



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Andy Simons - Chairman

Chairman's Report

I know the recent introduction of direct debit has caused many of us to review the benefits of group membership and whilst we have had a very good take up of several hundred, I am sorry that some have felt it time to say goodbye to the group. In many ways it is of great interest to me that the reasons given for leaving have not really been the direct debit itself but a range of other less tangible factors.

It is important for us all to understand what we want from the group, I say "us all" because as we are a group it is only through the efforts of us all that the benefits of membership can be delivered. I know that I have asked myself, but I do need you to tell me or the group committee what you want from the group, after all we only exist to support our mutual interest. Following this theme I need to come down to the more tangible issue of support to the group. As you know the work of the group is conducted by volunteers from within the membership; editors, treasurer and a range of other jobs need to be done to keep the group flowing forwards. You equally know that I and others have communicated the difficulties in obtaining people to fill these roles.

What I am asking is for you all to consider if you could make some form of contribution to group activities of any sort

It is now time for me to make this request once more; however I do not want to ask for a volunteer to fill a specific job or dedicate so many hours a week to group activity. What I am asking is for you all to consider if you could make some form of contribution to group activities of any sort; this could be filling a few envelopes once a year all the way to a committee role and everything in between. Please do not think expressing an interest now is committing you to anything. I am just trying to gauge the level of fundamental interest in "pitching in".

PLEASE DO THINK ABOUT THIS, AND PASS ON YOUR SUGGESTIONS TO YOUR BRANCH CHAIRMAN or to me or the Vice-chairmen of the group.

On the subject of the group's relationship with the RHS all I can provide is an update.

The Partnership agreement has been under development for the last few months and we remain close to getting to a draft that is suitable for consideration by the committee and membership.



Autumn colour at Wespelaar, Belgium (Just before the storm on the 28th October) See Tour Report on page two. Photo: The Editor

My pessimistic earlier assessment was I think too severe and things are moving forward. Unfortunately this has effectively been the same situation since the spring, we are held up on some seemingly minor issues which, unless fully resolved, place the group in some potentially difficult legal positions. I am confident that this situation will be resolved but it may take yet another season to achieve.

Turning to plant matters I think we have had a good season, if not the one I had perhaps hoped for. The Camellias are already showing good buds, however my largest *Magnolia grandiflora* (not a named form) has been somewhat disappointing. Despite all the good weather I have had hardly any flowers during the summer and yet now as I write in early October it has started to flower with several blooms and buds to come; clearly the wood was not maturing as rapidly as one would have expected from the summer?

I will leave you for this year with hopes for a mild winter, but not so mild as to disrupt the flowering.

Andy Simons

EDITOR'S NOTES

John Rawling

As members are already aware, I am retiring as honorary editor of the Bulletin, with this issue. Please do contact me if you are interested in assisting or improving the Group Bulletin, with this enjoyable task

Please let me know if you would be interested in taking over. I have much enjoyed encouraging a wider knowledge of the cultivation and showing of our three genera and keeping members in touch with what is happening in the Group and worldwide.

I shall be happy and very pleased to assist a new Editor, in the processes I have adopted over the years, both in collecting items obtaining the proofing, arranging the artwork, the printing and the distribution of the Bulletin.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The Group publishes your letters, articles, reports from branches, future events etc, to keep the members up to date!

It is hoped that a new Editor may be appointed shortly. In the meantime please send items to the present incumbent

for the next issue No.114

Please send to: John Rawling, Hon. Bulletin Editor,
The Spinney, Station Road, Woldingham, Surrey, CR3 7DD.
E-mail: jr.eye@virgin.net or telephone 01883 653341

NEW EVENT

WISLEY SPRING SHOW 2014

Make a note in your diary now! The RHS Early Rhododendron, Main Camellia, and Spring Ornamental Competitions will be held at RHS Wisley on the weekend of 12th and 13th April 2014, at the start of the Wisley Spring Gardening Week.

The Committee is working hard to produce a Show at Wisley to rival the great success at Rosemoor over the past few years. There will also be new Magnolia classes in the Spring Ornamental Schedule.

We have managed to get commitments to exhibit from many of the key Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia gardens in the South, including Exbury, Nymans, Borde Hill, Windsor, Isabella Plantation at Richmond so with some good Spring weather there should be a fantastic display.

To make this a key Show in the South East, we need as many Group members as possible to help in exhibiting, stewarding, manning the Group display stand and recruiting new members to make this a really good event.

Wisley is a great location with easy access off the M25 and A3 roads and there will be dedicated exhibitor parking near to the Show marquees to make staging precious exhibits as easy as possible. Staging will be on the Friday pm and Saturday am. New exhibitors will be particularly welcomed, and help will be available to them from the Stewards.

Do come and support us!

TOUR REPORT

Report of the JOINT TOUR TO BELGIUM

INTERNATIONAL CAMELLIA SOCIETY and THE RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA AND MAGNOLIA GROUP

It was a select group of 10 members who met Pat and Herb Short at St Pancras International station on 24th October for the smooth journey on Eurostar to Brussels and onwards to Leuven in Belgium. Luise Wolff-Boresch joined us from Germany, to make a lucky thirteen staying at the very comfortable Begijnhof Congress Hotel which Pat had organised for us in Leuven.

