

the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales

Bulletin 129 / March 2019 / www.rhodogroup-rhs.org



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

As I write this introduction in January, amidst the chaos of Brexit with its huge uncertainties for all of us, we can take pleasure that spring is just around the corner. We will find solace in our gardens, and can de-stress from all the foul words and lies we have been sold along the way. It seems that most of the population won't like the outcome that is decided for us, but time spent in the garden really is the best cure!

A little publicised fact is that whatever political arrangements are made with the EU, plant health regulations will be substantially toughened later this year. Plants will no longer be able to cross the channel without Phytosanitary inspections, and this will apply to businesses such as nurserymen and landscapers, but also returning holiday makers. Whilst a nuisance and an expense to anyone wishing to import or export plants, the new regime offers hope that Britain can prevent at least some of the numerous new plant pests and diseases from entering the country, and maintain a better plant health status. Our plants are continually at threat from new pests and diseases such as *Xylella* (thankfully, not on our genera yet) and the newly identified cotton stringy scale found on an imported *Magnolia* in Berkshire. Another little-known fact is that British plant inspectors are some of the most diligent in the world, and have accounted for 40% of all EU plant health interceptions, which is a remarkable figure bearing in mind the vast amount of material entering the EU through Holland. Now under the leadership of Professor Nicola Spence, Chief Plant Health Officer at DEFRA, 100 more Plant Inspectors are being recruited to inspect plants at the point of entry, and through the wider country. It is these inspections 'in the field' which are so successful, and even the envy of countries like Australia and New Zealand, which are known for their strict border controls, but where problems can go unchecked once in the country. We should all do our part in preventing the spread of pests and diseases by sourcing clean stock from good reliable suppliers, quarantining where necessary, and reporting anything unusual.

Keeping our plants and gardens free from pests and diseases is always been conserving our plant heritage. I hate to think of the number of plants which must have been lost since 2012 when the disease was first found in the UK. Eradication of *R. ponticum* has gone

a long way in eliminating one of its prime hosts. Culling on a large scale, especially in overcrowded landscapes, has given more space between plants and has opened up long lost vistas, creating space for new plantings which are the lifeblood of all gardens,



Rhododendron (Vireya) 'Kisses' in Roy and Lorraine Bilbie's garden in Queensland, Australia (see page 9)

and essential for good plant conservation. This is all part of good husbandry which helps to display plants to their best, and we will be pleased to recognise this with the introduction of the RCMG Outstanding Gardens Scheme. We have now received the first applications, and we hope to make announcements later this spring to recognise several outstanding collections of plants that are well labelled, of interest to the public, and have measures in place to support conservation and propagation of their gems. Our thanks go to Nick Butler, Mark Bobin and members of the Plant

Committee for launching this exciting new scheme.

The re-introduction of RHS Plant Awards this spring is something else that we are currently working on. Since the abolition of the old RHS Rhododendron and Camellia Committee in 2012, there has been no mechanism to make Awards such as FCC and AM which

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*Guided tours and lectures will follow
the AGM at Exbury June 1st & 2nd*

used to be so well recognised, and even now, those clones with an award are still sought out by collectors seeking the best clones. In conjunction with the RHS we now have a formal set of judging criteria that we can apply to vases presented at our Shows this spring, so do please bring along your best blooms and arrange them well in a vase for members of the Plant Committee to assess, prior to ratification by the RHS Woody Plant Committee. Please contact Pam Hayward for further details.

On the back cover of this bulletin there is a comprehensive programme of events this spring, including Shows around the country, and Branch talks and visits. You are welcome to attend all events, not just those in your branch area. New exhibitors at the Shows are always welcome and stewards will be able to guide you with your entries on the day. You will find you'll learn so much more by participating and meeting other exhibitors. Please contact the Branch Chairman or organiser listed, for more information. Christopher Legrand has arranged a wonderful tour of gardens in the Lake District, and there may still just be time to join if you contact him promptly. Having visited there last September, you can't help but love the Lakes and the gardens too!

2019 marks the Centenary of the outstanding Exbury Gardens, and we are delighted and very grateful to the Rothschild family for inviting the Group to share in their celebrations this spring. At the time of writing there are still a few spaces to visit the Rothschild Archives in the City of London in either March or June. When not banking, Lionel de Rothschild corresponded with plant hunters and members of the collecting syndicates, and most of these letters have never been seen before, so if plant history interests you, you will be in for a treat. In May, Millais Nurseries are building an exhibit at Chelsea Flower Show to mark the Exbury centenary with as many of their hybrids as possible, and even a few new varieties. The weekend of the 1st and 2nd of June promises to be a wonderful occasion and includes our AGM and a special Show to mark the Centenary of the gardens. Exbury are hosting a Show similar to those we have held recently at RHS Wisley, where members are encouraged to bring along anything in flower and enter in simple classes for a chance to win the RCMG Centenary Cup. This is an ideal opportunity for novice exhibitors to stage trusses from their gardens and show others what you have; we need lots of colour to showcase our plants to all the Exbury visitors and encourage them to join the RCMG. I would encourage as many members as possible to attend this landmark occasion. As well as guided tours by Lionel de Rothschild and Head Gardener Thomas Clarke on both days, a fantastic evening event has been planned on the Saturday, including a drinks reception, buffet dinner, two evening speakers, and two book signings. Lionel de Rothschild has commissioned a new book by Francesca Murray describing 100 years at Exbury, and this is due to be launched in time for spring. We are also hugely honoured that Seamus O'Brien, Head Gardener at the National Botanic Gardens, Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow will also be speaking, and signing his wonderful book 'In the footsteps of Joseph Dalton Hooker: A Sikkim Adventure' recently published by RBG Kew. Anyone who has met Seamus will know of his infectious enthusiasm for plants, and I am sure everyone will have a great evening. The Exbury weekend offers outstanding value at £40.00 for both days' events. We are not arranging accommodation, but please see https://www.exbury.co.uk/where_to_stay for suggestions of where to stay.

While writing about Seamus, I am delighted to announce that he has offered to become RCMG Branch Chairman in Ireland. Being well known throughout the plant community in Ireland, he is the perfect person to represent us and encourage greater interest in our plants, and I will be very pleased to welcome him and his guests when they visit Exbury. As always, the Committee would love to hear from others who would be willing to volunteer their services and help with the running of the Group in any way. Do please contact Polly Cooke or myself ahead of the AGM so that vacancies can be filled.

Finally, as flowers start to open in your garden, do get out and hand pollinate your choice plants, so that you can harvest seed in the autumn to donate to our ever-popular seed list next year. Hand pollinated species seed is especially welcome!

