



RCMG SW Branch News

Spring 2022

Editor's welcome – Notes from a Devon Garden

Welcome to the latest edition of the regional newsletter. It's been a very wet day here in south Devon which feels somewhat reflective of recent events. Whilst world events are firmly at the forefront of my mind, I am grateful to find solace in talking horticulture. Greenway escaped the worst of the wrath of Storm Eunice but I know many of you will have suffered damage. My colleague at Coleton Fishacre had an unexpected surprise when tree surgeons cut through a fallen beech limb to find a large bees nest in the middle. He enjoyed spending the rest of the day with a beekeeper rehousing the bees.

Winter is slowly drawing to a close and many of the rhododendrons are now starting to burst open. But of course it is the camellias at this time of year that bring brightness on a dull day. One of my favourite camellias is *Camellia cuspidata* (right) with its delicate, simple form all in white, it puts on a show without being too showy.

On the subject of camellias, the eagle eyed amongst you will have noticed an error in the previous newsletter. The diversity and depth of our genera has led to myriad questions and complexities around taxonomy that we will have all come across at one stage or another. Indeed, we all have a particular way that we like to abbreviate certain names such as *Rh.* for *Rhododendron*. Almost every submission for this newsletter that I receive will have a slightly different way of displaying names. Add into this that formatting often alters as text moves between software and the options increase further. Trying to bring some form of consistency to the multitude of offerings is one of my roles as editor of this newsletter. A consistent approach allows for a greater degree of clarity and helps to avoid any confusion. That is of course until I make a mistake as I did in Caroline's excellent piece 'Autumn Camellias'.

Caroline talked about her role as a National Collection Holder for *Camellia sasanqua* which includes the Hiemalis and Vernalis group of cultivars. I know very little about the Hiemalis and Vernalis group of camellias and, to be honest, I wasn't sure if these were species or cultivars. To make sure I got it right and to avoid asking basic questions from the author, I took it upon myself to do a little research of my own and educate myself. Who else to turn to but the International Camellia Society. Boy was I wrong! Listed on a page of Camellia Species on their website, under 'H', was *Camellia hiemalis*. On seeing this, I naturally concluded that these were species and edited the formatting of the text to show this. Those of you who know more about camellias than me (most of you) will know that this is not the case.

I have since learned that camellia taxonomy is a minefield of contradicting information and that sources one would take as reliable aren't necessarily as up to date as one would hope, as Caroline very patiently explained to me. Dr Clifford Parks in our 2015 Yearbook explained his morphological analysis and research re the Hiemalis group which are all descended from the cultivar *C. 'Shishigashira (hiemalis)'* and were incorrectly considered a separate species, rather than a hybrid group with some *Camellia japonica* genes by Dr Nakai in 1905. He also approved the research findings from chromosome analysis of Dr T. Tanaka, a Japanese botanist and camellia specialist, in the ICS 2010 Journal showing that the earliest Vernalis cultivars were F1 hybrids between *C. japonica* and *C. sasanqua*. Much further backcrossing has taken place in subsequent centuries. Even in the 2005 book 'Collected Species of the Genus Camellia' which Parks co-wrote with Dr Gao & Dr Yu of China, it was said that any non-white *C. sasanqua* cultivar showed elements of hybridity!

My apologies to Caroline for making the editorial error and also my thanks for the lesson in taxonomy. I've said it before and will say it again now – this group has been invaluable in sharing information and helping people like me learn.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. Suggestions, comments and contributions are always welcome. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, no matter how short or long your thoughts, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me, Pam Hayward or John Marston.



Ashley Brent

Branch Chairman's Foreword

Wet sums up the garden at the moment. As I write, storms are forecast with 70mph gusts here in North Devon. I look anxiously at my vast eucalyptus with the rotting centre awaiting its felling in April, as I showed in my January garden video. I hope it stays up until then! It has been mild so not altogether a disaster. I watch the camellias coming out now and the buds of the magnolias swelling – *Magnolia campbellii* 'Alba' and *M. campbellii* 'Darjeeling' are on the point of showing colour. I hope they will be sensible and wait to miss the gales. Scarlet *Camellia* 'San Dimas' (left) is looking gorgeous, and (a relief from the usual large blowsy flowers) *C. transnokoensis* (below) is a real gem.



