



RCMG SW Branch News

Summer 2022

Editor's welcome – Notes from a Devon Garden

Welcome to the latest edition of the regional newsletter. After what feels like a very long dry spring, the recent rain has been very welcome despite the induced explosion of weed across the garden. I can't help but notice that this is at least the fourth consecutive year where spring has been dry for us. Traditional spring planting has become challenging as we water to keep freshly planted specimens alive. It's now at the point where I am ready to abandon spring planting in favour of autumn both to better establish the plant but also to conserve water.

Where our three genera are concerned, all is fairly quiet as the last of the late-flowering rhododendrons and determined camellias come to the end of their flowering season. You may recall this time last year that I reported on work to restore the Camellia Garden at Greenway. We've been slightly delayed in this as we've been beset with access issues due to collapsing retaining walls and bouts of Covid amongst the garden team. That said, walls are now rebuilt and gardeners are fighting fit so I hope to be able to share some images of the next phase of restoration with you in the next newsletter.

You will also recall that we recently said farewell to a regular contributor to this newsletter, Ned Lomax who made the move from Glendurgan in Cornwall to Bodnant in North Wales. Nicola Johnson at Glendurgan has very kindly taken the reins and will be writing 'Notes from a Cornish Garden' for us.

Greenway has an intriguing collection of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias but its most famous owner, Agatha Christie, was rather fond of dahlias too. These are growing at full pace and it won't be long before we start to see the first flowers. I have to confess that I am not a fan of overly blowsy flowers and so most dahlias don't fill me with joy. That said, the simple form of *Dahlia merckii* (right) I find strikingly beautiful. Its delicate nature and almost ethereal floating presence appeals to me. It certainly ranks as one of my favourite summer flowers by far.

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

Very dry, then welcome rain, and not so welcome gales here on the North Devon Coast at least; but growth is phenomenal. One forgets how lush the growth is in May. The month brings not only blossom but colour of new leaves on shrubs and trees. At the moment I am enjoying the wafting scents from the 'Smellies' (*Rhododendron maddenii* and relatives). A powerful and spicy aroma struck me as I went on to the old tennis court lawn, and it turned out to be coming from a hybrid of the large tree *Magnolia obovata* and the large shrubby *M. sieboldii*, both in the same magnolia section



Rhytidosperrum from Japan and Korea. This cross has resulted in *M. x watsonii* (now *M. x wieseneri*) (left) in the past and more recently *M. 'Aashild Kalleberg'* from Olav Kalleberg in Norway. My plant I had from Kevin Hughes some years ago. Some people find the scent overpowering, cloying and over sweet. The flower is lovely however and the tree is growing away strongly, showing the influence of *M. obovata*. The other magnolias of note at this later season are *M. ernestii* (right) in a form with lovely yellow flowers emerging from red buds (this fine form was from Chinese seed) and the very large flowered and large leaved *M. officinalis* var. *biloba* with characteristic notched leaves.



Camellias have had a really prolonged season this year, and some flowers are hanging on, and not from the normally late flowering ones like *Camellia 'Hawaii'*. Such abundance; it is difficult to keep up.

John Marston

Rosemoor Show 12/13 March 2022

Just typing out that heading brought it home to me what an important event this was. It was two years since our last gathering of this kind, and of course it will be a three year gap for the other shows, which were last held in 2019. I recall the feeling of impending doom at the early Rosemoor show in March 2020: we knew we were in for it and, sure enough, lockdown and other restrictions followed very quickly. We made the most of it and had a memorable show.

Returning to Rosemoor's Garden Room brought us all together again, and it was wonderful to see all our old friends and to throw ourselves into the hard work and camaraderie which characterise the staging of a show. It must be said, though, that many of us were conscious of a Starling-shaped hole; Barry loved these shows and always brought along something special – often of his own breeding.

The Rosemoor Spring Flower Show is a many-faceted event, encompassing the RHS Daffodil and Early Camellia competitions, as well as the RCMG South West Branch competitions for rhododendrons, magnolias and spring ornamentals. This was not all though. As well as the normal show benches, we were presented with a special display from Caerhays of their home-bred *Camellia x williamsii* cultivars, a presentation by Ros Smith of the micropropagation work carried out at the Duchy College, a superb array of camellias and other choice shrubs for sale by Strete Gate Camellias, and an outstanding non-competitive display of daffodils by Scamps of Falmouth, which took up the whole of one end of the hall.