David Millais

Annual General Meeting Saturday 1st June 2019

The AGM for 2019 will be held on Saturday 1st June at Exbury Social Club. We will meet at the club from 11 am for refreshments followed by the AGM at 11.30 am. Parking is available at Exbury Social Club, which is situated in Exbury village, near to the Gardens. Entry to the AGM is free to all Group members and their guests. Our AGM forms part of a weekend of Group events hosted at Exbury. Details of the weekend are given below.

Please notify the Hon Secretary, Polly Cooke by Wednesday 29th May if you wish to attend the AGM.

**polly.cooke@btinternet.com
tel: 01932 863719**

EVENTS AT EXBURY GARDENS (Saturday 1st June and Sunday 2nd June 2019).

Lionel de Rothschild has kindly invited Group members to visit Exbury Gardens, in its Centenary Year, for a weekend of events to be hosted there. These are:

Saturday 1st June (Gardens open 10 am – 5.30pm)

Centenary Show

Details are as given separately by Pam Hayward. Please note: There will be plants for sale from some nurseries outside the Five Arrows Gallery.

AGM

11 am for 11.30 am details given above.

Lunch is at your own expense. Take advantage of Mr Eddy's restaurant or light refreshments from the Old Tennis Courts café. There are also designated picnic areas in the gardens.

Afternoon Group Tour of the Gardens

A guided tour of the Gardens is available to Group members starting from the House at 2.30 pm. It will be led by Lionel de Rothschild and Head Gardener, Tom Clarke.

Evening Buffet Meal and Lectures (Entry by ticket only)

A buffet meal including a glass of wine will be held at Exbury Social Club starting at 6.30 pm. There will be lectures from Seamus O'Brien about Joseph Hooker and from Lionel de Rothschild about the History of Exbury. Their latest books will be on sale and the speakers will be available to sign copies for you.

Sunday 2nd June

Continuation of Gardens Tour

On Sunday morning Tom Clarke will continue the gardens tour. This will include a visit to the glass houses and parts of the garden not visited on the Saturday.

The cost to attend all of the above events is £40 per head, including entry to the Gardens on both days. Payment will be in advance so that tickets, passes and maps can be provided. Details for payment will follow.

If you cannot attend everything:

To attend the show and the guided tour on Saturday June 1st only, please pay for normal garden entry and join us.

Full details will be sent out by email. If you do not have email and wish to attend any or all of the events, please phone me. 01932 863719.

Polly Cooke

VISIT TO THE ROTHSCHILD ARCHIVE

Lionel de Rothschild has extended an invitation for Group members to visit The Rothschild Archive in London. The first visit will have taken place by the time you read this but a second visit is on Wednesday 26th June at 2 pm. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to see their correspondence and many other documents. If you have a particular interest, please let me know and I will pass on your request to the Archivist who will do her best for you.

There are still places available for this visit. If you would like to join the visit, please contact me.

Polly Cooke
polly.cooke@btinternet.com
Tel: 01932 863719

THE EXBURY CENTENARY COMPETITION & SHOW

June 1st – 2nd 2019

Being invited to join in with Exbury's Centenary Celebrations has given us a spectacular venue for our Annual General Meeting this year. At the same time, it has created a golden opportunity to make a really special weekend of it, when we can feast our eyes on those late flowering rhododendron gems and drink in the scent of the countless gorgeous deciduous azaleas for which Exbury is justly famous. More than that, we'll be enjoying walks, talks and 'behind the scenes' peeks at places in the garden not normally seen by the public. It's also provided us with the chance to put on a Centenary Show in the Five Arrows Gallery and its courtyard, and to celebrate 100 years of Exbury Gardens

by awarding our wonderful Centenary Cup to the best exhibit shown in our 'Exbury Centenary Competition'.

Much like its forerunners, this Group competition is designed to encourage all our members who are coming along to the event, to bring something in flower from their garden and 'have a go'. It will be late in the season, we know, but there are always late blooms on early varieties and the end of May and beginning of June herald the flowering of all manner of beauties, among them the fabulous scented *Maddenia* species, the later *Fortuneas* and plenty of large and small flowered deciduous and evergreen azaleas. Previous displays we have put on at this time of the year have been notable for their range of colour and sumptuous blooms, and I am sure this will be no exception. Add to these rhododendrons the summer flowering magnolias and sprays of other flowering trees and shrubs (other than roses) and creating a carnival of celebratory colour is all but certain.

The Schedule and Application Form will be emailed out later on in the Spring and details will of course appear on our website, along with those for all the other forthcoming shows. Provisional details are provided below and will be confirmed in due course.

Do come along and join us and *do* take part in the competition – I promise it will be a fun and fitting tribute to Exbury's 100 year role in our great history. You'll need to be there in time to stage your entries, though, so be prepared for an early start!

If you would like to take part and do not as yet email, drop me a line or telephone and I will send you details.

Pam Hayward

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

Provisional Schedule for the Exbury Centenary Competition

Class 1

Any hardy rhododendron species, one truss or spray

Class 2

Any hardy rhododendron hybrid, one truss or spray

Class 3

Any tender rhododendron species or hybrid (grown under glass or otherwise including vireyas), one truss or spray

Class 4

Any deciduous azalea, species or hybrid, one spray

Class 5

Any evergreen azalea, species or hybrid, one spray

Class 6

Any magnolia, one truss or spray

Class 7

Any flowering tree or shrub (other than roses), one spray

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Provisional Timetable for the Exbury Centenary Competition

Staging in the Five Arrows Gallery:

Friday May 31st from 4pm until 6pm

Saturday June 1st from 6am until 9.30am

Judging (venue closed for the duration):

9.30am until 10.15am

Doors open: 10.15am

Presentation of the Centenary Cup: 2.15pm

The Rothschild Archive visit

HONORARY MEMBERSHIP FOR PHILIP EVANS

I am delighted to announce that the RCMG Committee unanimously agreed to confer Lifetime Honorary Membership on Philip Evans. This is only the second Honorary Membership that has been awarded, and there can be few people who have been so generous with their time, and such an enthusiastic supporter of the Group, for so many years.

Philip took over the position of Yearbook Editor from Lady Cynthia Postan in 1998 and developed and produced superb editions over the next ten years. He corresponded with and persuaded leading global experts to write for our esteemed publication, and these fascinating articles are now published for posterity and available through our Archivist. He remained on the Committee becoming Vice Chairman and acted with utmost



Philip Evans at Halgabron Mill. Photo: Robin Evans

patience and professionalism in difficult negotiations as we separated the Group from the RHS. Finally, he was instrumental in setting up the CIO and gaining Charity status for the Group before becoming an inaugural Trustee during the last few years. This is unparalleled service, and fully deserves this gesture from us in recognition of his huge contributions during the past 20 years, until he finally retired at the last AGM.