The first day dawned grey and dull and it drizzled as we piled into the minibus and travelled through the morning traffic to the gardens of the domain **Groenenberg**. This charming house was built around 1900 and the garden laid out soon afterwards. Landscape architect Edmond Galoppin designed six lines of sight from the house to major parts of the park and five 'vistas' remain today. After the second World War the house was uninhabitable and was subsequently sold to the Flemish Government, who have restored the garden and building.

So since 1981, the state has set to, to reopen the vistas which were overgrown and reveal or replace all the grand trees from 1900, over an area of 45 hectares. Hardy Ghent azaleas, hydrangeas, camellias, tree paeonies and witch hazel were planted. As well as the fine landscape, nearer the house there are collections of rhododendrons and azaleas, and some camellias, including *Camellia sasanqua* beginning to flower for our visit, although the planting has to focus on shelter for its camellias in view of their very cold winters – minus 20 centigrade last year.

The rain stopped during the morning and we progressed to domain **Het Leen**. The whole domain has 265 hectares of woodland and families and schools are encouraged to make use of the open space for exercise and games. The arboretum is known for its genera of *Magnolia*, *Viburnum*, *Rhododendron* and *Camellia*. There were many good things to see, including a walled garden with little (and larger) treasures which despite the shelter of the walls have to be brought under cover during the winter to protect them from those low temperatures. This garden contained my first sight of a *Gordlinia* tree, produced from a cross between *Franklinia alatamaha* and *Gordonia lasianthus*. Autumn flowering, with rich leaf colouring, the flowers had a wonderful boss of golden stamens amid the white petals.

Het Leen are applying for recognition as an International Camellia Garden of Excellence, and supporters and local ICA members, as well as staff, were in attendance to support this project, to welcome the visitors and ensure that we saw as much as we could. There is a significant woodland walkway through plantings of camellias, with associated plants to complement them. ICA member, Belgian Marc de Coninck explained that because of the low winter temperatures, the young camellias remain in pots and only when they are 5 years old are they considered tough enough to be planted out. There was a demonstration of propagation and well stocked greenhouses of camellias at various sizes were admired. The plants in the woodland walkway were mature and healthy and all carefully labelled to inform.

Early on Saturday morning most of the group visited the

Leuven Botanic Garden, which is the oldest in Belgium and associated with the university medical department. This delightful small garden, surrounded by blocks of apartments and offices is full of a wide range of plants – trees, shrubs and around 800 plants – herbaceous, alpiners and even water plants, all named, laid out in one metre squares. Some of the shrubs including rhododendrons were in full flower – including *R. 'Elizabeth'*.

Then we set out for the **Kalmthout Arboretum**. Kalmthout is well known throughout Europe and is noted for its autumn colour. Mark de Coninck, with his wife, came to join us again. We were guided by Bie Wouters, who told us that, at 83, this was her last guiding walk, but she had translated and helped the late Jelena de Belder, the creator of the present garden, to write books and keep records on the garden, and later had been her co-author. Some of us could recall a previous visit when Jelena de Belder, with Bie as translator, had entertained the group for tea so there were happy memories.

For the first 100 years, from 1800, the arboretum grew only evergreens so the largest trees are *Cupressus*, *Abies*, *Pinus* etc. We enjoyed a particularly fine *Picea breweriana*, the weeping spruce.

In 1900 the accent was on shrubs and from 1950, Jelena de Belder and her husband Robert, ran the nursery and developed the garden, first living in the house at Kalmthout and then moving to a larger property to have a bigger garden. Jelena grew everything from seed, not cuttings, and collected all over the world to bring back seeds to plant. She planted many fine trees and gave them the space to fully develop. In the mild sunshine for our visit the autumn colour was spectacular, with *Hamamelis intermedia*, a variety of acers, many *stewartias*, magnolias, *liriodendrons* and a *Sassafras* tree, which visitors liked for its polymorphic/variable leaf form.

We finished the day at Ypres, where we attended the Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate. On a warm dry Saturday evening the little town and the ceremony were crowded with young and old of several nationalities and it was pleasing to see the involvement of the young people in the ceremony.

On Sunday we were guided round the **National Botanic Garden** at Meise by the enthusiastic Marianne Koch. By now the weather had changed again to high wind and part of the garden was not open to us, for safety reasons. Two trees had already fallen. But there was plenty to see on other paths in this 42 hectare garden and the autumn colour was again dazzling, with *Liquidambar styraciflua*, acers and all the many fruiting shrubs and trees lining the paths. *Sorbus*, with pink, white or red berries and *Euonymus* with pink/orange spindles (*hamiltonianus*?) were a particular pleasure and with well labelled plants we were able to identify the purple berries of *Callicarpa bodinieri* and the huge blackberry-like fruits of *Eleutherococcus henryii*. When we retreated to safety in the glass Plant Palace, we saw *Camellia sasanqua* in flower and our guide's special interest in cacti and succulents was revealed. There were few camellias in the garden but Marianne was able to tell us that Meise plans to start a *Camellia* species collection in the near future, to be planted in the open.

We then moved to the **Wespelaar Arboretum**, a much newer creation, where from 1985 Philippe de Spoelberch developed collections of *Magnolia*, *Acer* and *Rhododendron* among many rare plants in the 20 hectares. With shelter from the early stands of oak planted in 1933, the autumn colour was in full swing here too, and our helpful guide, Joka Ossaer, pointed out the ginger and gold *Pseudolarix amabilis*, *Tetradium danielli* with its 'elephant legs', wonderful red nyssas reflected in the lake and



Pretty pink *Euonymus*

Photo: The Editor

golden *Carya glabra* (hickory), the poor man's pecan. *Parrotia persica* was also showing a wonderful red glow and *Euonymus*, *stewartias* and *acers* provided their full share of the colour.

