



RCMG SW Branch News

Autumn 2022

Editor's welcome – Notes from a Devon Garden

Welcome to the latest edition of the regional newsletter. The lawns are finally green again after one of the toughest summers I've ever experienced. Looking back at what I wrote in the spring edition of this newsletter, I couldn't help but chuckle to myself over my complaints about the dry spring that we had had. If only I had known what was in store for us as summer progressed and we repeatedly watched bands of rain and showers skirt west and north of our patch of the South Hams.

It is too early to tell just what the extent of loss will be. Many deciduous trees have shed some leaves, if not all, whilst many shrubs, including evergreens have done the same. The temptation to scrape the bark in search of a glimpse of green life hunkered down in these plants has been ever present. Rather than stress plants even further, we now just have to wait and see what happens in spring before taking full stock of casualties to drought. I know we aren't alone in this pain and I genuinely hope that no-one has suffered any particularly upsetting losses. You won't be surprised to find a recurring theme in this edition.

The positive of the dry weather has been that we have been able to push on with the continued post-Covid catch-up work as well as planned improvements to the garden. You may recall

last year that I wrote about the start of work to renovate the Camellia Garden. This year we carried out phase two of three planned years of work. We've now hard pruned all of the camellias in this area which has opened up further sweeping views down the Dart with a fabulous *Quercus suber* (right). As ever when work of this scale is carried out in a garden, the more we do, the more we find needs doing. All being well,



we will fell the spreading laurel below the garden walls. Doing so will fully open the views from this area and provide the setting for the spring show that will soon replace the current display of sprouting stumps we've made.

It wasn't just the camellias that showed resilience to the dry. Other shrubs continued to thrive and flourish such as another member of Theaceae, *Schima khasiana* (left) which was adding a welcome brightness amongst the green and brown



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

Since I wrote the foreword to our summer newsletter with its talk of abundance, it has all gone downhill. We then had no rain to speak of until the start of September, and the extreme heat and drought this summer has meant that the larger trees here have had first refusal on any moisture that might be in the ground. Even so, a few have unceremoniously dropped their leaves intact in an effort to survive. As a result, the rhododendrons and hydrangeas planted beneath them have shrivelled and are in a very sorry state.

The heavy rain showers we have been having this week have perked things up no end, but may be a bit late for some shrubs and trees.

On a more instructional note, it has been interesting to see which of our genera were more resilient than others, and the rhododendrons have definitely suffered the most. Camellias have been fine and so have the evergreen magnolias, under which heading I include michelias, manglietias and others. Many of the deciduous magnolias have behaved as the other trees and dropped their leaves. It will be interesting to see what bud set there is on them for next spring.

The photograph shows my forty-year-old *Rhododendron* Loderi Group with shrivelled dryness lower down, but the rain has restored the growth at the top. The live sections of the rhododendrons will sprout again, but this may result in rather strangely shaped bushes which will need tidying up next year when the extent of the drought will be revealed.

John Marston



John Mann

John Mann, who died peacefully at home on 12 September, was a well recognised figure in the South West Branch with a lovely garden which he had created at his home near Launceston. Not only did he have many rhododendrons and magnolias, but also many other species of plants artfully placed. A friend and veterinary colleague writes: "He was a larger than life country veterinary surgeon of the old school. I imagine he was a bit of a character in the gardening world also. He was also a model railway fanatic, with a massive layout at home with extraordinarily detailed and realistic landscapes and townscapes – all of which he created himself".

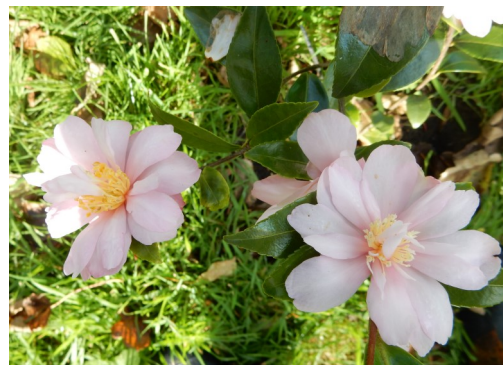
He and Gilly, his wife, not only attended our shows regularly, but always made sure they were there at the end to help with the clearing up; a good example of the practical help they gave to the branch over very many years. His good humour and smiling mischievous face will be missed at our meetings. Our love and sympathy extends to Gilly and family at this difficult time.

John Marston

Camellias in Early Autumn

One of the joys of autumn amongst the nerines and liquidambars and other coloured foliage is the start of the *Camellia sasanqua* season. When I first started to grow them I anticipated their flowers in October and was disappointed when it was November.

However, I now grow three cultivars which start flowering in late September. They are pink, double flowering *Camellia* 'Agnes O. Solomon' (right), white, single *C.* 'Kenkyo' and white, edged pink, single *C.* 'Rainbow Variegated'; the last has a stable variegated leaf and burgundy new growth as a bonus.