From my own point of view as Chairman, I knew I could always rely on Philip's wise counsel on a great number of issues, and his advice was always most appreciated. His experience of corporate governance and his attention to detail proved invaluable through negotiations with the Charity Commission and revising our Constitution. At the heart of this though, has been his love of all plants, especially rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias, and this love has taken him on fascinating trips to the Himalayas, enabling him to freely share his knowledge with others.

The attached picture was taken by his son Robin, who lives at Halgabron Mill, a property that Philip bought in the late 80's. Philip wrote recently 'Halgabron Mill and its surrounding woodland has played a central role in my rhododendron, camellia and magnolia experience. Acquiring the property gave me the opportunity and the incentive to start planting my version of a woodland garden. After my retirement in 1993 I was lucky enough to fulfill (with Elaine's blessing) my ambition to study rhododendrons in their natural habitat in the Himalayas, by trips to Bhutan, Yunnan, SE Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh and Guangxi and Guizhou Provinces in S China, mostly in the company of Peter and Ken Cox. Halgabron Mill has given me the space to plant many seedlings from collections on these trips and also from the Group Seed scheme – in steep hillside conditions not unlike their homeland. *Enkianthus deflexus* grown from seed collected outside Peter's and my tent in Yunnan in 1997 has given a particularly brilliant display this autumn.' What fantastic memories to share!

David Millais

APPRECIATIONS

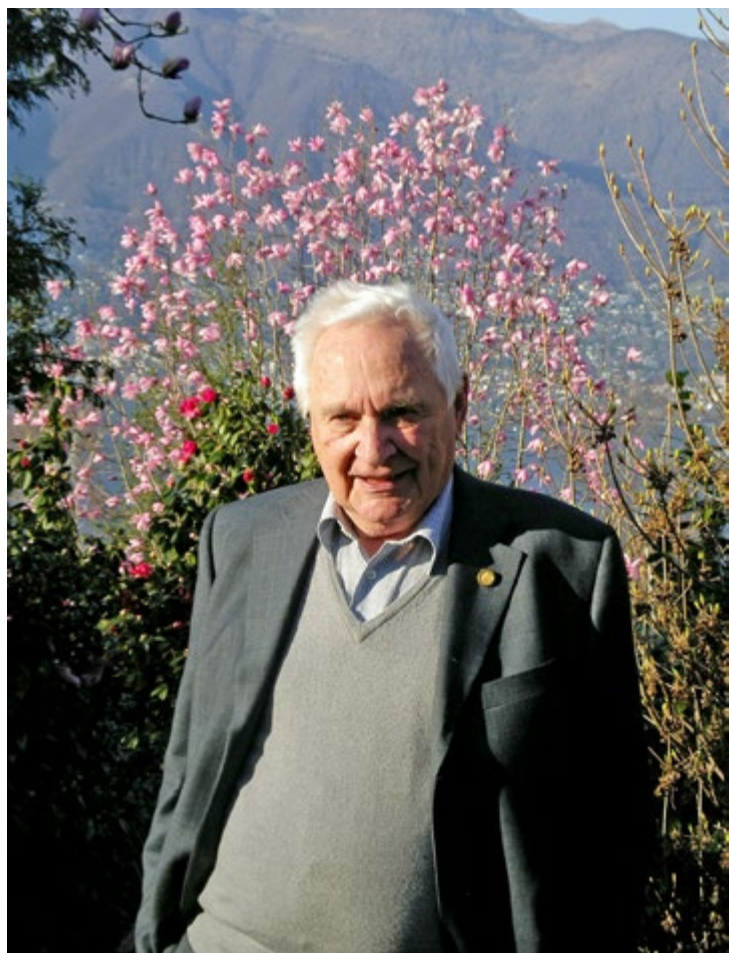
Otto Eisenhut 13.01.29-27.01.19

One of the 'giants' of the magnolia world quietly passed away last month. Having trained at the University of Stuttgart-Hohenheim, Otto and his wife Gretel started a perennial and cut flower nursery above San Nazzaro in Ticino, Switzerland in 1955. It wasn't until he met Sir Peter Smithers in the late 1960's that the pallet of plants he grew increased dramatically to those genera the nursery grows today. Peter was aware of his skills as a propagator so he asked him to propagate a 'sick' *Magnolia campbellii* 'Princess Margaret' which was growing in his garden at Vico Morcote. The rest as they say is history. Having succeeded with *Magnolia campbellii* 'Princess Margaret', Otto went onto propagate many of the recent magnolia introductions from the United States including the Gresham hybrids, Wisteria and tree peonies from Japan, as well a host of camellias, rhododendrons and azaleas at his site overlooking Lake Maggiore. The site today covers c. 20Ha and occupies two valleys one facing west and the other north thus extending the flowering period with many of the magnolias (over 700 taxa) in flower for six weeks. From April onwards this breathtaking display of magnolias in particular makes it one of the best sites

in the world to see these plants. Since 2000, the site is known as Parco Botanico del Gambarogno and is open each day from 09.00 to 18.00 hrs for a small fee.

For the past 20 years I have been visiting Otto (initially with Gretel his wife and more recently with his son Reto), with my wife and friends, also with groups from the Magnolia Society International, the International Dendrology Society and the Royal Horticultural Society. On every occasion we have been warmly welcomed with 'open arms', sharing with us his knowledge and enthusiasm for plants. He will be missed however his nursery continues to thrive in the capable hands of his son Reto. Otto has left the plant world with a great legacy. Over the past 50 years Otto has built up one of the most substantial collections of cultivated woody plants while at the same time you can walk amongst them growing in one of the most spectacular garden sites anywhere. In recognition of this, the RHS Awarded Otto with the Veitch Memorial Medal in 2006.

Jim Gardiner



Otto Eisenhut. Behind him is *Magnolia campbellii* Raffillii Group 'Charles Raffill'. Photo Jim Gardiner

We hope to print an appreciation of Sir Peter Hutchison who died recently in a future Bulletin. Obituaries of him in the national press can be seen in the following links. Ed

<https://www.rbge.org.uk/news/articles/obituary-sir-peter-hutchison-bt-cbe-frse>

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/appreciation-sir-peter-hutchison-bt-cbe-frse-amateur-botanist-plant-hunter-environmentalist-businessman-1-4864845>

2019 Photographic Competition.

Every year, members take wonderful pictures of their plants and gardens for submission to our website where they can be enjoyed by others. Garden pictures are almost always taken in landscape format, and we have seen a good selection over the years. However, our esteemed yearbook needs some full page pictures which are in a portrait format, so this year we are asking for high resolution images of rhododendrons camellias and magnolias in a portrait aspect.

