to specialist rhododendron nurseries I would often mention the plant but saw no sign of recognition. One nursery owner even went and found his copy of the checklist of registered hybrids but it was not present.

By this time, the nursery that I purchased it from was no longer in business so I could not enquire there. I therefore began to assume that the name was wrong or a synonym.

However, I continued to find the plant very attractive, to the extent that it is at the top of my list of favourite rhododendrons even though I know that it will not make the final 100. So when we moved to Cornwall it was dug up again and transported a couple of hundred miles to its new and current home.

The new millennium came along and with it the internet got

into its swing and I therefore took the opportunity to search for information on it, but to no avail.

That might have been the end of my search except that last year I was cutting back bamboo and a deutzia that were encroaching on it. I noticed that it had really been planted in the wrong location and was now rather overshadowed by a *Magnolia* 'Royal Crown' so was not as floriferous as previously. It was too big to dig up again so I wondered if I could get another. I had tried cuttings a couple of times previously and totally failed.

So back to the internet again and I found that the Hirsutum website had lots of information on it, namely:

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| Hybridizer | unknown |
| Azalea-group | unknown |
| Foliage winter | unknown |
| Height in 10 years | ? |
| Bloom time | unknown |
| Hardiness | |
| Flower | unknown |
| Leaves | unknown |
| Seed-parent | ? |
| Pollen-parent | ? |

However they did know that it was the parent of one cross: 'Adonis' ('Truus' x 'Azuma kagami' Felix & Dijkhuis, 1952). The photographs that I have seen of 'Adonis' seem very similar to 'Truus' so presumably it was the significant parent. Incidentally, there is almost as little information available about 'Azuma kagami' as there is about 'Truus'.

There are other sites with a reference to the name but with no more information than on Hirsutum. For those who might be interested in 'Adonis' then there is also reference to the other parent being *R.* 'Salmon Beauty' rather than 'Azuma kagami'. As you might have guessed by now, there is little information available for 'Salmon Beauty' except that it was apparently hybridised by Dexter, C.O. Sandwich, MA, USA, 1943 and there is one apparently planted in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

When the second edition of the *Rhododendron Register* was published, I eagerly purchased a copy and I was pleased to find it had some information on Truss, namely:

cv. Evergreen azalea derived from *mucronatum*, raised by Felix & Dijkhuis, named by Felix & Dijkhuis, INC: ICRA (1958), Flowers white.

Armed with this vast amount of new information, I did at least know that the plant existed and had white flowers.



Rhododendron 'Truus'.

Photo: Graham Mills

After 35 years the plant is now 9 feet (275cm) across and 4 feet 6 inches (140cm) high. It has always been planted in acid soil and

is currently happy at a pH of 6.7. The flowers are pure white with no sign of yellow and around 8cm across. They are offset well by the dark green foliage. It flowers for me in late May to early June.

'Adonis' used to be available from one of the specialist rhododendron nurseries. However it has been dropped since they found it 'a weak tender grower'. 'Truus', on the other hand, I have always found to grow well, even on the top of the Hampshire hills where we had snow for 2 to 3 months in most years. I am afraid that I cannot remember the size of the plant when at the age of 10 years but I would guess around half its current size.

This year I took advantage of my friendship with David Millais and persuaded him to root a few cuttings for me. They were successful and I now have four happy looking rooted cuttings growing on in my frame. After I sent the cuttings away, I had a few pieces of very small material left and tried to strike them myself. This time I was successful and have another two plants from that route (although, please do not tell David). They are all currently around a foot (30cm) tall and looking good. We intend to plant them in a group on a bank that we will be clearing this winter.

With the young plants that I have, I should have ensured 'Truus's survival in our garden, whatever happens to the original plant. Indeed I have a couple of spare plants available to spread its influence further afield.

If it should ever come into general cultivation I would heartily recommend this trouble-free and attractive late flowering evergreen plant.

All the information that I have on 'Truus' is now on the Group's website along with a number of photographs.

