



# RCMG SW Branch News

Summer 2021

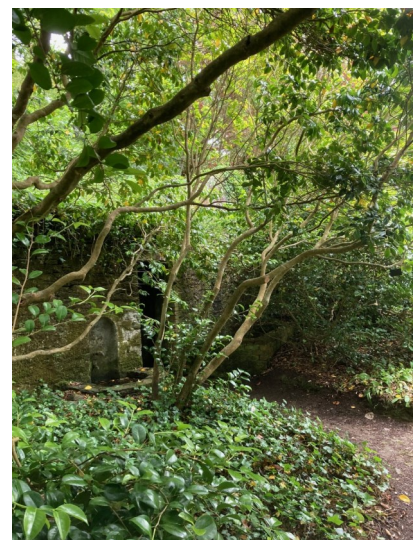
## Editor's welcome – Notes from a Devon Garden

Welcome to the latest edition of the regional newsletter. I wanted to start by thanking the numerous people who messaged me regarding my rhododendron conundrum from the previous edition: the specimen incorrectly labelled as *Rhododendron fortunei*. It has now been correctly identified as *R. 'Fortune'*, the hybrid of *R. falconeri* and *R. sinogrande*. The response highlights one of the reasons why I so enjoy this group: the freely offered combined knowledge of many minds leaves me humbled. I have learned an immense amount from so many of you and yet am aware that I have significantly more still to learn – one of the greatest joys of our genera are their breadth and depth.

Summer poses a challenge regarding subject matter based around the gardens in my care and our three genera. This time around I have it slightly easier as my team and I have been undertaking significant restoration work in the Camellia Garden at Greenway.

One of the older features in the garden, the Camellia Garden, has been in desperate need of a bit of renovation. Old photos and maps show the area as a fairly open space with camellias and lawns. More recently, it has been a rather dark space with a path fighting its way through overgrown and collapsing shrubs whose flowers were often impossible to appreciate as they were above head height (*right*).

It contains some wonderfully old specimens. One of my volunteers patiently did some ring counting to determine that some of the older shrubs are approaching 90 years, so it was with slight trepidation that we made the first cuts. We have now finished all the hard pruning that we will undertake this year and the result is fairly dramatic (*below left*). We now have a list of not unexpected secondary work.



Over the next two years, we will work to prune the remaining camellias in this area, remove some of the newer plantings that are overcrowding the older specimens and reinstate lawn to provide an area for visitors to pause and enjoy the garden.

It's not just camellias that makes their home here. Pruning work has already highlighted a magnificent *Quercus suber* that was lost amongst the camellia foliage. A large, sprawling *Gevuina avellana* requires significant but careful thinning to reveal the *Magnolia doltsopa* that is hidden away.

To really highlight the camellias in their designed setting, we will also work to tidy and consolidate the planting to the rear of this area to highlight the magnificent avenue of *Tilia x europaea* that provides a bold backdrop.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. Please do continue to feedback comments and suggestions. They are all gratefully received as are any contributions you may have. If you wish to discuss an idea for an article before committing to writing, please feel free to get in touch with me ([ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk)), John Marston or Pam Hayward who will be happy to talk over any ideas.

Ashley Brent



## Branch Chairman's Foreword

Fecundity, floribundance, heat then torrential rain have been keeping everything growing wildly. It has been difficult to keep up with nature this year. In the garden here, the excitement has been the first proper flowering of *Magnolia cathcartii* (syn. *Alcimandra cathcartii*) (right) collected on Fan Si Pan mountain in North Vietnam. It has beautiful flowers with prominent rose red stamens like long eyelashes. *Magnolia conifera* var. *chingii* (below) has also been flowering well although its flowers turn brown after a few days. The very talented Japanese botanical artist Masumi Yamanaka has made an exquisite painting of it for the next edition of Curtis's *Botanical Magazine*.



We have not finished with our rhododendrons yet in the garden as *Rhododendron glanduliferum* has many buds waiting and ready to open at the end of the month. We have had abundant flowering on *R. decorum* ssp. *diaprepes* followed by *R. 'Polar Bear'* wafting sweet scent about the place.