Just imagine your prize picture gracing the cover of a future yearbook as well as being shown on our website! Please submit your entries to Graham Mills by email to webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org. Publication is at the discretion of the Yearbook Editor.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Copy date for the next Bulletin (August, Number 130) will be Friday 28th June. Please consider writing for the Bulletin. Other members will be interested in what you are growing whatever the size of your garden and whatever your experience. How do you grow them? Do they flourish or sulk? Do you propagate from cuttings or layering, or do you grow from seed? For quicker results perhaps you will buy from one of the nurseries advertising in this bulletin, or from a stall at one of our branch meetings. What are your favourite books on our genera? And tell us about your favourite 'companion' plants. Have your travels taken you to where our genera grow wild?

I look forward to receiving your notes and letters! My contact details are on page 13.

Peter Furneaux

BRANCH REPORT

North West England & North Wales Branch

Visit to the Liverpool Athenaeum, 8 January 2019

Steve Lyus, Ursula and Mike Reddington organised our visit to the Liverpool Athenaeum to see some of the priceless botanical books owned by the institution and held in its library. The three are members – or proprietors – of the club, which was founded in 1797, 27 years before the London institution of the same name was opened. Its purpose was to provide members with up to date news, sometimes brought by specially commissioned horsemen and to provide members with a good library. The only other library in Liverpool was deemed 'inadequate'. In time the library grew into one of the most highly regarded libraries in the world.

Because of its rich history – partly botanical – I thought it might be of interest to mention a little about the club. At the time of its founding Liverpool was on its way to becoming the second city of the empire and much of its mercantile interest revolved around the slave trade, or triangle. This involved ships taking goods to Africa, taking slaves to North America and its islands in the Caribbean, then returning to Liverpool with sugar and later with cotton. This trade did not sit well with the

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philosophical outlook of one of its most prominent businessmen and Member of Parliament and great friend of the leading abolitionist, William Wilberforce. William Roscoe was the Liverpool MP and its denizens were not pleased when he voted for the abolition of slavery in 1807. Roscoe had many interests, among them being plants and some of the 'Monandrian plants' were later named Roscoeas in his honour. Roscoe was one of the founding proprietors of the Athenaeum and provided some of the books in the library from his own private collection. He was also responsible for founding the first botanic garden in Liverpool, at the aptly named Mount Pleasant. The first curator of this garden was John Shepherd, who is the only other Liverpoolian to have a genus named after him. That it is rather a drab plant may explain why I have never seen a living specimen, only a herbarium specimen in Liverpool Museum.

Another adopted 'local boy' was Thomas Nuttall, (of *Cornus nuttallii*) originally from Yorkshire but inheriting Nutgrove Hall, at St. Helens, outside Liverpool, from his uncle. He was a great friend of Roscoe and also of John James Audubon, author of 'Birds of America', who was in England to arrange for printing of his enormous elephant folio volumes, which could not be undertaken in the former American colonies. Roscoe, Nuttall and others were so dumbfounded by the beauty of the hand painted illustrations that an exhibition was arranged at the Royal Institution, Colquitt St., Liverpool. Originally the show was free but the crowds waiting to visit were so large that a small charge was made. Liverpool Council acquired a complete set of 'Birds of America' and this is currently on view (by appointment only) in the Picton Library. The last set at auction some years ago realised almost £8 million and the Liverpool set is surrounded by security staff whilst not in its usual bulletproof viewing cage.

Moving to more modern times, two Nobel prize winners were proprietors of the Athenaeum. Sir Ronald Ross was the first UK citizen to receive the award in 1902, for his research on the physiology of nerve transmission. The second award was to Sir Charles Sherrington, in 1932, also for research on the nervous system. Sherrington coined a description of the human brain, oft quoted as "*an enchanted loom where millions of flashing shuttles weave a dissolving pattern, always a meaningful pattern though never an abiding one.*"

One of our late members, Dr. Ken Slatter, the first clinical neurologist in Liverpool, mentioned to me that when he was in his early training years he had heard lectures by Sherrington.

Before our introduction to the library we enjoyed an excellent lunch in the club dining room before moving to see the books. Steve had laid out a very large collection spanning about five hundred years, with some of the early works being entirely in Latin. This was taxing after a large lunch! Many of the books, some bound in vellum, predated Linnaeus' binomial nomenclature being widely adopted and were simply in alphabetical order. Regardless of the naming systems, the illustrations, all hand painted, were incredibly beautiful. Some showed the whole plant in various aspects, all on the same specimen – i.e. some branches in flower and some in fruit or seed. Without a standardised system I do not think we can cast much aspersions on these early botanists – they did their best and slowly moved a scientific analysis forward towards the present day.



Coloured plate of *Rhododendron arboreum* in Exotic Botany, consisting of Coloured Figures and Scientific Descriptions by Sir James E. Smith (1759-1828). Published 1804-5. Photo Stephen Lyus



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The oldest book to be seen was 'De historia stirpium commentarii insignes' or 'Notable commentaries on the history of plants'. It was published in 1542, written by Leonhart Fuchs of Fuchsia fame. Another name familiar to those interested in plants is Engelbertus Kaempfer. His volume, published in 1712, 'Exotic Pleasures' reflected the success of his plant hunting in Japan. 1737 saw the publishing of 'Clifford's Garden,' in Holland, by Carl Linnaeus. In addition to plants the 220 plates included animals, ranging from reptiles to mammals. The 'greatest English botanical book,' published in 1799, was Thornton's 'New Illustration of the Sexual System of Carl Linnaeus'. Finally, from 1824 – 1828 William Roscoe published 'Monandrian Plants of the Order Scitaminae, with 112 Hand coloured plates. These were just a few of the specimens available for our perusal and collectively and individually were simply astonishing.

Speaking personally, it was a fascinating day, partaking in the history of Liverpool and the incredibly beautiful books that some of our predecessors had the wit to accumulate.

My thanks to Steve Lyus for arranging the event and letting me have access to his list of books.

Ted Brabin

NOTES FROM MEMBERS

Ludlow, Sherriff and *Rhododendron sherriffii*

Frank Ludlow and George Sherriff together led seven plant collecting expeditions to Bhutan and South-eastern Tibet between 1933 and 1949. The story of these expeditions is chronicled in detail in the book 'A Quest of Flowers' by their friend Dr Harold Fletcher, former Keeper of The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. Neither Ludlow or Sherriff published a book on their travels but they both kept daily diaries and wrote copious field notes and these form the basis for Fletcher's book. This book is copiously illustrated with black and white photographs and also some early colour photographs taken by Sherriff on the various trips. Over 21,000 herbarium specimens were collected during the 7 expeditions, with particular emphasis on *primula*, *meconopsis* and *rhododendron* species. A significant number of their specimens were new introductions. In 1936 for example they collected 65 primulas of which 14 were previously unknown and 67 rhododendrons of which 15 were previously unknown. In addition they also collected bird skins, butterflies, live plant material and a vast quantity of plant seeds. They also pioneered the despatch by air to the UK of live plant material following the completion of their 1938 expedition.