If anyone has further information on this plant I will be very happy to receive it. I would be particularly interested to hear if anyone has the plant in their garden.

Graham Mills

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|---|--|--|--|
| 16 North West Branch Ness Gardens Talk Ted Brabin 'The Great Smokies and Blue Ridge Mountains' Ted Brabin angela.brabin@btinternet.com 0151 353 1193 | 7 South West Branch Caerhays Castle RCM Group Centenary Celebration Day. Garden tours, exhibition and lunch Dr John Marston artavianjohn@gmail.com 01271 323202 | 1/2 North West Branch Ness Gardens Branch Show Ted Brabin angela.brabin@btinternet.com 0151 353 1193 | 23/28 RHS / RCMG Chelsea Flower Show Centenary Display David Millais david@rhododendrons.co.uk 01252 792698 Sally Hayward schaywar1@btinternet.com 01227 761369 |
| 18/19 RHS Wisley 'All About Plants' event David Millais david@rhododendrons.co.uk 01252 792698 Sally Hayward schaywar1@btinternet.com 01227 761369 | | | |
| MARCH | 9/10 RHS RHS Wisley RHS Early Rhododendron and Main Camellia Show South East Show David Millais david@rhododendrons.co.uk 01252 792698 Sally Hayward schaywar1@btinternet.com 01227 761369 | 6-10 RCM GROUP Wisley Hillside Events Centre Wisley and local garden visits. 4 day Centenary Celebrations including the 2016 AGM David Millais david@rhododendrons.co.uk 01252 792698 Sally Hayward schaywar1@btinternet.com 01227 761369 | |
| 5 North West Branch Ness Gardens Talk Tim Baxter on Invasive Rhododendrons Ted Brabin angela.brabin@btinternet.com 0151 353 1193 | | 14/15 RHS Harlow Carr RHS Late Rhododendron Show Georgina Barter georginac@rhs.org.uk or 020 7821 3142 | |
| 12/13 RHS / South West Branch RHS Rosemoor RHS Early Camellia Competition SW Branch Early Rhododendron and Spring Ornamental Competitions Georgina Barter georginabarter@rhs.org.uk 020 7821 3142 Dr John Marston artavianjohn@gmail.com 01271 323202 | 23/24 RHS / South West Branch RHS Rosemoor RHS Main Rhododendron Competition and SW Branch Camellia, Magnolia and Floral Display Competitions Georgina Barter georginabarter@rhs.org.uk 020 7821 3142 Dr John Marston artavianjohn@gmail.com 01271 323202 | 18-22 North West Branch Hampshire Branch Tour Ted Brabin angela.brabin@btinternet.com 0151 353 1193 | |

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

New!

Rhododendrons of subgenus **Vireya** Second Edition

George Argent

454pp, RBGE/RHS, 2015

Enlarged second edition with new species, updated descriptions and over 300 colour illustrations.

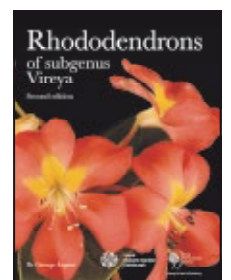
Full Price: **£60.00**

UK Member's Price: **£45**

European Member's Price: **£52**

Rest of World Member's Price: **£60**

All prices include postage.



Further chance to buy!

The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species

Second Edition

Peter & Kenneth Cox

396pp, Glendoick Publishing, 2009 (Final Printing)

Full descriptions of almost all hardy rhododendron species in cultivation; guide to recognition and cultivation. 1500 colour illustrations.

UK Member's Price: **£33** European Member's Price: **£44**

Rest of World Member's Price: **£50**

All prices include postage.

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Contact: Pam Hayward, Woodtown, Sampford Spiney, Yelverton PL20 6LJ

Tel/Fax: +44 (0)1822 852122

Email: rcmgpublications@woodtown.net

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

Event updates to Alastair Stevenson please:

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PUBLICATIONS

11/15