

RHS Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group



WESSEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2019

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Dear Members,

Where has the year gone? We had a huge agenda this year, yet it seems to have gone in a flash!

Jenny & I would like to thank you all for such splendid support and we do hope that you enjoy our Newsletter. Garden visits have been reported by other members within the Group as we feel it is so interesting to hear others views on our various visits.

We do still have another three events already planned which I hope many of you will attend and there is already an exciting season being planned for next year.

Before we start, I have some important dates for your diaries:

09.11.2019 – AGM, Ramster Tea Rooms, Petworth Road, Chiddingfold, Surrey GU8 4SN

This will be our first AGM and we are hoping to get a lot of feedback from members regarding future visits and activities. The Agenda for the day will be:

10.30am	Tea/Coffee
11.00am	Autumn Walk around Ramster Garden
12.30pm	Lunch in the tea room. Members to bring their own lunch. Tea/Coffee will be served. Raffle.
13.30pm	AGM to commence

We are planning to do a raffle at this event and I am asking if any members are willing to contribute a plant, book or gift for the raffle? Raffle tickets will be sold at £1 each. Each member who does contribute a prize, will be given a free raffle ticket.

16.11.2019 – Talk & Slide Show on Italian Gardens by Rosemary Legrand - £5 a head. Ramster Tea Rooms, Petworth Road, Chiddingfold, Surrey GU8 4SN

13.30pm	Tea/Coffee
14.00pm	Talk/Slide Show to start

25.01.2020 – Talk & Slide Show on Magnolias in the UK and New Zealand by Rod Wild - £5 a head Ramster Tea Rooms, Petworth Road, Chiddingfold, Surrey GU8 4SN

10.30am	Tea/Coffee
11.00am	Talk /Slide Show to start

In date order, I list the reports received relating to our Spring visits:

04.05.2019 – Garden Visit to Pinecroft, Bracken Close, Storrington – Report by Brian Long

For our first visit this year the Wessex Branch were delighted to be invited to visit Pinecroft, the creation of our current Chairman, Andy Fly and our Secretary and Group Treasurer, Jenny Fly. Many of us has previously visited the garden back in May 2013 and even at that time we all agreed that this was a most outstanding garden that combined an impressive collection of rhododendrons with a fine all-round garden. Significant development had continued throughout the six years and we therefore expected the garden to be really good and we were certainly not disappointed. It is quite impossible to cover all the changes since our last visit, let alone do justice to the gardens as they now are. However, it all started in 1995 when Andy and Jenny bought Pinecroft and commenced clearing the 3 acres of gently undulating grounds, which were almost entirely overgrown with *R. ponticum*. By 2013 a significant stand remained defiantly, but this has now been cleared completely and the replanting successfully integrated with the rest of the garden.

The house stands in a slightly elevated position towards the north end of the property and therefore looking southwards over the majority of the grounds. The area of higher ground extends throughout the centre of the garden and is mainly laid to lawn, with island beds being restricted to the fringes that merge with the main woodland areas. This demonstrates much restraint and the result contributes a great deal to the spacious feel of the garden, providing lovely vistas from the house and a nice contrast to the more intensive plantings in the woodland areas.

Early clearance had revealed a large disused pond situated towards the far end of the ridge of high ground which was originally a dew pond. Sadly, Andy's first attempt to restore the clay lining failed when the water drained overnight with the subsoil proving unsuitable to sustain a natural pond and by 2013 the hollow just made a useful bonfire site. Thankfully Andy has since then installed a flexible liner, and the pond is now fully restored. It follows the original shape of an elongated triangle, which sits well at the end of the ridge of higher ground. This is a really large pond, making this a great feature at Pinecroft. Set in the lawns surrounding the pond are several very distinctive architectural plants, including a Chusan Palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) with a good bold trunk and a magnificent monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*).



Trachycarpus fortunei



Araucaria araucana

The pond has attracted a good number of ducks that have now set up home and provide an interesting unexpected feature and repay the hospitality by keeping much of the garden slug-free.

The beds adjoining the lawns are planted with an extremely interesting variety of dwarf and compact rhododendrons interspersed with acers and other choice shrubs. The layout of the lawns, with soft curves around the natural undulations lead to the main woodland plantings in the eastern edge and southern end of the garden.

The woodland canopy in the eastern edge consists of many magnificent mature Scots Pine, from which the property derives its name, some of which have also been retained as specimens spilling out into the lawns and enhancing the natural feel of the garden.