In the introduction to Fletcher's book Sir George Taylor FRS, former Director at Kew, who also went on the 1938 expedition, describes the combined results of their expeditions as a magnificent contribution to our knowledge of the natural history of Bhutan and South-eastern Tibet. I can only agree after reading about the amazing experiences Ludlow and Sherriff encountered on their travels and would seriously recommend the book to anyone who has not read it.

Rhododendron sherriffii was first collected on their ten month 1936 expedition which concentrated on the Upper Subansiri river catchment area of South-eastern Tibet. At the end of April they descended the Chayul river gorge to the deserted village of Lung where at a height of around 9,200ft they found eight rhododendrons in bamboo and giant cardiocrinum forest. These were *R. fulvum*, *hodgsonii*, *puderosum*, *erosum*, *sherriffii*, *vellereum*, *luciferum*, and *populare*. *R. puderosum*, *erosum* and *sherriffii* were new to science. *R. sherriffii* was described in Sherriff's diary as 'the most delicate of the lot, a bell shaped flower with umbels of 3-4 flowers of a very deep carmine colour'. Seeds from the plant were later collected in October 1936 under L & S 2751 and it received the Award of Merit in 1966. H.H.Davidian has placed Rhododendrons *sherriffii* and *miniatum* in a Series (subsection) of only two species due to their distinct attributes, although P. Cox states that *sherriffii* is closely related to *R. lopsangianum*. Both H H Davidian and P Cox state that *R. sherriffii* is rare in

cultivation which I believe is a pity as it has a number of notable characteristics such as unusual foliage and unique indumentum.



Photos of *Rhododendron sherriffii* taken by the author

I have grown *R. sherriffii* for about 25 years in my garden in Kent. It is a very slow grower which is still only 4ft tall and about 6ft in diameter. The new growth is a very attractive purple colour and the obovate leaves have a unique cinnamon-brown indumentum on their lower surface. The mature branches have a smooth brown flaking bark. The flowers are a deep carmine colour and are particularly attractive viewed against low winter sunshine. My plant

Continued overleaf

flowers regularly in late February-early March and is rarely affected by frost. In my view it deserves to be much better known and I believe this is predominantly because it is too early to be exhibited on the show benches, and it receives little written recognition.

Since writing this short article I have noticed on the web that there was a recent talk given at the Royal Geographical Society entitled 'Primulas, Poppies and Rhododendrons – the Botanical Endeavours of Ludlow and Sherriff'. The author was Jan Faull, a retired film expert from the British Film Institute. Her talk highlighted the recently digitised RGS film archive relating to the exploits of Ludlow and Sherriff. The archive includes Betty Sherriff's 1987 commentary on early Kodak colour film shot during the war around Lhasa and black and white clips of films recorded in Bhutan and Tibet showing remarkable scenery, flora and travelling conditions.

Mark Oddy

A Small Camellia Mystery

The late John Hilliard, a former Chairman of our S.E. Branch and member of the Group Committee, was an intriguing character. He had been a career Officer in the Colonial Service but was himself most definitely the opposite of an 'establishment figure'. He told me that wherever he was posted – invariably some hot and arid location – he managed to create a garden for himself, endeavouring to cultivate plants more at home under an English sky. In retirement John and his artist wife Helen lived in a residential road of 1950's houses in Three Bridges on the outskirts of Crawley. If you drove into that road in early Spring your eye was drawn past some two hundred yards of monotone greenness to one spot standing out in a vivid multicoloured panorama. This was John's front garden crammed with camellias in flower up to the roof of the house. The rear garden was even more startling, as older SE Branch members might attest – a rectangular suburban strip with a small lawn by the house but beyond that a veritable jungle – of camellias (including a fine collection of 'retics'), many rhododendron, an astonishing number of mature magnolias and strutting around, at the heart of the 'jungle', a number of Himalayan pheasant! John had one very early flowering camellia up the front of the house which I must have admired in his presence, because on a subsequent visit he presented me with a small rooted cutting. I nurtured it whilst we were still living in W Sussex, not so far from John, and then took it with us when my wife and I moved to Devon twenty years ago. I planted it in a sheltered spot on the front south side of West Netherton our house here in Drewsteignton. In due course it started flowering, and despite the fact we are at 600 ft on the N.E. edge of Dartmoor, it is regularly in flower in very early January – this year in fact on Christmas day. John had it labelled as 'Akinamawa', but when I looked in the Register at the RHS library some years ago, I could not find any such name. So it is a bit of a mystery. As it grows taller each year the sight of the fresh cheerful deep pink small flowers on a dank turn-of-the-year morning is quite a treat. I am wondering whether anyone might recognise the name or can put an entirely different name to it – although I appreciate identification from a photo is tricky. The corolla is 5 – 8 lobed, approx 5cms width by 4cms depth, and the leaves 7cms x3.5 cms .



Writing this brings back other memories of John. The least burdensome Committee meetings I have experienced in my entire career were those convened by John for the SE Branch – held in his house and usually fuelled by bumper 'G&T's and extra large ham sandwiches. When choosing gardens for Branch visits the selection of a suitable pub for meeting up beforehand was equally important to John. And a further requirement was that Committee members joined him to visit said pub in advance – in his words, "to make sure the beer is alright" I am sure there are others in the SE Branch who remember John with as much affection as I do. I felt I could not write about C Akinamawa (if that is really what it is) without linking it with a reminiscence of a delightful man .

Philip Evans

An attractive dish

During a visit to Kirkcudbright in South West Scotland in the summer of 2018 I made a rather amazing find among the many art and craft shops in what is Scotland's equivalent of St Ives. In a pottery shop I found a dish made from an imprint of a *Magnolia tripetala* leaf – I managed to surprise the owner/potter by recognising it! I now have it at home.



The dish that caught Alastair's eye.

He also makes some really good quality things from Rhododendron leaves as well as a wide range of other ceramics. It struck me that members might be interested, but my particular thought was that his works could make great competition awards for shows. Have a look at the website www.jakeirvingceramics.co.uk.

