

RHS Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group



WESSEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2019

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Dear Members,

Another season is almost upon us and it has taken till now to realise the full suffering of some of our shrubs in our garden. You probably have as well. Rh. Fred Wynniatt seems as though he has had enough and so does Rh. Hotei.

These were two of my favourites for producing regular flowers and before last year were in excellent shape with very good foliage. Still these things happen and although sad, it is all part of gardening!

Let's hope this year will be better with no 'Beast from the East' and more rain through the summer please!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your help this last year. The commitment you show seems to be increasing year on year. The interaction and knowledge passed between members has been invaluable.

Below are excellent articles from members relating to our talks and garden visit since our July 2018 newsletter.

19.10.2018 – Garden Visit to Sir Harold Hillier Arboretum by Brian Long, Treasurer, Wessex Branch

For our autumn visit this year some twenty members of the Wessex Branch made the journey westward to the well-known Hillier Arboretum and were joined by several members of the New Forest Branch. Autumn sunshine is always welcome, even after a hot summer; and we were blessed with fine weather throughout the day.

The Arboretum is so extensive that it is not possible to see the entire garden in one visit and difficult choices have to be made. Our route was a broad loop taking in the Winter Garden, Centenary Border, Heather Garden, Himalayan Valley and Pond.

The Winter Garden in its current form had been developed around the turn of the millennium and thus is still young and vibrant but now reaching a degree of maturity with most of the plantings in their prime. It was still too early in the year for the brightly coloured stems of the various Cornus, Birch and Acers to be seen to best effect. However, in some cases the retained autumnal foliage was advantageous. I particularly admired a lovely specimen of *Betula albo-sinensis septentrionalis* labelled 'Bowling Green'. This had the familiar coppery peeling bark but on the day was enhanced by a light cloak of soft amber foliage; although the foliage obscured some of the bark, the overall effect was most lovely and the first time I have actually seen this.



At the edge of the Winter Garden we admired several very large shapely specimens of *Acer griseum*, clearly remaining from earlier plantings. The bark was lovely as always and the foliage displayed autumnal tints, but we were also impressed by the great quantity of seed pods hanging from some of these trees.

On-route to the Centenary Border we encountered a *Camellia sasanqua* 'Crimson King' in full flower.



In a nearby sheltered spot, we were even more pleased to find lovely yellow lily-like flowers on clumps of the all-to-seldom seen *Sternbergia lutea*, the 'winter daffodil'.

The Centenary Border has recently been renovated and although it was clearly out of the peak season at the time of our visit it does have a strong design structure that remains year-round. The absence of bright flowers enabled other more subtle plants to shine. I much admired clumps of *Miscanthus nepalensis* with graceful golden flower tassels. I had previously only seen this plant on TV where it sparked my interest and it is now firmly on my wish-list.

The Heather Garden is situated on the slope opposite Jermyn's House and is now predominately a collection of wonderful dwarf conifers surrounded by closely-mown grassy areas and interspersed by stone and gravel paths. It is laid out in a picturesque manner and the standard of maintenance is very high. It also has a light and sunny aspect in contrast to the surrounding woodland which helps to give it an almost magical quality. Remarkable foresight in the original planting and probably some judicious removal has provided a collection of truly dwarf conifers that are now of great age spaced apart so as to allow each specimen to develop naturally and to be appreciated in full at close quarters. Several good deep golden forms of *Chamaecyparis obtusa* were particularly striking.

The dwarf pines are most remarkable and in great variety of colour and shape. They were all so lovely that I was unable to select a favourite. However, the dark green forms certainly held their place among the more obvious choices with gold or blue needles.

Return to the Visitor Centre was through the Himalayan Valley, which proved to be a very interesting area with a small stream and the steep slopes planted with many unusual shrubs including representatives from our three genera. It would obviously be at its best in the spring, but autumnal colours were superb on two of the best species of *Enkianthus*: *perulatus* and *cernuus rubens*. These are growing together in a clearing which is good for comparison. Both had excellent deep red autumn foliage although *perulatus* the more compact in growth and *rubens* rather open-growing.

The valley leads up to a large pond affording really good autumn vistas. At the edge of the water there were several eye-catching splashes of yellow provided by Kniphophia 'Happy Halloween'. Information boards advised that this is a relatively new variety, but it is obviously strong growing and well worth looking out for. A timber shelter of very interesting futuristic design is located to the north of the pond. Nearby was a large shrub that drew attention from a distance and deserves special mention. This was *Euonymus hamiltonianus* 'Pink Delight', with yellow autumn foliage complemented by masses of delicate pink berries. The overall effect was both unusual and stunning.

As an unexpected bonus, after lunch, some of our group were kindly shown around the Brentry Rhododendron Wood across Jermyn's Lane by Russell Beeson, who works there as a volunteer one day a month. Rod White, Andy Fly and Jim Inskip were still there until closing time. Nothing unusual there then!

Overall this was a really enjoyable visit, during which we met several exceptional new plants as well as many old favourites.

28.11.2018 – Talk by Ken Cox on Woodland Gardening by Rod & Mary White, Wessex Branch Members



On a blustery wet day in November the Wessex Branch of the RCMG gathered in the tea rooms at Ramster (thankyou Miranda) for a long awaited talk on woodland gardening given by Ken Cox. This was to accompany his recently published book of the same title.