An irregular path winds through the pines towards the eastern boundary and is planted on both sides by a fantastic collection of rhododendrons, interspersed with various acers, camellias and choice conifers. This was one of the first areas planted by Andy and Jenny and many of the rhododendrons are now magnificent specimens of good form and stunning when in flower. A good number of large-leaved species rhododendrons are growing well in the shelter of the deciduous woodland at the south of the garden.

There had been one particularly challenging problem at Pinecroft: a large low-lying area some halfway down the western side of the garden. This proved to be very wet in the winter but prone to dry out completely in the summer, thus ruling out a natural pond or bog garden.

Back in 2013 Andy was undertaking some very extensive drainage works. Now a wonderful addition to the garden is a good-sized new pond set into the natural slopes so as to look completely natural. This is described as a wildlife pond, which it may be, but it is also highly attractive, with a nice informal oval shape and surrounded by delightful well-chosen planting.

There are so many lovely rhododendrons at Pinecroft that most of us if asked to name our top three would select at least six! On the day I really liked 'Apricot Fantasy', a fairly recent variety with soft semi-double golden-orange flowers; 'Queen of Hearts', deep lustrous red and well-known; and 'Colonel Coen', with good rich purple flowers.

Coincidentally, Andy and Jenny have been past show winners with both 'Apricot Fantasy' and 'Queen of Hearts' and it was good to see the actual plants.



More unusual plants that attracted me were 'Starbright Champagne', with most distinctive soft gold star-shaped flowers with a contrasting crimson centre.



Starbright Champagne

Others were 'Blewbury', a *R. roxieanum* hybrid with deep green pointed foliage and shapely trusses of white flowers. However, the rhododendron that I coveted most on the day was a good sized bush with white flowers. I asked Andy about it and it had a surprising story. It had been acquired from a highly reputable source as 'Molly Coker', but proved to produce white flowers rather than pink so could not be 'Molly Coker'. It has nice healthy leaves, strong growth, and good full trusses of flowers with absolutely no hint of pink at any stage, the flowers in fact being tinged green in bud and opening pure white with good texture. So, just what is it? Apparently, the entire batch have turned out the same way. The most obvious explanation would be a mix-up in the labelling process, but if so the question of what it is would still stand. Could it perhaps have arisen due to the micropropagation process? Either way it seems such a good plant should be identified or named and more widely grown.

Pinecroft certainly has an amazing collection of rhododendrons and I would be very happy seeing these alone, but it also has a wide variety of wonderful trees and shrubs.

The island beds contain two fine young specimens of *Metasequoia* 'Goldrush' and a very shapely young but good-sized *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' that I so much wish was growing in my own garden.



These together with the many different Acers planted throughout the garden ensure foliage interest throughout the summer, followed by an increasingly spectacular autumn display in years to come.

Following our morning walk around the garden, our hosts generously provided a delicious buffet lunch. Some of us attempted to eat this on the newly constructed elevated terrace with fine views over the garden, but a cold northerly wind resulted in most of us eventually taking shelter in the warmth of a most impressive wood range glowing in the kitchen.

Everyone agreed that the Pinecroft gardens are really outstanding. It is particularly special that they have been created from an overgrown wilderness by Andy and Jenny themselves and this serves as an inspiration to other group members who may try to do likewise, albeit perhaps on a more modest scale. I am already looking forward to a third visit, which I very much hope will be just a year or two on.

05.05.2019 – Garden Visit to Ducklys, West Hoathly – Report by Barry Cooke

This 14 acre garden was originally laid out in the 1930's with woodlands, ponds, an orchard and a more formal garden around the house. Both the house and gardens were in decline when purchased by the new owners Richard and Gia Thompson. Since then, extensive restoration has taken place in all areas and is still ongoing.

We started our visit by approaching the house down a long winding drive with a new retaining wall built of random stone on the right hand side. This provides a terrace effect which was laid to grass on the higher level with interspaced groups of *Betula nigra* trees. The bark provided quite a stunning spectacle. The house appeared on the left where we parked and were greeted by Richard and Gia.



Richard gave us a brief synopsis of the history of the house and garden while we admired the magnificent wall mounted sun dial and mature wisteria.

We started our tour of the garden along a path rising up slowly and passing a beautiful Victorian style greenhouse, eventually arriving at a quite secretive formal perennial garden enclosed on one side by a wall giving the taller plants and climbers a wonderful backdrop. At the far end was a round stone tool shed with a thatched roof.