On the subject of North Vietnam, we are looking forward to our Autumn Meeting at Rosemoor when we welcome Richard Baines all the way from Logan Botanic Garden, which has just been awarded 'best garden in the UK' by

readers of *Which?* magazine. The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh has recently published Richard's book on his plant hunting trip in North Vietnam which will be the subject of his talk.

I hope you have a great summer and I hope to see you in October.

John Marston

## Rhododendrons at Old Glebe

We are incredibly fortunate to have moved in October last year to the Old Glebe in Eggesford, where Nigel and June Wright lived and gardened for more than 40 years. Nigel planted over 30 borders and island beds with hundreds of different rhododendrons. There are also spring bulbs, herbaceous borders, a kitchen garden, numerous specimen trees, a wonderful bank of magnolias and a series of pools flowing into a lake with a Monet bridge to a tiny island. I wish I could offer any assurance that Nigel's wonderful rhododendron collection is in safe hands but I'm afraid we previously gardened on very chalky soil. Our only relevant experience is two camellias in tubs of ericaceous compost.

The versatility of rhododendrons was evident from our first Christmas (right). From then on, all through early spring we had one or two more rhododendrons in bloom each week, but it was only in May that we fully appreciated what a rhododendron treasure trove the garden is. The critical visitor might think they are now a bit too close together and that the colours are somewhat overwhelming but, taken as a whole, the effect is a joyous, dazzling display.





We were late seeking help with identification this year. Most had already finished blooming by the time we thought to ask local branch committee members, the Bucknells and the Danns, to visit. They have been wonderfully generous with their time and vast knowledge and expertise. A return visit to Botallick was inspirational.

CRATION	COLOR	PHOTOS	COLOR	PARENTAGE	RAISED	DATE	NAME	LOCATION	Height
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They have started us off with re-labelling. Finding any surviving old labels entails battling through brambly undergrowth in now overcrowded beds, frequently only to find that the lettering has long ago worn away. Often though, even a discernible letter or two was enough for the visiting experts to reinforce a conclusion. Or settle a disagreement where opinions differed!

The Wrights kindly left various old undated sketch plans, annual stock lists and a marvellous 'A to Z of Rhodo Locations in the Garden' (left) (curiously, the backs of old cereal packets were often used by Nigel instead of standard stationery!) but these offer only tantalizing hints of the specimens that were once, but may or may not still be, in the garden. We know that many mature specimens and even whole beds were sold at the height of the nursery business.

And it is not as easy as just walking over to, for example, 'Outer Circle West' and looking for a listed specimen because we haven't yet worked out where 'Outer Circle West' is/was.

In its heyday, there were 11 nursery beds, ordered by colour, and a series of net tunnels filled with young plants for sale. Nearing Frames were used to take up to 1,000 cuttings each year. This had all been dismantled years ago. Most of the best remaining potted rhododendrons were sold before we moved in. But there were dozens of straggly, unhealthy-looking specimens left in small pots in the nursery area, typically with a metre of stem and three or four leaves at the top. I potted on about 50 using ericaceous compost (right), to David Dann's immense relief, and lots of grit.

I had come to the reluctant conclusion that the remaining specimens in tiny pots weren't worth saving. But when they all started to flower and put on new growth, how could I compost them? It was helpfully suggested that I at least get them out of the pots and into the old nursery beds. Which first involved weeding the nursery beds. I doubt that any of them will ever be very good specimens themselves but perhaps it might be possible to take cuttings from anything interesting.

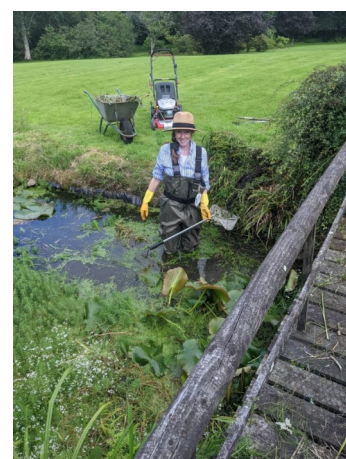
Even with my newfound but sincere enthusiasm for rhododendrons, the 'yak bed' is under review. Immediately outside the kitchen French windows, blocking a potentially beautiful view down to the ponds and off into the rolling Devon hills, are 35 *Rhododendron yakushmanum* hybrids planted in

a circle, now about 2.5 metres high (left). I had blithely thought we would thin them out/take out every other one/move them. But having seen them all in full flower, I can't think which we could do without. Unfortunately other family members have different ideas!

