

RHS Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group



WESSEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2018

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Dear Members,

I hope your gardens are recovering from the very long heat wave we experienced this summer and after the very cold winter last year, let's hope that there will be no permanent damage.

It really has been a full on calendar year for us all in the Wessex Branch and of course our affiliated members who have supported us so well. A big thank you to our Committee and especially Miranda Gunn for allowing us to continue our shows and meetings at Ramster. Mostly, I would like to thank my wife, Jenny for her support as Branch Secretary. Owing to her stoic attitude, I think we have had another successful year and that is mainly thanks to her even though she still works part-time and is the Treasurer for the main group.

You are all aware now that David Millais our Group Chairman is stepping down at the AGM next year due to work commitments. He has helped to modernise and encourage the Group through many changes and challenges which I am sure you all appreciate. There seems to be more optimism and energy now which makes an excellent starting point for his replacement.

04.05.18 – Garden Visit to Merton Place, Dunsfold, Surrey

We were very pleased to have been invited back to Merton Place by Peter Winkworth and his wife. We were greeted with a choice of tea and coffee and to the delight of a lot of members, including my wife, a glass of champagne!

Since our last visit, Peter, his gardeners and Rodney Longhurst have carried on expanding the woodland garden. Thousands of new plants have been planted and considering the bad winter we had, all looked extremely healthy.

The collection of magnolias totalled 258 which must now be one of the largest in private ownership. His other collections:

Rhododendron species –	76
Rhododendron species – dwarf	26
Rhododendrons – medium/taller	215
Rhododendrons – compact	127
Rhododendrons – Hydon hybrids	41
Rhododendrons – Hydon yak hybrids	18

As Spring was so late this year there were still many augustiniis in bloom as Rodney demonstrated for us! They and their hybrid forms were the pick of the day for me.



There was colour of all hues to please most. These are in woodland, mainly of mature oaks with raised canopies to let more light in.

11.05.18 – Garden Visit to Weald Place, Kent by Brian Long, Wessex Branch Committee Member

Weald Place is located on the fringe of the village of Sevenoaks Weald, which lies a couple of miles to the south of Sevenoaks. The owner Roger Trapp and his family have been developing the garden for several years and invited us to visit on 11th May 2018. It is situated on high ground on a steep south-facing slope with the A21 forming the southern boundary. The property enjoys breath-taking panoramic views across the eastern weald to The Ashdown Forest and the South Downs in the far distance.

Appropriately, the garden below the house has simply been laid to grass, merging to wildflower meadows with carpets of bluebells. To either side of the house mature and magnificent beech and oak trees provide shelter. When Roger took over the property it had become overgrown, but clearance works revealed remnants of previous plantings including some fine large old rhododendron hybrids. To date

many of these remain unidentified, but some clearly derive from *R. arboreum* and others from *R. griffithianum* parentage.

Roger has greatly extended the plantings of rhododendron in the woodland with the addition of many more recent hybrids including several strong-growing plants of 'Horizon Monarch'. Particularly striking on the day was *R. arboreum* 'Heligan', an outstanding plant with fine foliage and large glowing pure-red flowers.



The drive winds up to the house through the eastern section of wood, which gives way to a large lawn nearer the house. Some of Roger's first plantings were in this area and now some well-established good-sized magnolias are growing as specimens in the lawn. Varieties include 'Star Wars' and 'Lois'. The spacing is exemplary and allows scope for each tree to develop to full potential even as fully mature specimens. Other trees planted in the grassland around the garden included *Acer griseum* and *Prunus serrula* to provide year-round interest.

Below the magnolia lawn and adjoining the eastern wood we were shown an area known as the Japanese Rock Garden. The nucleus of this had been rediscovered from original plantings in a small quarry with several mature *Enkianthus campanulatus* as the centrepiece, flanked by forms of *Acer palmatum* and various deciduous and evergreen azaleas. Roger had greatly extended the plantings around this area with further azaleas, rhododendrons and maples and a nice young *Enkianthus* 'Red Velvet'. The steep slope enabled us to readily view this masterpiece from below and above, enabling the contrasting shapes and colours to be better appreciated. This area of the garden was indeed first-rate and we all wished we could replicate it in our own gardens.