The formal paths were divided by rectangular beds with some unusual box and all manner of perennials, bulbs and Euphorbias

We left this area and headed down passing a bank of deciduous azaleas, including a Crocea Tricolor and many other old Ghent hybrids. We carried on down passing many stands of various hybrid rhododendrons and some very old specimen trees.



Richard and Gia have had steps built into the hillside to enable better access to the lower and less formal part of the garden. I am sure the landscapers were quite pleased when they were finished!

At the bottom, we passed two beautiful ponds with many more specimen trees including Liquidambers, a magnificent *cercidiphyllum japonicum* and *acer dissectums*.



The path eventually took us back up to the house passing huge banks of evergreen azaleas and we ended our tour on the rear terrace enjoying the spectacular views.



On the last part of our journey we discovered that we were joined by a very friendly black hen that seemed quite at home among us.

We were very kindly invited into the kitchen for tea and coffee with a selection of the most delicious homemade cakes. This is certainly a garden in progress and we hope that we are invited again.

24.05.2019 – Garden Visit to Sandling Park by Rod White

An exciting day was in prospect for those of the group who travelled the long distance to Sandling Park. The garden's fame is well known and word of mouth reports from those who have visited I am sure encouraged those who had not been before to make the long journey.

Rendezvous had been arranged at the M20 motorway service area very near to the garden for a comfort break and refreshments to relieve and fortify us for the treat that lay ahead.

On arrival at the garden we were met by Michael Warren, Prunella Scarlett and Jane Hardy. Michael currently looks after the 24 acres of the garden singlehandedly! Michael has been with the estate for many years, originally being employed as the estate's gamekeeper. I find it incredible that on taking charge of the garden Michael has become so comprehensively knowledgeable on trees, shrubs and conifers and in particular, on our favourites, Rhododendrons and Azaleas.

I am sure that like me when walking around the garden and becoming immersed in the plants and surroundings it is easy to forget that apart from tree work and hedging that the maintenance is the work of one man! Michael is assisted with planting and propagation by Dennis Fordham the retired nursery manager for Oakover Nurseries.

The plants! Where to start. The garden is entered through a small pedestrian gate to the right-hand side of the main house. On arriving, one is greeted with extensive grass areas containing many fine specimen trees one of which is *Pinus radiata* planted in 1848 showing signs of previous damage caused by the great storm of 1987 but still a remarkable sight.

As with all great gardens the eye quickly moved on as we all took in the spectacle. The spacing and arrangement of this upper part of the garden gives a very attractive parkland effect and Michael has been very careful with new plantings in this area making sure that as these develop into larger plants, they will not threaten the sense of space the upper area of the garden gives. It is also important to note that Alan Hardy, probably the garden's most prolific planter had added many interesting bulbs to this area which are so rarely seen in gardens of this scale and are a tremendous bonus to those whose interest extends beyond woody plants.

Tulipa sylvestris a lovely extensive patch at the base of a fine fully furnished *Pinus sylvestris*, fine drifts of snowdrops in the long grass under the *Cornus* and *Enkianthus*. *Scilla bithynica* in drifts of delicate blue under the large plants of *Rhododendron augustinii* and a choice planting of 2-3m² of *Cyclamen repandum* under a large plant of *Rhododendron schlippenbachii*. All of which are so easily overlooked when faced with the wonderful spectacle of the whole picture.

I can testify that a visit here earlier in the spring to view the *Narcissus* is truly breath-taking. The *Narcissus* having been almost continually added to (annually with the best, newest varieties available) for over 50 years! Surely a good reason to visit again at an earlier time of year.

Into the woodland part of the garden proper! *Crinodendrons* 25 feet high in full flower, *Enkianthus campanulatus* 20 feet high in full flower, *Rhododendron basilicum* under a Farrer number - some flower, *Cardiocrinums* 8 feet high, *Acer palmatums*. Many fine plants.

For me personally having been many times before, to see *Photinia beauverdiana* in full flower 25-30 feet high was outstanding even more arresting (if that were possible) than when I saw it in full glory with its autumn colour bedecked with dark red fruits. It seems a tragedy that the good plant *Photinia x fraseri* Red Robin has so dominated the current public consciousness of the genus *Photinia* to the exclusion of so many other good species – the same could be said to be true with the general public regarding *Rhododendron ponticum*!

On the western boundary of the garden the garden is at its lowest elevation and here can be seen what remains of the giant trees that were so much a feature of the garden before the great storm. Giant Oaks



and a massive Sitka Spruce showing what a wonderful tree this can be when at maturity and given space. Best of all in this area for me is the remarkable specimen of *Calocedrus decurrens* of a particularly conical and narrow shape given its size. Fortunately, a good view of it can be had by walking away for some distance 30m plus and seeing it in its full glory from top to bottom.