Philippe's interest in magnolias, especially the yellows from *Magnolia acuminata*, is well known to the RCM group and we were pleased to spot these among the magnolia plantings, as well as the many different hybrid *Magnolia xsoulangiana*. The party was also pleased to encounter a *Franklinia alatamaha*, a *Camellia* relative. One of the parents of the *Gordlinia*, it is believed to be extinct in its native Georgia, USA and exists only in situations such as this. Named after Benjamin Franklin, it is slightly tender and vulnerable to *Phytophthora*, so to stand before this healthy small tree, with the white flowers with golden stamens starting to open, and in full autumn colour, was a rare treat.

All visitors were grateful for the support that Marc de Coninck gave to the group to enhance our visit and wish him well with the tremendous work he is doing to promote the Belgian National *Camellia* Collection at Het Leen. And at our final dinner we all thanked Pat, who with Herb, plans and delivers these lovely tours and even managed dry(ish) weather for us, despite their many other commitments.

Ros Rawling

SPRING TOUR 2014

'INFORMAL' GROUP SPRING TOUR 2014 - offer to MEMBERS

Judith Hallett (Past Tours Organiser)

In Spring 2014 Miranda Gunn and I are planning a short trip to Bremen, Germany, primarily to view Hartwig Schepker's collection of hardy hybrids in Bremen Rhododendron Park, the Rhodofest in Westerstede and Walter Schmalscheidt's collection of old English hybrids.

When Hartwig Schepker saw Miranda's article in the 2011 Yearbook (see page 113) on the group's collection of hardy hybrids held at Ramster he offered to help by supplying scions from his vast collection. Miranda chose a few she had been searching for and Hartwig was able to supply them. David Millais has now grafted the scions and is bringing them on. Hartwig declined payment for the scions but said he would love the group to visit him and his collection: hence our enthusiasm to include Bremen Rhododendron Park in this tour.

We shall fly out on Tuesday 20 May and return on Friday 23 May, staying in Bremen on Tuesday night and Bad Zwischenahn

on Wednesday and Thursday nights. We anticipate this will be a good time to see spring flowering of our favourite plants.

Proposed itinerary: **Tuesday 20 May** Arrive in Bremen

Wednesday 21 May Morning visit to Bremen Botanic Garden with Hartwig Schepker. then travel to Bad Zwischenahn during the afternoon.

Thursday 22 May Visit Rhodofest in Westerstede & Hobbie Nursery

Friday 23 May Visit Park der Garten (Walter Schmalscheidt's collection) and return to UK in the afternoon.

Members would be most welcome to join us for this mini tour, leaving individuals to book their own flights and hotels, while we organise the visits to nurseries, gardens etc. If there is enough interest we could hire a minibus rather than use trains and taxis while we are there.

Please note that hotels in Westerstede are already very full, so do book as soon as possible.

RHODODENDRONS

David Millais

ANOTHER GOLD FOR RHODODENDRONS AT CHELSEA!

Behind the scenes with Millais Nurseries at the
Centenary RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2013

The Centenary of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show provided enough inspiration for us to return to Chelsea in 2013, and promote our favourite plants. Chelsea is a huge commitment for any nursery, but with only 3 full-time and 2 part-time staff, and the peak season at the nursery, then the pressure is really on!

100 years ago Rhododendrons were beginning their ascendance to their heights of popularity, so the Chelsea Centenary seemed an ideal way to re-ignite that interest, and give the Press a good story about the collection of Rhododendrons from the wild and their introduction into British gardens. Our staff had a brain storming session to bring out the theme for our exhibit, and ideas such as '100 years of Rhododendrons', explorers, species, Nepal, Sherpa, Himalayan valley, breeders, and plants from each decade emerged. From these ideas, the circular design with a Nepali rest wall was conceived and drawn up for consideration. Applications to exhibit at Chelsea have to be made to the RHS Shows Department during the previous year, and you are advised if successful in late October.

The letter advising that our design was successful was received with excitement, tempered with a fair degree of trepidation. Straight away we started to select the best budded and best shaped plants to move under a little protection to keep the worst of the winter frosts off the buds, as every pip is vital. To cater for the vagaries of the weather, we had to reserve a range of key specimen plants that would normally flower from early to late May. We knew from experience that we would only use about one third of them on the day. This year we must have reserved more than £20,000 worth of plants.

While the plants quietly waited to shine in their moment of glory, Show preparations continued, such as producing a new catalogue and associated printing. Press Releases to gain the attention of commissioning authors and TV producers, Risk Assessments and vast amounts of forms to complete for the RHS, and sourcing 'props' for our exhibit.

We tried to find some fibreglass rocks like those used locally for the recent filming of James Bond – *Skyfall*, but in the end realised the only way was to use genuine stone, - all 600kg of it, which necessitated another van journey up and down to Chelsea. An historic rucksack and a genuine wooden trekking box were sourced from Ebay, and we were about to import a sherpa's basket from Kathmandu when friends of friends found a genuine antique one in a shop in North Wales.