A sadness to us all in the RCM Group and especially the South West Branch is to report the death of our stalwart member and amazingly knowledgeable gardener, Barry Starling. There is a tribute later in this newsletter. Barry was such a modest man of great achievements in hybridising and showing plants (I remember his amazing flower arrangements) to perfection. We are instituting an award to be given in his memory at the April Show for the best exhibit in Class 67 (a small containerised rhododendron in bloom) which appropriately reflects his area of expertise. To this end, John Sanders has very generously donated a lovely silver goblet which will be inscribed and mounted on oak.

On a happier note, we welcome Joanne and Peter Court onto our Branch Committee. They came from a chalk area to take over the late Nigel Wright's rhododendron garden at Eggesford which was a very steep learning curve. Joanne wrote of their experiences with getting to grips with the new garden in last summer's newsletter. We are very lucky to have many such active members in our South West Branch who are willing to give their time and expertise.

Finally, a reminder that we have two important shows and competitions coming up at RHS Rosemoor in March and April, so please do come along and bring some plants to show. It would be great to make these magnificent events even more magnificent after a fallow 2021.

John Marston

Barry Starling

I first became friends with Barry during the 1970s when working for the National Trust for Scotland at Inverewe. We exchanged seed of rhododendrons and other ericaceous plants in which we had a common interest. However, it was not until later that we first met in person. I had moved back south to Devon in 1983 and Barry moved west from Essex to Devon in 1985 so inevitably our paths crossed and this was at Topsham near Exeter where the Exeter Group of the Alpine Garden Society held their meetings. We soon re-established contact details and it wasn't long before Barry invited me to have a look at his garden and plant collection at The Chine.

I could see why he chose to move to a location on the edge of Dartmoor. Here is a moist climate with acid soil on north-east facing sloping ground. Just the right situation to build peat walls for his many dwarf members of the Ericaceae including *Cassiope* and the closely related *Harrimanella*, a more difficult species. Also *Phyllodoce*, *Kalmia*, *Kalmiopsis*, *Leiophyllum*, *Ledum*, *Rhododendron* and many more. Added to this were all the dwarf forms of larger shrubs such as

Pieris, *Enkianthus* and *Leucothoe*. His reputation for this group of plants spread far and wide from the USA and Canada to Northern Europe and beyond. What Barry will be remembered for more than anything else is his plant breeding and some beautiful little bi-generic hybrids using *Phyllodoce* and *Rhodothamnus* to produce x *Phyllothamnus*; *Phyllodoce* and *Kalmiopsis* to produce x *Phylliopsis*. These are some of the more important ones but perhaps the most famous is a fine form of *Rhododendron keiskei* which Barry named *R. 'Yaku Fairy'* (presumably from seed collected on his trip to Japan with the AGS). Latterly he had been working on *Menziesia* (now *Rhododendron*) to select clones with blue leaves. *Rhododendron 'Spring Morning'* comes to mind but he was always looking to improve on that one and get even more blue in the leaf. He did produce a number of larger rhododendron hybrids and greatly enjoyed showing his plants. I expect Pam Hayward will have all those details and his many successful show exhibits.

He was a very skilled propagator, both from seed and by cuttings and was still growing considerable numbers of plants, many of his own specialties and wholesaling up to 2008 to Starborough nursery in Kent, well known for their catalogue of rare and unusual shrubs. In 2013 he was elected an Associate of Honour by the RHS in recognition of his distinguished service to horticulture.

Although Barry's health was declining he continued propagating his many treasures right up to the end of 2021. Our South West Branch will certainly be poorer without him and his great generosity in providing the sales bench at the autumn meeting with so many plants given freely over the years. As a friend and colleague we shall all greatly miss his friendly smile and quiet manner.



Barry with the Loder Cup

Dick Fulcher

Photo credit: Sally Hayward

Random thoughts on . . . the people we grow in our gardens

It's been a very sad time just lately; losing Barry Starling early on in February has caused me to spend a lot of time thinking about him and his legacy. Indeed, walking the dogs every day along my woodland paths has brought forth a constant reminder of his great legacy and what I personally owe him. I know I'm not alone in this.

It's made me think more generally about the 'people' we grow in our gardens, by which I don't mean, interesting though it is, the plants named after someone like Mrs Furnivall or Adelina Patti. All of us will have planted things gifted to us by friends, family or others with whom we have a special association and over time they come to embody a memory of that person and conjure images of occasions or incidents.

Many of us will either be gardening in the same garden we have worked in for decades, others will have taken special plants with them as they have moved around – these 'people' come with us! I have taken *Populus balsamifera*, originally brought into the UK from Canada as a twig in a lunchbox, to every garden I have owned and seeing it powering up to a great height in a wet meadow by the river here brings to life the owner of that lunchbox – the man who entrusted us with his wonderful cottage garden in Berkshire nearly 50 years ago. I have *Skimmia japonica* gifted me by the mother of a great friend even further back and I still think of her as I pass. I could go on and on but won't!