What an unexpected retirement project! We have a library of rhododendron literature to assimilate, hundreds of plants to identify, all aspects of propagation to learn. Not forgetting the pond weed (right)....



Joanne Court





## Notes from a Cornish Garden

The school summer holidays are here and they bring with them a huge boom in visitor numbers, both to Glendurgan Garden and the local area. There appears to be a real appetite for a return to normality and the relaxation that a good holiday can bring. Life isn't quite normal yet however, and the implications of continued limitations on foreign travel mean that Cornwall is absolutely heaving at the moment!

One of the few advantages of social distancing restrictions over the past year or so has been that Glendurgan's famous, historic maze has been closed to visitors, giving the hedges a chance to recover and the garden team the opportunity to continue with our renovation programme. Over the past few months, stone steps have replaced collapsing wooden risers and more robust path surfaces have been installed. With only one more section to complete, hopefully during the course of this winter, the maze is currently open once again and delighting our guests. Glendurgan has always been a family garden with a real sense of fun, so it's great to hear laughter in the garden and to see people enjoying themselves.

I must admit that I find this busy time of the year a little stressful though. All gardens are fragile in nature and this is particularly the case for an historic garden such as ours. I try to avoid the carpark rather than witness the destruction caused by cars parked on lawns (and flower beds), and I can't help but notice the inevitable wear and tear created by heavy use of the garden and its infrastructure. The maze and the small beach, where the garden joins the Helford river, are the main draw for our visitors and it sometimes feels as if the garden and plant collection are a little forgotten. I'm sure we are all guilty of allowing our passion for rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias to wane over the summer months, particularly when on a family holiday, but for those with a keen eye there are still plenty of horticultural delights to enjoy.

I've particularly enjoyed seeing *Rhododendron auriculatum*, *R. 'Polar Bear'*, *R. serotinum*, *R. chihsinianum* and *R. kyawii* flowering over the last few weeks. *Magnolia figo*, *M. delavayi* and *M. grandiflora* have put on an equally good show, and let's not forget that, whilst flowers may be sparse over the summer months, foliage displays can also be spectacular. We have a particularly fine young *R. falconeri* ssp. *eximium* showing its dark chocolate coloured flush of leaves at the moment, and the coppery new growth of our *R. nutallii* is simply beautiful. Of course, all these small things, whether they are noticed or not, contribute towards the greater enjoyment gained from time spent outside in beautiful surroundings. An in-depth chat about horticultural issues with a visitor can be very rewarding for me, but so too can be witnessing simple pleasure derived from a stroll through gardens to a beach. That is something I wouldn't begrudge anyone, no matter how bad their parking is!

Ned Lomax

## Camellia news

As it is high summer, we are not exactly in the season for camellia flowers, but rather preparing with lots of watering for the sasanquas and those species such as *Camellia sinensis* which flower in autumn – or so you would think! First, I found a flower out on *C. 'Freedom Bell'* (right) at the end of July and it has never flowered in summer before; this is unlike say *C. 'Aaron's Ruby'* and *C. 'Konronkoku'* which can have an occasional summer flower. Both camellias had stopped flowering completely in May and isn't it interesting that it seems to be the red ones that give you the odd flowers unexpectedly. Last year it was *C. 'Black Lace'*'s odd double buds flowering which of course took the biscuit. These occasional summer flowers also seem to happen in Japan as I have just learnt recently from reading the translated book, *Japoneira* by Takeo Ogawa sent out to those who had to cancel attendance at the Goto Camellia Congress of 2020 due to the pandemic.



If we cannot have flowers out on our camellias, we can at least have a temporary, colourful decoration from a clematis.