As the season progressed it was obvious that most of the flowers were blooming 10-14 days later than usual. In the 2 weeks before Chelsea, we moved many plants from glasshouse to shade and back again as the weather changed from bright and sunny to cold and grey. With the use of Blackmoor Fruit Nurseries' coldstore preserving some varieties at 1.6°C, we thought we were on target for perfect blooms for Monday judging, but during the cold week before Chelsea all the flower buds stopped moving, even under glass, and we really wondered if we had enough plants to make a proper display. It was a very stressful time, but we turned up the heat and turned on our high pressure sodium lights and just managed to get some key plants to open in time.

In desperation we walked around the garden and the nursery looking for 'spare' plants that could be used. As is often the case, we found some plants that hadn't made the grade in December had now turned into Cinderella and looked wonderful, while those we had spent hours trying to time to perfection had failed to shine!



In progress . . .

Photo: David Millais

The RHS Shows department built a basic wooden stand, which we had to 'modify' to accommodate our porter's rest wall. We started building the wall on the Tuesday before the Show.

On Wednesday we selected key specimen plants to use which included a 2.4 metre specimen of *Rhododendron sinogrande*, and an almost as large *R.* 'Halfdan Lem'. Other large plants included *R.* 'Simona', 'Spring Sunshine', 'Le Progrès', and *R. annae*.

During the following days we carefully transported 4 Luton van loads of plants up to Chelsea. My sister Fiona is an accomplished artist and she helped with colour placements on Saturday while my assistant Dan and I hauled the plants around. One of the most important parts of building the stand is the height of the display. This was Dan's third Chelsea and he has been a great advocate of lifting key plants as high as possible for maximum visual effect. We then find that the smaller ones around them can look very different if lifted a few inches higher or even lowered by reducing the rootball!

Historically, all the blooms should be fully open at judging on Monday, but fortunately a more enlightened approach seems to

be accepted, and the colour contrast of flower buds and opening blooms is finally appreciated. Sunday is the critical day to make sure all the details are of 'Gold' standard. We were busy filling in all the smaller plants around the edges, labelling every variety, and spreading dried leaves collected last autumn to hide every pot. At the end of the day we took away nearly a van load of plants which did not 'fit' either because they were the wrong colour mix for the exhibit or the blooms were not perfect.

This year judging was moved forward to early on Monday, and the rest of the Preview day was taken up with talking to Press, officials, celebrities and the Royal Party, finishing with the evening Gala Preview which is now mainly an expensive corporate hospitality event. We knew our theme of '100 years of Rhododendrons' had made a story for the Press, and we had been contacted and filmed at the nursery in the weeks before the Show. Throughout the Show we had TV crews filming our exhibit, including Andy Sturgeon interviewing me for BBC Gardener's World, the Red Button team and our local BBC South Today, which was broadcast in the Chelsea Preview programme. Carol Klein and the BBC crews returned twice more during the week which gave us excellent national exposure.

Arriving early on Tuesday morning we were delighted to see our third consecutive Gold Medal. It's an emotional time when all exhibitors visit their neighbours to see what medal was awarded and offer one another congratulations or commiserations for all their long hours of hard work building the exhibit. But of course it doesn't stop there; the 14 hour days continue all Show week, aided by a band of loyal volunteers to help man the exhibit with our nursery staff. It's 'members only' for the first 2 days, when the keenest gardeners visit to see the freshest blooms and it's not quite so crowded. This year we went 'high-tech' with our own wifi hotspot, and 2 ipads taking orders direct via our website. Although slightly slower than writing an order on a form, visitors were able to experience our website, and everything was done in one transaction. It also meant that staff on the nursery were able to pack and despatch the orders straight away. Throughout the week we felt we were one of the most colourful and photographed exhibits in the Pavilions, particularly with Japanese and Chinese visitors! As well as selling, we answered many people's enquiries about Rhododendrons; hot topics included growing them on 'the wrong soil' and what to do with overgrown plants and bud-blast. We had several people ask whether Rhododendrons would take salt!



In full flower at the Show

Photo: David Millais

Magnolia wilsonii 'Sandling Park' — postscript

In the last Bulletin, I wrote about the above tree introduced from the Cangshan above Dali in W. Yunnan (as *Magnolia taliensis*) which produces copious seed which germinates easily. It will flower in 5 years which probably explains why it is the most widespread in gardens of the Oyama section. It is known to be variable from seed and instead of the usual 9 tepals, semi-double forms with 12-16 tepals are sometimes seen, with variation in flower size and in the depth of colour of the central boss of stamens.

One such form with extra tepals and much larger flowers than the type, is in the great garden at Sandling Park near Folkestone.

I received an interesting email from Dennis Fordham following my note in the March issue of the Bulletin about an excellent form of *M. wilsonii* at Sandling Park.

Dennis had flowered a seedling of this plant *in its third year* from germination. It had been given to him by curator Michael Warren, who had collected open pollinated seed in the autumn of 2010. It germinated the following spring, May 2011.



M. wilsonii 'Sandling Park'

Photo: Maurice Foster

To flower in its third season from seed is unusual enough, but there is more. The seedling reproduced the same exceptional characters as the parent, with a flower measured at 5" across and with 12 tepals, stained pink. In fact the pink staining is more extensive than in the parent.

The plant was grown on in a pot and at present (September 2013) is 1.2m tall 'in a vigorous state of growth'. During the summer of 2012 it had developed a flower bud on the terminal shoot and a second leader took over as a dominant growth. During the period of flower development, according to Dennis, 'it was subject to constant strong winds' which slightly distorted the flower and reduced the quality. He believes that had weather conditions at the time been more favourable, the quality of the flower would have been much better, but there is enough evidence to suggest that it could be another excellent form.