Alastair Stevenson

Camellia pitardii – A valuable addition to the scented winter garden

In 2009, Maurice Foster kindly gave me a small seedling *Camellia* which he had collected and which he called *Camellia tunganica*. After a year of growing it on, I planted it out in a sheltered part of my garden at the edge of a small area of woodland, shaded by a dwarf form of Chilean *Podocarpus salicifolius* growing a couple of feet away. After a further three years, it produced three pure white single flowers in mid-January which, to my surprise, were richly and sweetly scented. Since then, it has reliably flowered every January into February providing a succession of pure white flowers with a golden central boss of stamens, set against the deep green foliage. A most attractive sight, lighting up its slightly shaded position.



Camellia pitardii in John Marston's garden.
Both the photos were taken by him.

Camellia tunganica is now considered one of the many synonyms of *C. pitardii* Cohen-Stuart, which appears to be the accepted name for the species. In the Flora of China *C. pitardii* is described as growing anything from 3m to 7m tall (my plant is 1.5m after eight years) and as having flowers with five or six petals ranging in colour from deep pink to white. This white form, like my plant, has been synonymously known as *C. pitardii* var. *alba*. Rather surprisingly, no mention is made of its powerful scent. It is possible that the pink forms are not so strongly scented – I would be interested to hear from other members who can comment on this. The leaves are a glossy deep green with serrated edges and a prominent midrib as can be seen in the photograph taken in mid-January, and they do set off the flowers beautifully.

C. pitardii is to be found in forests and thickets at lowish altitudes in southern China; Guizhou, Yunnan and Sichuan from where I believe Maurice made his collection. For a plant from only about 2,500m altitude, mine appears to be remarkably hardy and the flowers are untouched by the weather. Another excellent feature is that the flowers drop off the shrub while still a pristine white, so no brown mushy flowers desperately hanging on.

I would strongly recommend that *Camellia pitardii*, and in its white form, should have a place in the winter garden for colour, poise and above all, rich sweet scent. Move over Daphne.

John Marston

Membership

We welcome our new members and hope they will enjoy all the benefits of membership of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group

Rupert Eley

UK

Mrs Jennifer Holliday Millbeck, Cumbria

Mr Jeremy Andrews-Moore Fernhurst, West Sussex

Mr Robert Wallace Pontypridd, Rhondda Cynon Taff

Europe

Mr Bjarne Dineson, Asperup, Denmark

USA

Mr Clarke G Isackson Birkenfeld, Oregon

The Bilbie garden 'The Haven' on Tamborine Mountain S.E. Queensland Australia.

Larraine and I have lived on Tamborine Mountain in the Gold Coast Hinterland for over ten years now. Our garden of 1/3 acre is on a gently sloping piece of land facing the Pacific Ocean at an elevation of 550 metres. We are fortunate to be able to grow all of the genera covered by our R.C.M. Group. The soil here on Tamborine Mountain is red volcanic and acid in nature, I would describe our climate as somewhere between sub-tropical and warm temperate. The winters here are mild and the summers don't reach the extreme maximums that other parts of Australia experience. So generally speaking our temperatures are on average 4 deg celsius cooler than sea level due to our elevation and proximity to the ocean. Most of our rainfall occurs during the summer months although this year we have had very little due to severe drought in large parts of the country. When rain does come the mountain is often enveloped in fine misty rain which many of our plants enjoy particularly Vireyas. Space does not permit coverage of all three RCMG genera other than to mention that *Camellia reticulata* grow particularly well here and we have reasonable selection of deciduous Magnolias. I have included collage images of some of our camellias plus some Australian native shrubs and trees that we grow in the garden such as *Corymbia* 'Summer Red', *Alloxylon flammeum* (Queensland Tree Waratah) and *Telopea speciosissima* (NSW Waratah)

Continued overleaf



A path in Larraine and Roy's garden with vireyas and camellias in bloom.



Top left and clockwise: *Aloxylora flammeum* (Queensland tree Waratah), *Corymbia Summer Red*, *Telopea speciosissima* pink hybrid (NSW Waratah)



Left panel then clockwise: *Camellia reticulata* 'Frank Hauser', *Camellia japonica* 'Betty Ridley', *Camellia reticulata* 'Ellie's Girl'

Of the rhododendrons in the garden, Vireyas are very much at home and we grow both hybrids and some species such as *R. rarilepidotum*. When it comes to Asiatics we have to be more selective and after a few years of trial and error we have about seven which grow and flower well including the beautiful N.Z. hybrid 'Kaponga' (pictured). We have had good success with Maddenia species and hybrids such as *R. formosum* and *R. veitchianum*. There are about eleven deciduous Azaleas hybrids in the garden such as 'Knaphill Red' and the species *R. periclymenoides*. Also amongst the Azalea Collection there are a number of the 'Wilson's Fifty' evergreen azaleas.

The main season for open garden visits here is during the winter months of June/July/August when Camellias particularly the Reticulata are in full bloom along with a number of Magnolias. The Vireyas also make a colourful impact in these winter months. There are a number of orchids flowering in the garden such as Cymbidiums and Dendrobiums which nestle in the branches of deciduous Maples and Tropical Birch Trees. Winter temperatures on Tamborine Mountain are around 5-7°C to 15-17°C, and we are gifted at this time of the year in S.E. Queensland with mainly clear blue skies. At this time of the year we get an influx of visitors to the State from the colder southern states.



An old Veitch Vireya hybrid 'Princess Alexandra'



Rhododendron 'Kaponga', a hybrid bred in New Zealand which succeeds in Larraine and Roy's subtropical garden in Queensland.



Rhododendron (Vireya) rarilepidotum (red form).

All the photographs in this member's note were taken by the author.

A few miscellaneous trees that we have in the garden are *Davidia involucrata* (Handkerchief tree) which is four years old and growing well, and two *Camellia* relatives *Franklinia alatamaha* and *Stewartia malacodendron*, these last two are only young.

Finally we have a few colour forms of *Lapageria rosea* the National Flower of Chile growing in our Tropical Birchgrove. A gallery of our garden plants can be viewed on Instagram, username ellbee65

Roy Bilbie

Using Vireya Rhododendrons outside.

Vireyas are considered to be a subgenus of the genus *Rhododendron*. They comprise approximately 400 species, roughly about 40% of all *Rhododendron* species, of which approximately 150 species are in cultivation. They are rhododendrons with scales whose main distinguishing characteristic is that their seeds have a long tail at each end. They are mostly montane and grow in special terrestrial conditions, (on moss covered stone, free-draining soil or wood) and epiphytically. Most come from an area best described as Malesia, the geographical area of the SE Asian archipelago from the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra in the west, to New Guinea in the east and the Philippine Islands in the north. Most grow at high altitude and love humid, cool conditions.

From the gardener's perspective in the UK and Ireland, they have been confined to the glasshouse, but my query is; could these flamboyant autumn and winter flowering species be brought out of the glasshouse to flower and then be returned more or less unharmed?