Also, in this area is an interesting (but not that beautiful) plant which is a purported cross between a *Kalmia* and *Rhododendron* by the name of *Rhododendron Everlasting* – this is in reference to the flowers which being sterile last on the plant for some time. Recent DNA studies have revealed that there is no *Kalmia* DNA present which justifies Peter Cox's nickname for this plant as *Rhododendron nonsuchianum*!

Wonderful groupings of deciduous Azaleas were very cleverly worked in with the *Rhododendrons* giving an open character to the plantings. Michael and Dennis have been busy adding areas of ground flora. Trilliums, Primulas, Ferns etc evidence of new planting was everywhere causing many stops to check labels and ask questions.

Even in a mature and vibrant garden the occasional showstopper came into view with the sound of 'come and look at this' being heard amongst our party. This gave Michael much pleasure as was evident from his broad grin.

Showstoppers on the day:



Rhododendron Soulei 'Exbury Pink'



Enkianthus campanulatus albiflorus



Enkianthus campanulatus Palibini

Part of the fun of these visits is being able to share such treasures with others and all the conversations that go with that. I am sure Michael enjoyed the day as much as we did. I hope that in doing so he felt rewarded and appreciated for the immense energy that he puts into all that he does.

11.05.19 – Annual Flower Show held at Ramster.

Due to the number of exhibits and people entering the show this year, John David had to take some time entering all the exhibitors and plant names on the judges sheet and show certificates. He managed to stay calm under pressure and as always, a good steward for the exhibitors. Colin Tomlin was our judge and we are very grateful for the time he gives us.

The committee decided that next year we will only put names on the 1st prize certificates to help cut down the administrative work and then everyone can enjoy the day. A list can then be sent out to the exhibitors so they can see the prize winners and exhibits shown for their records.



*Russell Beeson – Cup Winner for Best in Show
For his exhibit of Rh. Charlotte de Rothschild*



*Trudy Breen & Jim Inskip – Winners of The Lady
Adam Gordon Plate for a group of three different hybrid
elepidote for Rh. XXL, Rh. Springtime & Rh. Unknown*

Jenny & I were delighted to win the Katherine Beadle Shield for the most points.

The floral displays had a lot of interest by the garden visitors and many questions were asked.



04.08.2019 – Summer Picnic held at Loder Plants, Long Hill, Brighton Road, Lower Beeding, Horsham,

I would like to start by thanking our hosts Chris and Tania Loder for making us so welcome and the constant cups of tea and coffee with delicious homemade biscuits. They arranged our venue so we could overlook the lake and far scenery. The weather was perfect!



This is the time of year when we get together to talk about the year's events. It is an excellent time for everyone to relax, socialise and enjoy the day.



After our picnic, different members got up to have a 5 minute talk about different plants that they had in flower at this time of year or what they thought was worthy of growing. It proved very interesting and entertaining!



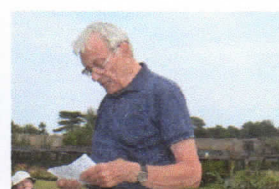
Rod White



Brian Wright



Paul Strike



Geoff Yates



Robin Lack



Polly Cooke

We all agreed that the most outstanding exhibits were the late flowering rhododendrons hybridised by Paul Strike. The health and vigour of the flowers and leaves were incredible.



Paul has been the gardener at The Malthouse in Chithurst for almost 30 years which is owned by Mr. & Mrs Graham Ferguson. He trained at a horticultural college in Somerset and has worked at Edinburgh Botanic Garden, Kew and other gardens in the south east of England.

During his time at the Malthouse, Paul has followed on in the footsteps of the well-known author and nurseryman, Michael Haworth Booth, father of Graham's wife Alys whose interest was late flowering rhododendrons.

Paul has used Rh. Leonora as a parent plant for many of the crosses he has made along with Rh. Argossy, Rh. Tally Ho, Rh. Grand Finale, Rh. Flameheart and Rh. Polar Bear along with species Rh. Ariculatum and Rh. Kyawii. As you can see from the photos above which are quite spectacular.

I was at the Malthouse today, 14th August 2019 and was looking at rhododendrons with buds still to break. David Millais has now registered some of Paul's previous crosses and I am sure there will be more to follow.

I look forward to seeing you at our AGM at Ramster.

All the very best

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andy Fly'.

Andy Fly
Chairman of the Wessex Branch.