As in recent years, we are all indebted to Georgina Barter and Pam and Sally Hayward for administering our shows with their usual efficiency and attention to detail. Following a relatively mild winter, the standard of exhibits fulfilled or exceeded our expectations and most of our usual major exhibitors, such as Caerhays, Trewithen and Marwood Hill, along with many amateurs, were well in evidence. A most welcome new exhibitor this year was Hergest Croft Garden, all the way from Herefordshire, who walked away with the Tremeer Cup for the best rhododendron in the show – a remarkable and very fine truss of *Rhododendron exasperatum* (right).



This is not the place for a detailed catalogue of exhibits, so I will just mention a few which particularly caught my eye, along with the rest of the trophy winners:

R. magnificum from Trelissick. It was a treat to see this rare large-leaved species, with its impressive mauve-pink flowers.

R. 'Lady Anne', a hybrid of *R. calophytum* x *R. ririei*, was exhibited by Rosemoor Garden, whose former owner, the late Lady Anne Palmer, had a long association with Collingwood Ingram, who raised this plant. Its flowers clearly show the influence of both parents. This hybrid was so much admired that it was nominated for a First Class Certificate at the show.

Magnolia 'Apollo': a single bloom of this fragrant violet purple cultivar won Caerhays the Brother Vincent SSF Cup.

M. 'Susanna van Veen' (below), whose sumptuous pale violet flower was one of three single blooms that won the Lamellen Cup for Botallick.

Camellia 'Harold L. Paige', a *C. reticulata* hybrid, whose huge brilliant scarlet double bloom won the RHS Camellia Rosemoor Award for Marwood Hill Garden.

Brugmansia suaveolens, normally thought of by most of us as a summer-flowering shrub, impressed with its huge cylindrical orange flowers. Overbeck's Garden was awarded the Alun Edwards Memorial Cup for this exhibit in the Spring Ornamentals competition, repeating their success in this class at the 2020 show.

Last, but certainly not least, in a very well-supported class for ferns, John Lanyon surpassed himself with a beautifully staged vase of *Lophosoria quadripinnata*, with fronds towering to nearly 3m high. This spectacular plant has, over recent years, become the fern that all non-fern growers want to acquire.



The opportunity was also taken at this event for Jim Gardiner VMH to present two prestige RHS awards. Firstly, Seamus O'Brien from Kilmacurragh in Ireland, who was visiting Rosemoor to judge the rhododendron competition, was awarded the Loder Rhododendron Cup to recognise his contribution to the culture and knowledge of the genus. Secondly a remote ceremony was held to present the Jim Gardiner Magnolia Cup to Mark Jury of Tikorangi, New Zealand, to honour his huge contribution to raising fine magnolia hybrids. The ceremony was filmed so that it could be sent to Mark.

The 2022 show season was therefore started in great style and bode well for the shows that followed later in the spring.

Russell Beeson

Notes from a Cornish Garden

Despite working at Glendurgan (right) on and off since 2019, the end of March to early June is a window in the garden calendar that up until this year I'd missed. I'm often found to be singing our year-round interest praises, testifying that if you're a true plantsperson we're more than just another Cornish spring garden. All of which is true. But there really is no denying just how many 'planty' bells and whistles we have going in spring and, from what I've been told by longer standing colleagues, volunteers and regular visitors alike, this year was one of the best. It's quite possible that my expectations for future springs have now been set unrealistically high!

As ever, we were a bit early to the RCM genera spring party. This year we were even further ahead with our early camellias



in particular flowering a good month earlier than usual for us. *Camellia* 'Minato-no-akebono' (below left) was once again a favourite amongst the team – winning us over with prolonged flowering, long held flowers, and graceful habit. Our *Magnolia sargentiana* var. *robusta* (below right) by the pond put on such a show that we couldn't help wondering



how it manages to replenish the energy expended by pushing out so many enormous flowers each year. The rhododendron season is so long that it's easy to forget the earlier flowerers by this point and be wowed by those in more recent, and frequently scented, memory. That said, a favourite this year with visitors has been the scented *R.* 'Countess of Haddington' (below) which sent out flowers



very early in early March, along with specimens in a few other Cornish gardens, and flowered prolifically right through until just a few weeks ago. We have two in close proximity to each other with paths on either side of them, the scent was almost overpowering at times. Personally, I've become intrigued by the origins of our two older *R.* 'Tyermanii' (below) since learning the hybrid was named after and registered by J.S. Tyerman, once



curator of the botanic gardens in Liverpool who in retirement owned Penlee House, Tregony, Cornwall and laid out Kimberly park in Falmouth. Possibly quite a tenuous local link, but an interesting one all the same that I'd like to unpick further.