Before and after our visit Roger kindly provided us with refreshments and delicious homemade cakes. We were the first group to be invited to visit and we wish him and his family well in the future development of the garden.

17.05.18 – Garden Visit to Bagshot Park, Surrey by Jim Inskip, Wessex Branch Committee Member

I managed to get a special invitation on the 17th May 2018 for a limited number of twenty members of the Wessex RCMG who had had special security clearance in the past. We were invited to Bagshot Park by the Earl and Countess of Wessex and their head gardener Andrew McCarthy who was to be our guide for the day.

Along the south front is a walk beyond which are two terraces, built projecting out into the earlier parkland in the 1870s to accompany the new house. A pair of steps, the western flight extending the axis of the walk across the west front, lead down a grass bank to the second level which is laid out as a semi-circular parterre, planted in box with a central circular pool. The terrace is defined by a stone balustrade set at intervals with urns for planting. The wisterias which clothe the red-brick retaining wall of the terraces are presumably those brought back from Japan by the Duke and Duchess and planted here in 1888. A double flight of steps leads down through the balustraded brick retaining wall of the lower terrace to the sloping lawns below. A tennis lawn enclosed by yew hedging lies on an axis with the terracing, laid out in 1909 by their Royal Highnesses the Crown Prince and Princess of Sweden.

The top walk along the south front continues, down a short flight of steps, eastwards to terminate in a formal flower garden. Known as the Diamond Garden, this is aligned with the walk, with a seat set in a yew bower at each of the three other corners. The garden was one of the additions made by the Duke of Connaught, as were the two sunken gardens near the house and the Blue Garden, 200m south-east of the house, of which the surrounding clipped yew hedge only survives. The Duke also laid out a Spiral Garden to the south of the tennis lawn, the site of which can be identified from the earthwork traces in the present lawns.

Below the west front of the house lies a crazy-paved terrace set with flower beds and a sundial, beyond which, separated by a low brick wall, is the Italian Garden, an addition of 1912. The central feature here is a long rectangular lily pond with paved walk surround, a seat set within a brick pergola closing its far, western end.

The formal gardens round the house are set within lawns, divided on the south side from the park by a ha-ha. To the north-west of the house and Italian Garden the ground rises, a gravelled path leading along the shoulder of the sloping grassed bank set with specimen trees. Above lies the pinetum, the path continuing round the western perimeter of this collection to reach the orangery which forms its focal point. The pinetum, with its fine set of mature conifers, was created by the Duke of Connaught, but the orangery dates from the C18 (Rocque, 1768). The latter stands at the apex of a patte d'oie, this also being an C18 arrangement. The westernmost ride of the goose-foot leads through plantings of azaleas to the north front of the house 250m to the south. The central avenue, aligned with the south front of the orangery, extends 150m through rhododendrons to join with the less formal walk which leads from an entrance on the A322 public road to Bracknell, round the east side of the pinetum area and so back to the north front of the house. The most northerly vista of the patte d'oie, lined by yews, also meets this walk, but continues beyond it to connect with the path along the northern edge of the east side of the pleasure grounds which, too, connects with the north front.

To the east of the main drive as it passes through the pleasure grounds, is an area known as the arboretum, within which stands a number of fine specimen trees. The gravelled area at the top of the sloping lawn is the site of the Japanese House presented to the Duke of Connaught by the Government of Japan in recognition of his work with the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition. By 1949 it had fallen into poor condition and was demolished.



South-east of the house are beds within the lawn, planted predominantly with azaleas, we noted Ghent Azaleas Crocea Tricolor and rhododendrons, kalmias, and magnolias. South-east of this area is a substantial rock garden, through it lead winding walks among steep banks of rockwork and at its southern end is a rock-built, now partly ruinous, grotto.



Adjacent and to the west of the rock garden, and connected to it by a path through raised rockwork, is a circular garden enclosed by densely planted banks. This, the Dutch Garden, is laid out within a perimeter path, with lawns quartered by brick-laid paths, a pond in each quarter, and a central oval pool set round with rose-clad trellis work. Between the grotto and Dutch Garden is a C20 tennis court constructed on the site of a former conservatory.