You will have your own such 'people' I am certain. And we become those 'people' every time we pass on something special – what a lovely thought!

Pam Hayward

Notes from a Cornish Garden

As I write, the garden team at Glendurgan are making preparations for the imminent arrival of Storm Eunice. Short of putting away signs, securing windows and doors and filling a few sandbags, there's very little to be done at this stage other than await the aftermath and hope that the damage isn't too severe. As now seems to be the case every year, this particular storm is arriving the day before the garden opens to visitors following our winter closure. Carefully raked paths will soon be covered in debris and the various big *Magnolia campbellii*, which are now in full bloom, will most likely be stripped by the morning. Fortunately, Glendurgan will be relatively sheltered compared to Cornwall's north coast, so I'm sure we will survive comparatively intact and, after a quick clean up operation, be ready to welcome the first visitors of the new season.

In the last newsletter, back in November, I wrote about the various winter projects the garden team were due to undertake. I'm pleased to say that we had a very productive winter and achieved a great deal. I, on the other hand, have been undertaking my own project with rather more varied success. Historically, the planting records at Glendurgan have been rather hit and miss, and so unfortunately we don't have accurate planting dates, provenance or sometimes identification, for much of our plant collection. Although none of these issues affect the beauty or appeal of the garden to our visitors, they do rather diminish the scientific value of the plant collection as a whole. I've spent much of my time recently, therefore, updating, correcting and reorganising our database, in order to consolidate the information we do have and to hopefully give gardeners, both present and future, a better resource to draw on. This unglamorous work mostly involves rifling through old papers, moving dots around a map on a computer screen, and occasionally researching and keying out unknown species of plants. A plant collection in a garden such as Glendurgan is forever changing, and so our records can never be finished. However, I'm approaching the end of my work and the result is a satisfying snapshot of the plants here in 2022. It's of course great to be able to now look up the identity of any plant growing in the garden, but the real value of such a database lies in the ability it gives us to identify our most significant plants; those which might be very rare in cultivation, particularly characteristic of the garden or be of known wild origin. With a usable and up to date database, we're now much better able to select and prioritise plants for propagation and sharing with other gardens.

Whilst my efforts should hopefully benefit Glendurgan, they're only part of a much bigger drive across all National Trust Gardens. When taken as a whole, the National Trust cares for an enormous collection of plants, of both huge horticultural and scientific importance. The ability to view this collection, spread out across three countries, gives our central Plant Conservation team the information needed to evaluate and target resources far more effectively. It also allows us to share our collections with members, visitors and interest groups much more easily and therefore supports one of the key purposes of the NT as an organisation.

This feeling of being part of a greater effort excites me and has inspired me to make Glendurgan's records as good as they can be. As I'm sure I've said before, conservation is all about recognising what plants are really important and then making the effort to protect them, not just in one garden, but as widely as possible. I love receiving rare or unusual species from other NT gardens, and it's comforting to know that our most prized cultivars or species are growing elsewhere as a reserve, should we need them.

Ned Lomax

All of us in the South West Branch wish Ned well as he takes up his new post at N.T. Bodnant Garden in Wales. I'm sure that he will rise to the challenge of taking on this great historic garden and ensure that it goes from strength to strength.

John Marston

'Delia Williams' or 'Citation'

My work on the RCM Conservation Camellia Database has brought to my attention a real mystery which I am hoping, with the help of the South West Branch members, to resolve. *Camellia x williamsii* 'Citation' was registered by Charles Puddle, Bodnant, in 1958. The ICS Register states that it originated in England. It came to Bodnant in 1933 under the name 'Williamsii semi-double'. It received an RHS Award of Merit on 8 March 1960. The award was reported in the 1960 Yearbook, with the following description: 'The flowers are semi-double, measure 3½ inches across and contain 16 petals; the stamens are numerous in a central cluster and a few are petaloid. The flowers are coloured Rose Pink (HCC 427/2) with a slight deepening of the colour at the base of the petals and in the veination'.