Spring is a fast-moving exciting time in the garden, with something new out in flower or leaf each day. But there's also a small window of calm from a gardening point of view where the garden almost looks after itself following all the hard work to get ready for reopening, a window that still saw us very busy nonetheless. We were happy to be back hurriedly cutting for the shows at Rosemoor again after the two-year break, hoping that favourites and reliable 'showers' had not gone over or failed to open flowers by the time of cutting. Like a lot of horticulture, showing is as much about the people as it is the plants, and it was fantastic to reconnect face-to-face with so many people while trying make that awkward stem

sit well in a vase and mentally questioning why you'd felt the need to bring five trusses of the same rhododendron 'just in case'.



In the previous newsletter Ned Lomax discussed the importance of collections management, and the ongoing efforts to better understand and catalogue the hugely significant plant collections stewarded by the National Trust. Late March saw the team at Glendurgan support a three-day monograph conference on *Narcissus* (left). The aim of the conference being to deepen our knowledge of the genus whilst also identifying the narcissus collections, some of which are historic, held across our gardens and parklands. For our part, the

Glendurgan team cut, recorded, labelled, and staged by division and colour over 500 different narcissi (right) from various sources across Cornwall, to be used as an identification reference for delegates to compare their own against. It was quite some undertaking but, in the spirit of full disclosure, our intense efforts over those weeks did see us neglect to actually bring any of our own from the garden to the event for identification! However, we do now feel better equipped to attempt identifying them next year.

Back in the garden, we have recently started the final leg of the maze restoration project. With the path foundations and metal edging work of the last section completed over the winter by contractors, it now falls to us to lay down the surface dressing. With weather on our side, we should be on course to finish by early June, in time for the annual maze cut. If we could, we'd order in a cloudy dry day with a slight breeze. It's not the easiest of work getting several tonnes of gravel and 100s of litres of dressing binder into and around a maze on a valley slope by hand, and it can get a little claustrophobic in there on a humid, still day, but it is essential work to preserve a feature that is the absolute heart of Glendurgan.

Nicola Johnson



Topiarised Camellia at Chelsea

As we had returned to the normal Chelsea Flower Show timing of late May in 2022, I was not expecting to find any camellias there. This is not to say that all the camellias had totally finished flowering, but just that they had peaked more than a month before. Mostly we would consider they are history, until the *Sasanqua* season starts in the autumn or the new *Camellia azalea* hybrids come into flower.

I was therefore delighted to see one camellia in a guise we do not see enough of in our gardens – the topiarised option which provides a year-round ornamental feature while still providing flowers. Topiarised camellias are something practised very well by Mark and Abbie Jury in New Zealand, so to see *C. sasanqua* 'Cleopatra' (right) at Chelsea on the RAF Benevolent Fund Garden was exciting. I wonder if it will start a new trend! As the Jurys point out, the small-leaved Sasanquas lend themselves well to topiary and once the shape is created, are easy to maintain.

As can perhaps just about be glimpsed from my photograph, this *C. 'Cleopatra'* was exhibiting its reddish-tinged new growth colouring. This new growth colouring gives the topiary and indeed Sasanquas in general, an extra season of interest, while still providing a neat display.



Designed by John Everiss, this garden was awarded a Silver Medal. The topiarised camellia also demonstrates how the crown can be lifted and a shape created by careful pruning at eye-height, so the shapely trunk is exposed.

To my great surprise, I then espied another camellia close by in the Swiss Sanctuary Garden which was sponsored by various tourism groups from Switzerland and designed by Lilly Gomm. It was at the back of the site so my photographs would not really help you to see any detail; but it was included as a pointer to the famous camellia garden at Locarno which is an ICS Camellia Garden of Excellence such as we have in the South West at Marwood, Trewithen, Mount Edgumbe, Antony Woodland Garden and Trevidden. This Locarno garden will in fact be part of the ICS Post-Congress Tour in March 2023 which will briefly stray over the border from Italy. The Chelsea leaflet said 'the garden is conceived as an imaginary personal sanctuary filled with the unique flora that typifies different regions of the country' [of Switzerland] despite the fact that camellias are not native to Switzerland! Quibbles aside, it was a good-looking, red, single flowered, un-named *C. japonica*.

Caroline Bell

Dates for your Diary

- ♦ 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 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.

Photo credits: by the article author unless otherwise stated

Compiled by Ashley Brent