The above-mentioned features south-east of the house survive from the Duchess of Gloucester's garden which she created between 1816 and 1827. J C Loudon wrote a detailed description of the garden in his Gardener's Magazine in 1828, including with this a plan drawn by Andrew Toward, long-standing head gardener to the Duchess. The gardens, then a short walk from the house, Bagshot Park Lodge, consisted of a series of interconnecting elements including, amongst other features, a rosery, an area of herbaceous plants, the arboretum of rare trees and shrubs, the rock garden, the range of greenhouses for exotics, the Dutch Garden, and the American Garden. The latter was of particular note containing, it was said, a complete collection of American shrubs then available; many are still in good health. Loudon referred to the garden again in 1834, observing that Toward had improved it further by replanting beds to contain just 'one natural order or tribe' instead of a miscellaneous assortment. In the Villa Gardener (1850), Loudon provided a long and detailed account of the moss house which Toward had designed for the Duchess (now gone). Andrew is now restoring the views and vistas by reducing the height of many of the hedges to their former glory.

26.05.18 – Wessex Branch Flower Show at Ramster, Chiddingfold, Surrey

Our flower show this year was a real challenge for exhibitors. This was due to being late in the year and the heavy torrential rain prior to the show. Despite this, many members did their level best to support us and the woody plant section was again outstanding. This section is getting very interesting and unusual exhibits were greatly admired by the visitors to Ramster. I would like to thank all the exhibitors as if it was not for you we would not have a show.



Best in Show was won by Russell Beeson for his beautiful and unusual exhibit of Agapetes 'Ludgvan Cross'. An unusual rarity in the Blueberry family with pendant blooms that look like little Chinese lanterns.



Russell must have a marvellous collection of plants and we are so grateful for all the exhibits he manages to bring each year.

The cup was presented by our Steward, Dr. John David and Colin Tomlin kindly did the judging. John and Colin contribute so much to our show with their advice and knowledge of plants to which we are all very grateful.

Amongst the rhododendrons that did well were the hardy hybrids. They looked so good that after the presentations and lunch, Miranda (who holds the RCMG collection), Jenny & I decided to pick some more of them from Ant Hill at Ramster. We wanted to take a photo of them for other members to see. This is just a small sample of what is growing at Ramster –



The show will be held on the 11th May next year which, depending on the weather, may enable us to show more species as well as hybrids.

This years get together was hosted by Therese McKenzie and her son Christopher. Norney Grange was designed by the world famous architect CFA Voysey. His vision and design so easily recognisable. The main house and estate is owned by Russell and Christine Clapshaw. They told us about their time at Norney Grange as custodians. Many a film has been made there and the most recent one being Goodbye Christopher Robin.

A few lines from Therese:

" Uncovering Norney Grange Gardens"

The WL Grane, Arts and Crafts Gardens of 1897, (CFA Voysey) and the Kingdom Ward Walk of the 1930s gardens of HC le Marchant.

Fifty years of growth from 1975 made it impossible to walk in any direction in 2012. Living on the Estate, I would scramble through areas of bracken and bramble, amazed at the old walls, potting sheds, Upper and Lower vegetable gardens. Iron apple cage and then the 192 feet iron stone wall.

Joining RHS Wisley, spending days in the Library with wonderful people, taking in samples, the journey began. I approached the owners on clearing some of the paths, and by 2015, I was able to get permission, that we would share the cost. Rare trees, Champion trees, species of Rhododendron and Azalea, perhaps more to find.

A mammoth task she has undertaken and we have seen so much change in the couple of years of visiting. A most magnificent magnolia she brought to the show and won 1st prize with was 'obovate'.



Therese was most welcoming and with the same grit and determination she ensured that she catered for both wet and dry conditions in the courtyard and stables. Tea and coffee flowed all day with the most scrumptious cakes.

Members of the group brought along sprigs of plants and trees for identification. Many of which were uncommon and will now be sought by others! Rod White also showed members how to graft rhododendrons.



A very enjoyable day and we all came away with deep admiration for Therese.

Andy Fly

Chairman of the Wessex Branch