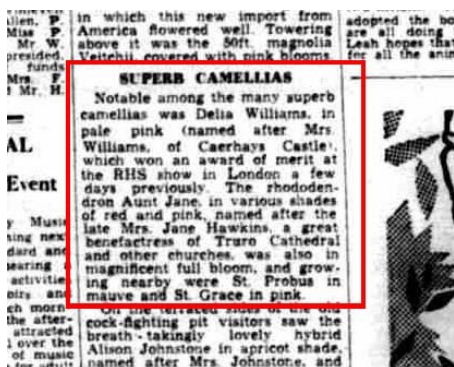


C. x williamsii 'Citation'

By kind permission, from the ICS Register

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On 21 April 1964, Mrs Alison Johnstone of Trewithen exhibited *C. x williamsii* grex 'Delia Williams' and received an RHS Award of Merit. This award was reported in the 1964 Yearbook as follows: 'Typical of the grex as a whole, this cultivar has narrow leaves attenuated at the tip and some 4 inches long and 1½ inches across. The flowers are 4 inches across, contain 8 – 10 petals and are coloured Rose Pink (HCC 427/2) with some darker staining on the outer petals. In the centre is a cluster of stamens, a few of which are petaloid'. So – the colour is identical, and there is mention of a central cluster of stamens and petaloids for both, but the size of the flower and the number of petals is at variance. In the image of *C. 'Delia Williams'* published in the 1964 Yearbook, it definitely appears to have just 8 – 10 petals. On 7 May 1964, the



West Briton and Royal Cornwall Gazette carried a report (left) about Trewithen gardens being open to the public which mentions the superb camellias, including *C. 'Delia Williams'* (named after Mrs Williams of Caerhays Castle) which had won the Award of Merit in London a few days previously.

Last year I had the opportunity to transcribe the plant records made by Philip Tregunna, Head Gardener at Caerhays (1956 -1996). On 29 September 1965 he noted that they received cuttings of *C. 'Delia Williams'* from Mrs Johnstone, and it was this entry that first alerted me to check the Register and hence discover the confusion that exists regarding these cultivars.

The ICS Register (<https://camellia.iflora.cn/>) simply records *C. 'Delia Williams'* as a synonym for *C. 'Citation'*. What's the story here? How did this all come about? Are they truly one and the same?

I would like to ask your help to try to finally solve the mystery. Do you have *C. 'Citation'* or *C. 'Delia Williams'* in your plant collection? If so, it would be useful if you could photograph the flowers and the foliage, and also count the petals, which seems to be a key distinguishing feature. Please send any information and photographs that you have about your plants, including the provenance if you know it, to my email address rcmconservation@gmail.com.

If you are intending to attend either of the Rosemoor Shows, it would be really good if you could bring along a bloom and some foliage so that we can carry out a comparison with live material. We are planning to have a bench for this purpose. This is a separate exercise from the camellia competitions, so please don't feel that you have to be a competition entrant in order to be able to assist with this investigation. Please help to locate the real *C. 'Delia Williams'* and let us see if we can get her properly registered!

Sally Hayward



Photo: J. E. Downward
Pl. 3—*Camellia williamsii* 'Delia Williams' A.M. 21st April, 1964 when exhibited by Mrs. Alison Johnstone, Trewithen, Grampound Road, Cornwall (see p. 165)

Image from 1964 Yearbook

Camellia hybrid 'Cinnamon Cindy'

We are having a lovely, early year with the winter and spring flowering camellias here in Mid-Devon, although the autumn flowering camellias were not early. Looking at my camellias in mid-February the one that impresses and has never before, is the hybrid *Camellia* 'Cinnamon Cindy' (right) which started on 17 January 2022 and on 4 January in 2021. "What a surprisingly good landscape camellia", is my thought, and up for competing with *C.* 'Cornish Snow' which might need more shade and certainly takes up more room.

I bought *C.* 'Cinnamon Cindy' with great excitement about 20 years ago expecting its promised sweet, cinnamon-like scent, which never materialised. *Camellia* 'Cinnamon Cindy' has a miniature white flower which is usually a formal double in the UK, but may occasionally show a few stamens; it has an attractive pink outer petal tipping only visible in bud, which is an extra, lasting feature when viewed from a distance. It is a hybrid of *C. japonica* 'Ken'yōtai' x *C. lutchuensis*, a truly scented species from the Liu Kiu Islands



off the southern tip of Japan and it was bred by Dr W. Ackerman in the USA by 1974; it represents his early work on scented camellias which he then shelved to work on hardiness after the terrible winters from 1974 onwards had decimated so many camellias in the US Arboretum where he worked. *Camellia oleifera* had survived those winters and the rest is history.