In total, Michael raised 20 seedlings from 'Sandling Park', gave some away (all traceable), used a few as understocks, and will now plant the balance to await flowering with a degree of enhanced interest, not to say excitement, following Dennis's experience. The wait should not be too long as most *M. wilsonii* seedlings will achieve floescence within 5/6 years. Watch this space.

Continued overleaf

The original plant which I reported in March as in a terminal state of decline is in fact now dead, so it was doubly fortunate that it has been successfully grafted and seedlings grown on. All credit to Michael Warren. These plants are now growing in a number of gardens.

Michael also raised seedlings of an old *M. 'Highdownensis'* at Sandling, also now deceased. Previously regarded as a hybrid between *M. wilsonii* and *M. sinensis*, it is now generally regarded as just a form of *M. wilsonii*. He kindly gave me a seedling which is now growing on vigorously.

It strikes me that the foliage of this seedling is not typical of *M. wilsonii*, being broader, some leaves broadly ovate, even suborbicular, and heavier and more leathery in texture, all characters more typical of *M. sinensis*. It has inclined me to think twice about the outcome of the hybrid / form discussion.

The two species were grown close together in a number of gardens between the wars and seed widely distributed. In fact I would go so far as to say that a majority of plants in gardens labelled *M. sinensis* are hybrids with *M. wilsonii*. The only plant I have seen so far that appears to conform to the original Wilson herbarium specimens of *M. sinensis* (what he called *M. globosa*) ssp. *sinensis*) is at Windsor in the Savill garden.

The current status of *M. sinensis* is as a subspecies of *M. sieboldii*. This should be reviewed as it seems an eminently unlikely diagnosis. For anyone interested, I made the argument for the restoration of *M. sinensis* to full species level in *The Plantsman* of December 2011.

Maurice Foster



R. platypodum

Photo: Ken Cox

Subsection Fortunea contains most of the larger hardy scented species such as *R. fortunei* and *R. decorum*. Recent years have seen a larger number of new Fortunea taxa introduced from China including *R. maoerense*, *R. faithii* and *R. glanduliferum*. Two of the very best introductions of the last 30 years are *R. yuefengense* and *R. platypodum*. Chinese botanists have stated that these are a single species, but having grown and flowered both, we can be sure that they should remain separate.



R. yuefengense

Photo: Ken Cox

Both are available from Glendoick Gardens www.glendoick.com



R. yuefengense seedlings at Glendoick

Photo: Kristian Theqvist

MEMBERS NOTES 2

Kenneth Cox

DETAILS OF NEW RHODODENDRON SPECIES

— flowering in the UK for the first time.

Some eight years ago, Kenneth Cox provided us with a note about some new species of that time, that were thought might provide more Autumn flowering hybrids.

These were four species from subsection Monantha, and included *Rhododendron monanthum* and *R. kasoense*.

Now he reports on two new species, trialled and flowered for the first time in the UK, from Subsection Fortunea and I show photographs of these new species, *Rhododendron platypodum* and *R. yuefengense*, below. These were both included in *The Pocket Guide to Rhododendron species*, by John McQuire and Michael Robinson, published in 2009.

Both have handsome large oval leaves and pink flowers and are not scented. *R. platypodum* has larger leaves and deep pink flowers in a tall truss while *R. yuefengense* is lower growing with an almost spreading habit and pale pink to off-white flowers in a loose truss in early June. It buds up as a tiny plant and is suitable for both the larger and smaller garden. It would even grow in a large container. Both should be very hardy though *R. platypodum* grows early so requires a more sheltered woodland site. *R. platypodum* is critically endangered in the wild due to deforestation but the species may have been saved.

Wessex branch

The spring garden visit of the Wessex branch was to the Storrington gardens of John and Diane McLaren and Andy and Jenny Fly. The visit was arranged for early May, partly with recent early seasons in mind.

The first garden viewed was that of John and Diane McLaren. This is a modest size of no more than half an acre, which most of us can relate to. Even so, there was much to see, with several interesting and distinct features. Immediately gaining our attention at the centre of the rear garden was a large and perfect specimen of *Rhododendron* 'Elizabeth' in full flower. Nearby was a most attractive cameo of a small pond flanked by a pair of cut-leaf Japanese maples, one purple and one green, and behind these, a *R. davidsonianum* with pretty clear pink flowers. The first surprise came just beyond this with a bridge crossing over a most attractive small stream that traversed the garden. To our surprise we were informed that the pond as well as the stream was completely natural. The geology in this part of Storrington is clay subsoil overlaid with a thin layer of peat and a thick layer of sand. In this garden the peat was particularly thick and the sand thin, creating near-boggy conditions in the area below the stream.

However, this has been coped-with well, by drainage and the creation of raised island beds. A good number of choice hybrid rhododendrons were growing here, including 'Seven Stars', 'Cream Glory', 'Aurora', and various Loderi hybrids, all carrying many promising large buds just starting to show colour. On return to the house we were amazed to find several *R. edgeworthii* hybrids trained against the east wall.

There were two perfect flowers on *Rhododendron* 'Lady Alice Fitzwilliam' filling the sheltered terrace with scent. This feature was quite unexpected and unique with a very special atmosphere.