Sometimes scented *C. 'Sparkling Burgundy'* AGM opens a flower just before the start of October. Weeping *C. 'Polar Ice'* (left), a *C. oleifera* hybrid bred in USA by Ackerman, can also start flowering in the last week of September with its good, pinky-bronze new growth colour often still visible amidst a pretty, white, double flower. But the usual star of September is *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis*; I cannot register its faint scent, but it draws in the bees and wasps.



We also have the excitement of finding seed on our camellias, which is gradually ripening. Seedpods on camellias can be visually interesting and ornamental. This year I have bright crimson pods on the Japonica *C. 'Scented Red'* (below left) and cream-turning-pink pods of 11cm diameter on the species *Camellia yunnanensis* (below centre) which came from Trehane's. One of my hardy Reticulata species plants ex Marwood sets fertile seed inside golf ball sized pods, one of which is currently 19cm in circumference. Birds have tried to peck at them without success as they are so dense and woody (below right). Neither its fellow species Reticulata or *C. reticulata* hybrids, such as *C. 'Diamond Head'* and *C. 'Royalty'*, have such large capsules. But I find the pink or crimson coloured seedpods more interesting visually.



Caroline Bell

Notes from a Cornish Garden

When I last wrote we were about to embark on the last leg of completing the maze path work renovations. I'm happy to report that the finishing post was indeed reached on time, and with minimal complications! I think I speak for the whole team when I say it's a relief, and with no small sense of satisfaction, to have that chapter in the garden's history closed. As custodians of an historic garden feature it's comforting to have further protected the longevity of the maze, and we can now turn our fuller attentions to the conservation and development of other areas in the garden. Though currently we are in the thick of finishing up hedge cutting, and the annual summer strim across our many sloped meadows, so other developments will start in earnest later in the autumn.

Having spoken previously about not experiencing a Glendurgan spring until this year, I am now back into more familiar seasonal territory. However, as with any garden of size, it is easy to miss plants and a few that flowered back in May/June at the time of writing the last newsletter really shouldn't be left unmentioned. Having already been drawn to the wonderfully exotic looking, chunky foliage of *Rhododendron hemisleyanum* (right) it was lovely to find the large trusses of white scented flowers didn't disappoint. In early June, after flowering for the first time only last year,





our *Magnolia foveolata* flowered again. Frustratingly, the few flowers were too high to photograph! But we did manage to get one flower down last year and spent quite some time debating what the scent reminded us of. I think Hubba Bubba bubble gum!

Perhaps the most exciting flowering to come from our three genera this year has been *Rhododendron kawakamii* (left). Planted into the top of a fallen *Thuja* stump last year, this little Taiwanese *Pseudovireya* appears to have established well, putting on a good show of dainty waxy yellow flowers in late June/early July. Bean states it is the “hardest of Vireyas, capable of withstanding several degrees of frost”. We don’t tend to get prolonged deep frosts here, more likely a late frost to catch out spring growth, so lower temperatures shouldn’t be too much of a concern for us. In fact, the converse has been more of an issue in recent months as we found ourselves, like many, in repeated periods of heat and dry well beyond our average range.

When we talk about ‘gardening on the edge,’ of pushing boundaries, we often associate it with how much cold a plant may tolerate. Cornish gardens have a strong tradition of experimenting with just how much we can get away with when it comes to the more exotic and tender plants, and it’s always lovely to hear visitors exclaim disbelief at what we can keep in the ground all year round. But we are in fact, or have been, a mild temperate climate with a relatively narrow temperature range, and reliably moist-bordering-soggy at times. The edge that has been pushed for us recently is the heat and dry tolerance of some of our

traditional Cornish woodland planting. Thankfully, we appear to have had very few fatalities so far, but some plants are still looking concerningly wilted despite recent rains, and we’re yet to see what possible longer term impact these stresses may have had on them and if a repeat next year would be a test too far. We’ll certainly be watching our spring-flowering shrubs and trees expectantly next spring.

Of course, at this time of year as we head into autumn, we rely quite heavily on hydrangeas for late summer flower interest, and they have fared varyingly against the conditions with some of our *Hydrangea macrophylla* and *H. serrata* really struggling. On a more positive note, the *H. aspera* (right) have coped much better and are currently flowering beautifully. And some of our plants have positively thrived. We’re not sure if the bananas, sited in spots where the ground has retained



some moisture, have ever looked better (left) thanks to many weeks of sun and low winds!

It really has highlighted the importance of good planting practices for successful establishment, alongside selecting the best location for long-term plant survival. We’ve also been prompted to refer to and reassess our list of significant plants as we prioritised watering across the garden. All of which is back to the basics of good gardening and stewardship; plant things well and know the importance of the collection you are looking after.

Nicola Johnson

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.

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Compiled by Ashley Brent