Subsequently, his *C.* 'Cinnamon Cindy' plant formed a mutation under glass; it was so different and better scented he introduced it as the single flowering, creamy-white *C.* 'Cinnamon Scentsation' (left) by 1995. I find this plant is genuinely sweetly scented in the right conditions of warmth. Even its growth habit is different, as it spreads outwards and is low-growing as a young plant, while its parent shoots up skyward.



Camellia 'Cinnamon Cindy' is a neat, pillar plant (right) with classic Lutchuensis style, small leaves which would be good in a hedge. Unlike some of the other *C. lutchuensis* hybrids it does not have the excellent feature of pinkish new growth, but it is much hardier as a result, showing its half *C. japonica* parentage. It came through the hard winter of 2010 here more easily than both *C.* 'Fragrant Pink' or *C.* 'Spring Mist', both Lutchuensis hybrids which lost foliage and only just survived. Initially, I was so disappointed by it I tried moving it around and close to walls to get it to scent. I now grow it in some shelter from wind behind our house and it has really filled in, but still has an upright, columnar shape which looks good in the landscape especially when smothered with flowers as now. I am growing it in full sun and to begin with I was uncertain if this would affect its foliage and cause yellowing; yellow foliage does seem to occur with other Lutchuensis hybrids in sun, but *C.* 'Cinnamon Cindy' looks a healthy green colour even after all the sun last year in June and July. It flowers prolifically well and has impact in the landscape making a good punctuation point for a border or as a contrast with other evergreens such as tree heaths, *Pittosporum* or *Hoheria*.



Storms now and then

Like many of you, with trepidation, I ventured out on the day after Hurricane Eunice and surveyed the damage. Torn limbs look horrendous and depressing, especially if they are on top of other plants.

I was confronted by an English oak torn in half (£1 from our local garden centre in 1982) now remarkably large, especially when viewed at ground level. My purple Dawyck beech blown right over and half a *Castanopsis* among other things. The rootball of the Dawyck beech has left behind a deep pit; a ready dug hole to pop something else into; a silver lining there. I have made a start with my chainsaw but will need professional help for the larger things and am now in the long queue for the tree surgeon. Surveying the wind damage brought to mind an earlier hurricane that hit the South West 32 years ago.



On 25th January 1990, during daylight hours we had tremendous winds gusting to over 80mph recorded at Chivenor weather station a few miles from our house. The highest gusts were recorded in Wales and Gwennap Head in Cornwall registered at 107 mph.

There was so much publicity about the 'Great Storm' of October 1987 in the South East of England that our

own storm of 1990 was not as widely publicised. The fact that it affected areas with more isolated trees and during the winter when deciduous trees were bare, meant fewer trees were lost, although 47 people were killed. Here in my garden, the oldest trees I had planted so far in creating the garden were about 10 years old and small enough to escape damage. The worst hit was a row of about 12 tall *Cupressus macrocarpa* (above) planted in the 1940s as a windbreak; all but one fell.

The next day, they looked like giant skittles with their remarkably shallow rootballs in the air (right top).

To my delight, I found that our house insurance covered the removal of the trees (remarkable nowadays) which meant that I cunningly diverted the JCB earth mover which was burying the stumps (right bottom), to create the landscaping ready to build my grotto... another larger silver lining.

More sanguine with age, I no longer get so upset by losses and find that a garden recovers quickly. Gaps left by fallen trees let in more light and present planting opportunities; I already have an evergreen magnolia earmarked to plant in the hole left by the fallen beech.



Dates for your Diary

- ◆ 12-13 March 2022 – Spring Show and competitions at RHS Rosemoor.
- ◆ 5 April 2022 – Visit to two gardens near Bodmin, The Lodge and Lanhydrock
- ◆ 23-24 April 2022 – Rhododendron Competition and Branch competitions at RHS Rosemoor.
- ◆ 4 May 2022 – Visit to Chevithorne Barton, Tiverton.
- ◆ 26 May 2022 – Visit to two gardens near Totnes, Dartington Hall and Avenue Cottage.
- ◆ 29 October 2022 – Autumn Meeting and AGM at Rosemoor. Guest Speaker: Tony Kirkham ‘Wilson in China – A Century On’

Plant Swap Shop

Please do send in lists of plants that you wish to make available in the future to ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk and I will add them here at the first available opportunity. Many gardens have already benefited from the generosity of members' surplus plants. Thank you!

Your personal details will not be shared on the newsletter.

Submit a contribution

Feeling inspired to contribute? Perhaps you feel differently about AGMs? Or have something that you're keen to discuss with the group?

Please send any contributions, no matter how short or long, including photographs to ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk.

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