He began with a brief history of gardening explaining how a very formal style had prevailed at the grand country houses until William Robinson published his book *The Wild Garden* in 1870. He championed the naturalistic style of growing plants as they would be seen in the wild.

This is what gave rise to woodland gardening (as we know it) as a planting style. With the plant hunters sending back seed from their travels in the far east several years later, the new plants were perfect for using in this way. From then on it became fashionable for gardens of all sizes to incorporate these ideas within.

Ken then went on to show us wonderful photographs of examples of the woodland gardening style. Some were from large gardens such as Bodnant and Caerhays others were from smaller examples Ramster included. He even managed to include one of our own which rather surprised us! It just goes to show that you can carry out woodland gardening on any scale so long as you have planted a few trees.

There were also photos from abroad where woodland gardening as a style is just as popular. Some wonderful photos from New Zealand and Australia, about as far away from the UK as you can get.

He also showed us a photo from Sir Peter Smithers garden in Switzerland a rather spectacular example of woodland gardening on a steep slope with luxuriant growth very close to the balconies of the house. Ken did say though that this garden had originally been planted with the long-distance view in mind and that over the years this had largely been lost. He urged us all therefore not to be afraid to prune or even remove plants when too big, essentially to be very happy to use our chainsaws!

Then followed many more photos showing us how the plants of our group's interest are being used within woodland gardening.

It was a very interesting talk by Ken who has obviously travelled widely to put together such a wide range of photos from so many gardens large and small.

We finished with tea, coffee and cake and Ken very generously signed copies of his book both for those who already owned it and those who had ordered one beforehand. A thoroughly great afternoon spent looking at wonderful garden landscapes and fabulous plantings.



08.12.2018 – Talk by Rosemary Legrand on Exploring the North Island of New Zealand – Chairman of the New Forest Branch

This was an excellent talk and the photographs presented brightened a dark December day! Members had a lot to talk about afterwards and for some brought back fond memories of their visit to New Zealand.

Notes from Rosemary:

In 2008 my husband and I realised a long held ambition to tour New Zealand and see its incredibly beautiful scenery, its botanical gardens and plants.

In this presentation you can also experience the Maori culture, unique geological features and stunning coastline.

Auckland Botanic Gardens covers 158 acres with a collection of over 10,000 plants. There is an extensive collection of our genera with *Camellia crassipes* from Yunnan in flower.

Notable trees seen on our travels Northwards :-

(1) *Eucalyptus ficifolia* ' Red Flowering Gum '. We also saw a superb fiery orange flowered form.



(2) *Albizia julibrissin*.

(3) *Metrosideros excelsa* known as ' the New Zealand Christmas Tree '.

(4) Pohutukawa – part of the New Zealand Christmas tradition.

(5) *Jacaranda mimosifolia*.

(6) Native trees of the mighty Kauri *Agathis Australis* and the Rimu *Dacrydium cupressinum* which can grow to over 50 metres.

En route to the most northerly point Cape Reinga we passed nurseries growing olives, bananas, red pineapples, passion fruit and avocados.

Hamilton Gardens covers 58 hectares with a collection of international gardens including an Indian Char Bagh Garden.

In the grounds outside the conservatory *Erythrina crista-galli* and inside a beautiful *Hibiscus schizopetalus* amongst a multitude of plants.

Wellington Botanic Garden covers 25 hectares with a very comprehensive collection of *Vireya* rhododendrons which were in full bloom. Hydrangeas, lilies, and roses were a riot of colour.

In the conservatory amazing displays of Begonias, air plants *Tillandsia*, Bromeliads and the fantastic *Victoria Amazonica* Water Lily.



We thanked Rosemary for an excellent afternoon and look forward to further talks in the future.

One particular talk I know members would love is about Italian Gardens. We went to the New Forest Branch AGM a couple of years ago when Rosemary was doing her talk and was completely transfixed with the stunning photos.

Arranged Garden Visits –

04.05.2019 – Pinecroft, Bracken Close, Storrington, West Sussex RH20 3HT – 11am

This 3 acre garden is owned by Jenny and myself and has been created over 23 years from overgrown heathland covered in ponticum, brambles, bracken and fallen trees. Our aim is a garden for all seasons which will flow from one season to another. We have a woodland area, wild flower border in progress, ponds and various other borders.

05.05.2019 – Duckyls, Vowels Lane, West Hoathly RH19 4LP – 2.00pm

This 14 acre garden is owned by Richard and Gia Thompson who are South East members. This garden was laid out in the 1930's. The garden has woodlands, ponds, an orchard and a more formal garden.

24.05.19 – Sandling Park, Ashford Road, Hythe, Kent CT21 4HN – 10.30am

Sandling Park was the home of the late Alan Hardy and holds some of the most significant and important collections of narcissi, trees and shrubs of many varieties. The future of this garden is not certain so I do recommend you try and visit.

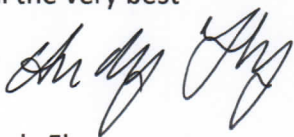
Please let Jenny and I know if you wish to attend any of the above.

Annual General Meeting

This we hope to start this Autumn and further details will be in our July 2019 newsletter.

Hope to see you at our events and of course our main RCMG flower shows.

All the very best



Andy Fly
Chairman of the Wessex Branch
Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group