I garden at the National Trust's Mount Stewart on the east shore of Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland. Strangford is a post-glacial landscape of low drumlins. The garden nestles into a south east facing declivity and is surrounded by thick shelter-belts. There is a fault line running through the garden, initially disguised by a raised beach, but the general incline to the west is very gradual which forms a very gently sloping shelf of sand stretching far out into the lough. Warm water from the Gulf Stream drifts across the Atlantic and some of this warm water hits the north west coast of Ireland and rounds the tip of Donegal and Antrim before it is drawn down the west side of the North Channel between Ireland and Scotland where it is rushed into the lough at the Narrows, south west of Portaferry. This slightly warmer water passes over the sand shallowly four times a day as the tide comes in and goes out and so Mount Stewart gets very little frost because of this humid, warm sea water. At 54.5° North, the mean annual temperature in January, our coldest month, is 4.4°C but, it is really the light intensity in the winter which is our limiting factor for growing these mainly tropical, montane species. On the shortest day, the sun is only 15° above the horizon at mid-day. So there is absolutely no chance of growing *Vireya* outside all year round at Mount Stewart, but perhaps there is a way to place them out in the garden in autumn and winter to enjoy their flowers.

In January 2018, I was lucky enough to go with the British and Irish Botanical Expedition to Tasmania. This was an expedition largely organised by Stephen Herrington, then Head Gardener of Nymans, a National Trust garden in Sussex. James Comber, (1866-1953), was Head Gardener at Nymans and his son, Harold Comber, (1897-1969), a trained botanist, went to Tasmania in 1929 to collect plants. We were to follow in his footsteps. We had a permit to collect seed of non-rare or endangered plants and were working closely with a couple of fine botanists from the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens in Hobart.

We grow a number of Tasmanian plants at Mount Stewart and always did historically, perhaps the best known of which are the

Continued overleaf



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huge Tasmanian Blue Gums, *Eucalyptus globules*, first planted in 1895. The garden's creator, Edith, Lady Londonderry, (1879-1959), surrounded the Italian Garden at Mount Stewart with these gums to evoke a clearing in an enchanted wood, surrounding the garden and mansion of her alter-ego, Circe the Sorceress, who lived on the magical isle of Aea and famously turned half of Odysseus's crew into pigs! But we can only grow those plants which can adapt to the low intensity of our winter light. Many of the family Proteaceae, struggle with us, whereas, they would grow perfectly well on Tresco at approximately 50° north.

A couple of years before we went to Tasmania, I had bought Peter and Ken Cox's collection of Vireya from Glendoick Nurseries and was hugely impressed that we could grow most of them, albeit under glass. I had also seen the very fine display at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, where glasshouse supervisor Louise Galloway, had explained their culture to me and our students on successive visits. Ken Cox mentioned that we should find time to visit the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden, near Burnie on Tasmania's north-west coast. Ken is their patron and 'sold' the garden as the ultimate 'sweet spot' for growing not just the large leaved *Grandia* subsection, but also the *Maddenia* subsection and the *Vireya* subgenus all out of doors, all year round. Whilst in Tasmania, I peeled off from collecting with a 4x4 containing two great Irish gardeners; Seamus O'Brien from the National Botanic Garden Kilmacurragh and Robert Wilson-Wright from Coolcarrigan Garden and we were treated royally at Emu Valley.

Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden enjoys a slightly different climate than Mount Stewart. At approximately 41° South, the coldest month is July whose mean average temperature is a balmy 9.3°C. July is our warmest month at Mount Stewart but I often have recorded temperatures of 8°C at dawn. The mean annual temperature in the warmest month, January is a cool 16.9°C. In our warmest month July, the mean average temperature is 15°C, and our annual rainfall is about the same at 960mm. So, the summer is not the problem, apart from the more diffuse light levels at this latitude, it's the winter which is the deciding factor. Thinking about our difficulty with Vireyas, perhaps if we tried hybrids, one of whose parents was from high altitude, we'd stand a better chance, as often hybrids prove tougher and more adaptable than the species and of course, they are usually more showy.

Emu Valley, like Mount Stewart, is in a declivity. The approximately 27 acre garden has a charming landscaped lake where Platypus swim and the garden has been laid out thematically, to represent different parts of the world. Run by approximately 80 volunteers and their charismatic founder, Maurice Kupsch, the garden is a delight in every way. The Vireya are grown in sections of tree fern, *Dicksonia antarctica*, about 200mm deep with a coffee mug sized aperture gouged out with a chisel, (no mean feat), to hold the root system. This provides the Vireyas with the ultimate in free drainage. A stake is driven through the log section to anchor the plants against wind and above is the dappled tracery of Blackwood trees, *Acacia melanoxylon*.

So, having seen how it is done, I was very kindly donated a few dead tree fern trunks by Billy Alexander of Kells Bay Garden in Kerry and away we went. We used the RBGE mix of 40% graded pine bark, 30% perlite and 30% crushed charcoal with a modest sprinkling of Osmocote Pro. Thereafter, a couple of half strength

dilute foliar feeds at six week intervals starting in mid-April; the first two with a high Nitrogen content and the last two with a high Potassium concentration and that is that.

So there we have it – a solid theory! What could go wrong? Perhaps that will be the subject of a follow-on article a couple of years down the line? I'll be able to tell you which hybrids survived – if any.

Neil Porteous



Two Vireya hybrids which Neil is trying at NT Mount Stewart



Rhododendron (Vireya) pleianthum.



R. pleianthum in 'Dicksonia' pots



Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden, Burnie, Tasmania

All photos in this note were taken by the author

Directory of Committee members and Branch 'Chairs'

Chairman	David Millais Email: sales@rhododendrons.co.uk Tel: 01252 792698	South East Branch	Barry Haseltine Email: barry.haseltine@which.net
Vice Chairman	Ivor Stokes Email: ivor.t.stokes@btopenworld.com Tel: 01558 823233	Wessex Branch	Andy Fly Email: pinecroftgarden1@btconnect.com
Treasurer	Jenny Fly Email: treasurer.for.RCMG@gmail.com Tel: 01558 823233	New Forest Branch	Rosemary Legrand Email: clegrand@pirltd.org.uk
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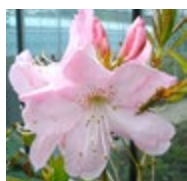