It is not like decorating the Christmas tree, as these living plants are quixotic and spread out differently each year and I do not usually have time to train them. The one that has given a good display here this year is *Clematis viticella* 'Betty Corning' (far left) which is a chalk-blue colour and not only floriferous for me: it was looking particularly fetching amongst the roses in Rosemoor's Rose Garden on my sole visit there in 20 months in early July. But I now have a display from *C. viticella* 'White Magic' (left) which always seems to flower slightly later, and this year it is straddling two camellias rather pleasingly. It has small, nodding, white flowers.



My real reason for writing is that I want to share about the soon and coming arrival of true summer-flowering camellias with *Camellia azalea* hybrids (formerly *C. changii*) from China. The first one to reach us, I think, is called rather effusively *C. '1001 Summer Nights' Jasmine* and it is being sold by Thompson & Morgan. A few of us are having a go with it and may not get flowers this year, and it is certainly not a cheap exercise. However, I am hopeful that we will be able to see it in flower at the Chelsea Flower Show in the week starting 20 September on the International Camellia Society stand, either in person or on television if the television gardening gurus at Chelsea spot a novelty and record it for us!

Failing that, we will be able to learn more when our 2022 Yearbook comes out, as an American lady botanist by the name of Dr Brenda Litchfield will be writing for us about her tour of the nursery and breeding programme of Dr Gao in China who re-discovered this summer-flowering (and potentially all-year round flowering) camellia species in China in 1985. Gao left his professorship at Kunming Institute of Botany to devote himself to hybridisation and a goodly number of his hybrids have been registered with the International Camellia Register, with many more to come.



The only other plants to note from our genera here are *Rhododendron* 'Polar Bear' (above) which is currently having a good year, with scent as ever to please, as is *Magnolia grandiflora*; but *M. virginiana* 'Moonglow' (left) (name changed to *M. 'Jim Wilson'* according to the *Plant Finder*) has flowered late this year. It is growing in permanently moist soil close to a bog garden and the flowers are much smaller than *M. grandiflora*. Although the evergreen leaves are leathery and shiny, they are not as large or magnificent as *M. grandiflora*. It is rather aptly named *M. 'Moonglow'* as the flower is a dull, waxy lemon-white, as in my photo, and the scent is also 'lemony'.

Having listened to John on his Youtube Gorwell garden tour numbered July part 2, on the subject of small differences in *R. 'Polar Bear'*, I should report that I duly observed mine, being as I freely admit, wholly ignorant of the subtleties of rhododendrons. At around 23 years old, mine has a tinged green throat and a small apricot mark opposite that, and a rather frilly flower as seen in my photograph (right); it is a 10 x 8 foot floriferous specimen in part shade which is a highly scented joy, and it sometimes wafts in moist air.

*Caroline Bell*



## Books for Sale for Branch Funds

The South West Branch is very grateful to Philip Evans' widow Elaine for her generous donation of books to be sold for branch funds.

I am preparing a list which will be available by email to any branch member who is interested in making a purchase. I can then either post the books (at cost) or bring them to the Autumn Meeting in October for collection.

Philip's collection includes all manner of plant hunting titles, all good reading copies; many different rhododendron, camellia and magnolia titles and other plant related reference works. Send me an email ([pam@woodtown.net](mailto:pam@woodtown.net)) if you would like to see the list or have a particular book you are looking for.

Any unsold titles will be brought to the Autumn Meeting and thereafter offered to the main Group.

*Pam Hayward*

## Dates for your Diary

- ◆ 30 October 2021 – Autumn meeting at Rosemoor.
- ◆ 12/13 March 2022 – Rosemoor Spring Show including RHS Early Camellia Competition and SW Branch Magnolia, Ornamental Plant and Rhododendron competitions
- ◆ 23/24 April 2022 – Rosemoor National Rhododendron Show including RHS Main Rhododendron Competition and SW Branch Camellia, Floral Display and Magnolia competitions

## Plant Swap Shop

Please do send in lists of plants that you wish to make available to other branch members to [ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto: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? Or have something that you're keen to share with the group?

Please send any contributions, no matter how short or long, including photographs to [ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk).

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Compiled by Ashley Brent