The second part of our visit was to 'Pinecroft', the garden of Andy and Jenny Fly. Photographs from the time of purchase in 1995 show a small area around the house to be clear, with heath land taking over at the margins.

The majority of the grounds were impenetrable, being overgrown with *Rhododendron ponticum*. Andy and Jenny have been working intensively to clear and develop the garden during this period. The results are now remarkable, indeed amazing in view of the fact that this has been Andy and Jenny's first major gardening venture. The grounds extend to some 3 acres and most of this has now been cleared to reveal graceful and interesting undulations. The eastern and southern half of the garden has a canopy of Scots Pine, providing a sense of maturity and continuity together with ideal growing conditions. An area of higher ground extending from the house to the centre of the garden is predominately lawn, giving a very spacious feel and some fine vistas.

One clever feature is a yew hedge planted at the southern end of the lawn area, with an archway leading through to the woodland. When mature this will highlight the contrast between these areas and enhance the intimacy of the woodland.

Andy and Jenny decided to clear some areas furthest from the house first in order to undertake planting rather than just extending the planting away from the house. This was a wise move, resulting in some of these planting now being well established. We were amazed to come across a massive

Podocarpus a great distance from the house. Probably the best rhododendron in flower on the day was *R.* 'Beatrice Keir', with numerous fine yellow flowers on a good sized and perfectly shaped plant; closely rivalled by the lovely soft yellow flowers of *R.* 'Lunar Queen' nearby. An excellent plant of the *Rhododendron roxieanum* hybrid 'Blewbury' stood out for its surprising maturity, good health and fine shape with an even scattering of speckled white flowers set to perfection against the deep green pointed foliage. My own choice for favourite plant of the day had already passed its flowering season. This was an unusual multi-stemmed specimen of *R. barbatum*; some seven evenly proportioned stems formed the centre of the plant and these were just becoming sufficiently mature to reveal the beautiful smooth peeling bark of various coral and copper tones.

Rhododendron is obviously Andy and Jenny's favourite genus and the garden already contains several hundred fine specimens; sufficient to keep an enthusiast happy exploring for several days. Magnolias were also represented by a very fine good sized *M.* 'Yellow Lantern' in full flower and two *M. grandiflora*; one free-standing and the other planted as if to be part of the pergola. Several *Camellia reticulata* hybrids were present to complete our three genera.

Indeed there are a great many other fine and interesting trees and shrubs beyond our three genera. Of particular merit were two very graceful specimens of golden *Metasequoia* already of sizeable proportions and possibly some of the largest in the country. Spread throughout the garden was a good collection of acers. Some were just coming into leaf but more noticeable at the time of our visit were the beautiful flower and seed tassels that are too often overlooked. A monkey puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*) had been planted towards the centre of the garden in the early years and, having achieved amazing growth was now a stunning plant of well over 20 feet and a dozen distinct tiers.

Around half an acre of the south-west corner of the grounds remains as tall impenetrable *R. ponticum*. A wide ride has been cleared around the boundary which contains some special plants. No doubt the *ponticum* will eventually be cleared, but I particularly liked this area which felt as if we were exploring a clearing through dense woodland.

My initial impression of this garden was also my lasting impression of a really good all-round garden and certainly not just an exceptional collection of rhododendrons or even just an excellent woodland garden.

Pinecroft is surely destined to be recognised at a national level in the not too distant future. Despite their huge numbers, the plants are mostly well-spaced, with a good deal of room to develop into superb specimens. The standard of maintenance is very high, assisted by extensive mulching with home-produced compost and woodchip.

The weather was pleasantly warm and the sunny intervals increased during our visit and at the end of this most memorable afternoon we enjoyed tea in the Pinecroft garden. This had been contributed to by both sets of hosts and their friends and neighbours and amounted to a banquet with quiche, cheesecake and wine in addition to our traditional tea and cake in great variety. No gift could ever reflect our full appreciation for the afternoon and it was very appropriate that Andy and Jenny won Best in Show for a stunning *R.* 'Queen of Hearts' at the Wessex Branch annual competition just two weeks later. John and Diane had been winners the previous year.

Brian Long

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

We have heard a good deal lately about the need for members to come forward and take an active part in the task of running the Group. As a Committee member it has been a major discussion point for far too long.

I have been on the Committee for over 20 years and, for most of that time, have done one of the “jobs”. It has been a great way for me to make a contribution to the continuance of a very special organisation and, as a serial amateur, to get to know lots of experts and learn from them.

I have a concern that one of the issues holding back volunteers to help run the Group is a feeling that they have to be experts in our plant groups --- far from it. We have lots of experts whose knowledge we can draw upon, we just need those who can put in a few hours to help “make the Group work”. While we cannot pay for people’s time we do cover expenses where necessary so no-one needs to be out of pocket.

We are currently looking for a Bulletin Editor (our thrice yearly Bulletin is a key communication tool) and a Tours Organiser, but we will, in a year or so’s time, also need a Secretary (setting up meetings, writing up and distributing minutes, etc) and a Treasurer (basic book-keeping/accounts). If you think you could take on one of these roles, or would like to know more about what is involved, please get in touch with one of the Committee members.

*Alastair Stevenson, Hon. Treasurer
alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk
01989 780285/780699*

MEMBERSHIP

Rupert Eley

We welcome the new members who have joined in the last few months and hope that they will enjoy all the benefits of membership of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group.