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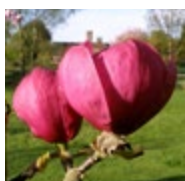
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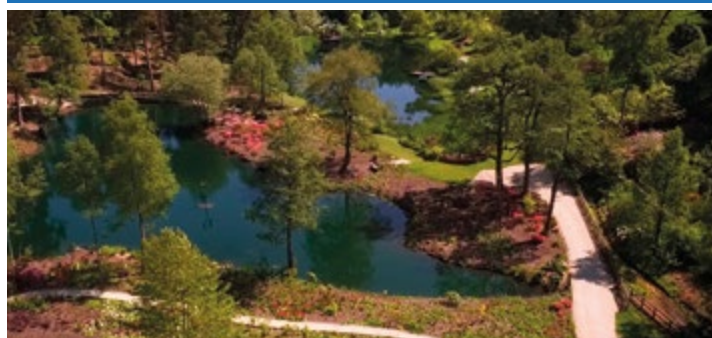
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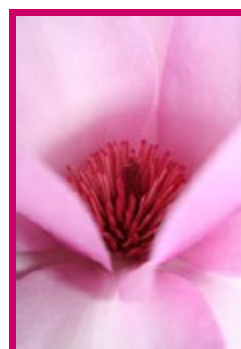
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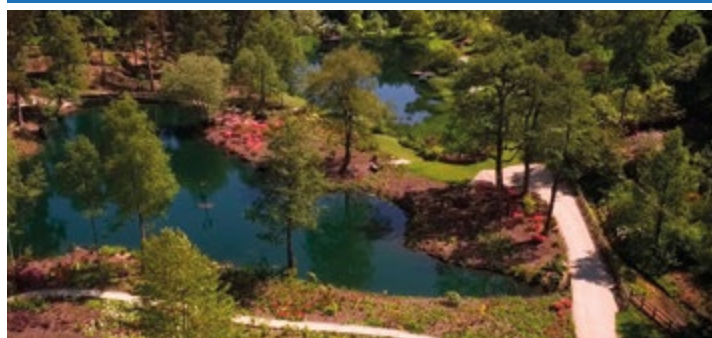
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Group and Branch Meetings and Events

Date/Time	Organiser	Location	Event	Contact
Wednesday March 6th	RCM Group	London	Visit Rothschild Archives (Full, no places available)	Polly Cooke polly.cooke@btinternet.com 01932 863719
Saturday and Sunday March 16/17th	RHS and South West Branch	RHS Garden Rosemoor, Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH	RHS Early Camellia Competition and the South West Branch Magnolia, Rhododendron and Spring Ornamental Competitions	Georgina Barter georginabarter@rhs.org.uk 020 7821 3142 Dr John Marston artavianjohn@gmail.com 01271 267091
Tuesday April 2nd 10.30am	New Forest Branch	Brentry Wood Sir Harold Hillier Gardens & Arboretum, Jermyns Lane Romsey SO51 0QA	Conducted Tour of Brentry Wood	Martin Gates mgates@talktalk.net 023 8025 2843
Saturday and Sunday April 13/14th	RHS	The Savill Garden TW20 0UU	RHS Early Rhododendron, Main Camellia and Spring Ornamental Competitions	Georgina Barter georginabarter@rhs.org.uk 020 7821 3142
Wednesday April 24th	New Forest Branch	Minterne Garden Minterne Magna Nr Dorchester DT2 7AU	Conducted tour of Minterne Garden by Mark Bobin	Martin Gates mgates@talktalk.net 023 8025 2843
Saturday and Sunday April 27/28th	RHS and South West Branch	RHS Garden Rosemoor, Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH	RHS Main Rhododendron Competition South West Branch Camellia, Magnolia and Floral Display Competitions	Georgina Barter georginabarter@rhs.org.uk 020 7821 3142 Dr John Marston artavianjohn@gmail.com 01271 267091
Saturday and Sunday May 4/5th	RHS	RHS Harlow Carr, Crag Lane, Beckwithshaw, Harrogate HG3 1QB	RHS Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition	Georgina Barter georginabarter@rhs.org.uk 020 7821 3142
Saturday May 4th at 2pm	South East Branch	Duckyls Vowels Lane, West Hoathly RH19 4LP	Garden visit to the home of Richard and Gia Thompson (Very close to Gravetye)	Barry Haseltine bhaseltine@btinternet.com 01342 713132
Saturday May 4th at 11am	Wessex Branch	Pincroft Bracken Close, Storrington, West Sussex RH20 3HT	Visit to the garden of Andy and Jenny Fly	Andy Fly pincroftgarden1@btconnect.com 01903 742350
Sunday May 5th at 2pm	Wessex Branch	Duckyls Vowels Lane, West Hoathly RH19 4LP	Garden visit to the home of Richard and Gia Thompson	Andy Fly pincroftgarden1@btconnect.com 01903 742350
Sunday and Monday May 5th/6th	North West England & North Wales Branch	Ness Botanic Gardens	Branch Show in the Bulley Room	Ted Brabin angela.brabin@btinternet.com 0151 353 1193
Tuesday May 7th May 10th	RCM Group Spring Tour	Hillthwaite Hotel Windermere	The Lake District Tour of private and public gardens	Christopher Legrand clegrand@pir ltd.org.uk 01202 873344
Saturday May 11th	Wessex Branch	Ramster Petworth Rd, Chiddingfold, Surrey GU8 4SN	Wessex Branch Annual Flower Show	Andy Fly 01903 742350 or pincroftgarden1@btconnect.com
Friday 17th May	Chamberlain Highbury Trust	Highbury, Birmingham	'Celebrating Heritage Rhododendrons in Highbury, Birmingham'	details and ticket booking at www.cht.eventbrite.com .
Saturday May 18	Chamberlain Highbury Trust	Highbury, Birmingham	'Exploring rhododendrons in two Birmingham gardens'.	details and ticket booking at www.cht.eventbrite.com .
Saturday June 1st 11.30am	RCM Group	Exbury Social Club Exbury Village Hants SO45 1AH	RCM Group AGM	Polly Cooke polly.cooke@btinternet.com 01932 863719
Saturday June 1st	RCM Group	Exbury Gardens SO45 1AZ	Centenary Competition	Pam Hayward pam@woodtown.net 01822 852122
Saturday and Sunday June 1st/2nd	RCM Group	Exbury Gardens SO45 1AZ	Flower Show at Five Arrows Gallery Saturday morning, Guided Tour of Gardens at 2.30 pm, Lectures by Seamus O'Brien and Lionel de Rothschild with Buffet meal 6.30pm at Exbury Social Club	Polly Cooke polly.cooke@btinternet.com 01932 863719
Wednesday 26th June at 2pm	RCM Group	London (Address advised on registration)	Visit Rothschild Archives Places are available but pre-registration with Polly Cooke is essential as numbers are limited	Polly Cooke polly.cooke@btinternet.com 01932 863719