GROUP WEBSITE

Steve Lyus & Graham Mills

www.rhodogroup-rhs.org

There have been a number of improvements made to our website over the past year, namely:

Back issues of the bulletin in PDF form can now be downloaded from the web site. Look for ‘Bulletins’ under ‘Services’ on the menu or follow the link from the News column.

The Group sponsored the **International Rhododendron Species Conservation Conference** that was held on 20 & 21 April 2013 in Edinburgh. Unfortunately it clashed with the show at Rosemoor so many could not attend. However, you can now see details and download the presentations from the link on the Home page of our web site.

The seed list will be open all year, with updates to the list as seed becomes out of stock. First come first served!

The group now has a Facebook page. It is hoped that this will entice new (younger) people to the web site to become members. However, we will also be putting topical news on the page so if you have a Facebook account do have a look and preferably *Like* us.

Many of you will not be aware that the RHS went through a huge exercise last year to review plants that had received AGMs in the past and also to judge new cultivars.

For our 3 genera, this is a summary of the changes:

	New AGMs	AGMs removed
Rhododendrons	47	54
Camellias	12	13
Magnolias	26	13

You can download these new lists from our website under the “Plant Information” section, or follow the link from the News column. Note that I have highlighted the new AGM plants in red in these lists.

On an irregular basis we send emails to members warning them of topical events such as Gardens open on short notice. If you are not currently receiving these emails but would like to in future then please email pam@woodtown.net indicating your name.

Members’ Photographs

One of the aims of the Dictionary element on our website has been to include as many interesting plants as possible, with the bare minimum of having at least those that have been awarded an AGM.

So, this gives you all a new challenge to try to find these new AGM plants and photograph them. You may be amused to note that we do not have a single photograph of an Evergreen Azalea with an AGM!

If there are additional features that you would like to see added to the site or you have any other comments then please contact webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Graham Mills and Stephen Lyus

Direct Debit

Those of you who have arranged to pay your annual subscription by Direct Debit should note that the payment will be identified on your bank statement by the name of the company providing the service for us, 'EAZY' and not with the name of the RCM Group as I had been expecting. For the majority this will have been for £20.00 on the 1st November.

Apologies for any confusion this may have caused.

*Alastair Stevenson, Hon. Treasurer
alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk
01989 780285/780699*

Notes For Seed Donors 2013

Donations from members are essential if we are to continue producing a varied and interesting seed list. Here are a few suggestions for the treatment of seeds in order to maintain maximum viability as well as easing the task of distribution.

RHODODENDRONS: Using, preferably, only wild or hand pollinated rhododendrons, pick seed pods just before they start to split open. Store the seed pods in a dry, airy place, away from direct heat, and allow the seeds to drop out naturally. Separate the seeds from the pods and store in dry place in paper packets, but, if refrigerated, place inside sealed plastic bags to prevent drying out.

MAGNOLIAS: Harvest seed pods just as the red seeds begin to show. Remove the seeds and soak them in water for a few days until the red seed coat can be washed off. Rinse the seeds thoroughly and place in plastic bags with damp perlite (**not** peat, compost or vermiculite). **Do not allow the seeds to dry out.**

CAMELIAS: Harvest seed pods as they begin to split. Remove seeds from pods and place in plastic bags. **Do not allow seeds to dry out.**

Seeds other than those of the above genera are also very welcome. We will also accept seeds of species that exhibit early germination such as *Aesculus*, *Quercus*, *Castanea*, etc. and advertise these by email or on the Group website for early distribution before the end of the year.

All seeds should be sent in bulk – one packet for each species, with clear, waterproof labelling showing full, correct, botanical name, whether hand or open pollinated, collector's number, location collected plus any other relevant information.

If you have seeds but cannot manage to clean them then just send them anyway and we will deal with them appropriately. If you have the opportunity to collect in the wild we would particularly like to hear from you.

For inclusion in the main printed list seeds should be received by 14th December. Exceptionally, late ripening seeds may be sent up to the end of the year but notification of an intended seed donation should still be received by 14th December, where possible. Seeds received at other times of the year may be advertised using email or the Group website.

All seeds can be stored temporarily in the warmest part of a domestic refrigerator – **DO NOT FREEZE** – before sending them, in a padded mail bag, as soon as possible, to:

Mrs Julie Atkinson 184 Crow Lane East Newton-le-Willows
St Helens Merseyside WA12 9UA

If you are still not sure about something, queries may be sent to julie.soundgardenrhododendrons@hotmail.co.uk

Sadly, we have, to report two very recent deaths of outstanding members. Both well known and active rhododendrophiles:

David Farnes
David Farnes has been a member of the RHS Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group since 1964, and served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Group and the position of Honorary Treasurer from 1978 until he retired in 2005. He was also a member of International Camellia Society holding the office of UK Regional Treasurer for ten years from 1992.

As a tour organiser, with his meticulous attention to detail and with the help of his wife Eileen, he made sure that everyone was happy with the hotels etc. and the choice of gardens. His tours were always very informative including the identification of genus, so you always remembered what he had told you.

Everything he did was very business-like and was done straight away. On tours he always carried his blue document case which held details of gardens to be visited and there was never a case of misunderstanding. He used to say that he joined the Camellia Society to see early flowering rhododendrons!

He was an excellent tour organiser and a perfectionist in all he did, and he always paid great attention to detail. The great pity was that he was unable to carry on organising tours due to his ill health.

Keith Sprague

Romy Millais (1923-2013)
Rhododendron enthusiast Romy Millais died peacefully on 11th November aged 90, after a short illness. She and her late husband Ted bought the derelict Crosswater Farm at Churt near Farnham in 1947. For more than 50 years she supported Ted growing various crops including mushrooms, guinea fowl, pigs and cattle, and together they established the specialist Millais Nurseries in 1970.

Romy was fully involved with the business for more than 35 years, working tirelessly on production, despatch and administration. Throughout this time, Romy also enjoyed developing the woodland gardens at Crosswater Farm. She and Ted were amongst the first Westerners to be allowed back into China on plant hunting trips when the borders were opened in the 1980's. Over several trips to Sichuan and Yunnan, as well as Bhutan and Nepal, they found many important new *Rhododendron* species for the first time. These are still available from the Nursery today, which is run by their son David.

She is survived by 3 sons, a daughter, and 4 grandchildren.

David Millais

I am sure members will join me in sending our sympathies to both Eileen Farnes and to David Milais and his family at this sad time.

The Hon. Bulletin Editor

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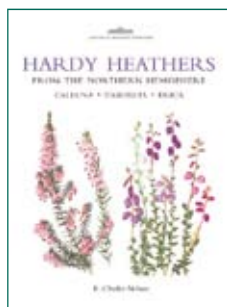
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PUBLICATIONS

11/13

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MAGNOLIAS *in Art & Cultivation*

MAGNOLIAS *in Art & Cultivation*



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Authors Barbara Oozeerally, Jim Gardiner & Stephen Spongberg

Published by Kew Publishing in association with the RHS

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150 full colour botanical paintings

Publication date February 2014

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European Member's Price £76

World Member's Price £84

All prices include postage.

Magnolia sargentiana (Sargent's magnolia)

Magnolia sargentiana (Sargent's magnolia) is a species of magnolia in the family Magnoliaceae. It is native to the mountains of the Himalayas in the region of Sikkim, India. The tree is a large, spreading tree with a trunk that can reach up to 30 cm in diameter. The leaves are alternate, ovate to elliptic, with a serrated margin. The flowers are large, with a diameter of up to 10 cm, and are a pale pink or white color. The fruit is a large, woody, three-lobed structure that can reach up to 10 cm in length. The tree is a hardy species and is well-suited to cultivation in temperate regions.



Magnolia zenii

Magnolia zenii is a species of magnolia in the family Magnoliaceae. It is native to the mountains of the Himalayas in the region of Sikkim, India. The tree is a large, spreading tree with a trunk that can reach up to 30 cm in diameter. The leaves are alternate, ovate to elliptic, with a serrated margin. The flowers are large, with a diameter of up to 10 cm, and are a pale pink or white color. The fruit is a large, woody, three-lobed structure that can reach up to 10 cm in length. The tree is a hardy species and is well-suited to cultivation in temperate regions.



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the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group forthcoming events



JANUARY / 2014

11

North West Branch Ness Gardens

Talk by Mike Reddington on 'The gardens of Umbria'. Followed by a Social Event

Michael Reddington
cmreddington@lycos.com
or 01516 526 081



MARCH / 2014

15/16

RHS Rosemoor

Early Camellia Competition
with South West Branch Magnolia, Rhododendron & Spring Ornamental Plant Competitions

Georgina Barter
georginac@rhs.org.uk
or 020 7821 3142

Dr John Marston
artavianjohn@gmail.com
or 01271 323 202



20

South West Branch Caerhays

All day visit to Caerhays, with lunch

Dr John Marston
artavianjohn@gmail.com
or 01271 323 202

22

North West Branch Ness Gardens

Talk by John Grimshaw of Castle Howard 'Ray Wood - The restoration of a woodland Garden'

Michael Reddington
cmreddington@lycos.com
or 01516 526 081

APRIL / 2014

12/13

RHS Wisley

Early Rhododendron Competition
Main Camellia Competition
Spring Ornamental Plant Competition
incorporating South East Branch Magnolia Competition

Georgina Barter
georginac@rhs.org.uk
or 020 7821 3142

26/27

RHS Rosemoor

Main Rhododendron Competition
with South West Branch Camellia, Rhododendron & Floral Display Competitions

Georgina Barter
georginac@rhs.org.uk
or 020 7821 3142

Dr John Marston
artavianjohn@gmail.com
or 01271 323 202

28-2 MAY

North West Branch Spring Tour

Spring Tour to Highland and Island gardens, West Coast Scotland

Ted Brabin
angela.brabin@btinternet.com
or 0151 353 1193

MAY / 2014

7

South West Branch Exeter University/Killerton

Garden visits to Exeter University Campus and Killerton Gardens

Dr John Marston
artavianjohn@gmail.com
or 01271 323 202



10/11

North West Branch Ness Gardens

North West Branch Show
Ted Brabin
angela.brabin@btinternet.com
or 0151 353 1193

10/11

RHS Harlow Carr

Rhododendron Competition

Georgina Barter
georginac@rhs.org.uk
or 020 7821 3142

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Wessex Branch Ramster

Wessex Branch Show
Miranda Gunn
miranda@ramstergardens.com
or 01428 644 422

20/23

RC&M Group

Informal Group
Tour to Bremen
North Germany
Judith Hallett
judyhallett@googlemail.com
or 01981 570 401

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RC&M Group

Group AGM at Exbury
Gardens
Barry Haseltine
barry.haseltine@which.net
or 01342 713 132