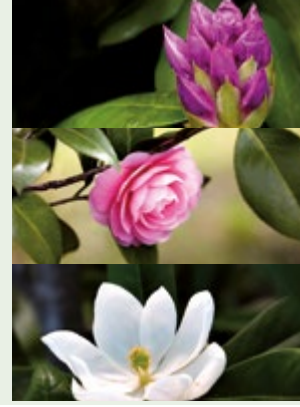


the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Patron: HRH The Prince of Wales

Bulletin 131 / November 2019 / www.rhodogroup-rhs.org



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Many Magnolias in my garden that normally only flower once, flowered again this autumn, just as they did last year. Unfortunately, at that time the leaves are still on the plants so the blooms aren't that showy. Luckily it doesn't seem to diminish the display in spring which, looking at the number of buds, could be a good one in 2020.

As you read this, all that we will have left in flower from our three genera will be the autumn flowering Camellias, which in my garden are mainly represented by *Camellia sasanqua* and its many varieties. They do enliven the scene, along with the autumn colour from the deciduous azaleas.

However, autumn is probably mainly a time to prepare and look forward. It is of course an ideal time to move plants and plant new ones. In addition, it is a time to collect seeds, catch up on paperwork and dream of spring.

Conservation

One of the key things that the Group undertakes is our conservation work to save and propagate species and hybrids from our three genera. Part of this work involves the creation and ongoing support of specific Plant Collections in locations that can be visited around the country. There are currently seven of these extant with an eighth being developed. Elsewhere in this bulletin you will find information about the history and evolution of these plus the new collection that is being created.

Of the existing seven, four are of Rhododendrons, two of Magnolias and one of Camellias. Perhaps now that I am Chairman, the Magnolias and Camellias will get more attention.

Once you have read that article, you will realise that the financial cost to develop these collections is significant, as is the vast amount of time given freely by the volunteers who undertake the work. We have a Centenary Fund that was created during our Centenary year specifically to support our Conservation work and this continues today. All the money collected in the fund is ring-fenced and only used for our conservation efforts. Details can be found on our web site

The 2020 AGM will be at the Bothy at Bowood on 9th May



Camellia trichocarpa. See page 10 Photo: Maurice Foster.

at www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/current/fund/ and if you wish, you may also contribute to the fund.

Shows

This year's show season was superb, although the severe frost at the Savill Show in early April was an unwelcome surprise. It was neatly rounded off by the Centenary Cup Competition at Exbury in early June. Thanks to Pam and Sally Hayward for creating such a classy finale.

We now look to the RHS competitions at Rosemoor, Savill Garden and Harlow Carr during 2020 plus, of course, the many branch shows that often run alongside them. The Centenary Cup Competition will be at Ramster Gardens alongside the Wessex Show.

So many people give freely of their time to enable these events whether it's organising and setting up, competing or judging; all deserve our heartfelt thanks.

Continued overleaf

Herbarium specimen boxes

We have sponsored three Herbarium specimen boxes for the new RHS Herbarium at Wisley, which is presently under construction. It would seem that our three genera as a Group have more specimen boxes in the present Herbarium than any other RHS Group or Society! Our full Group name will be included on the Donor Recognition Board in the new building.

Bursary Award

We have recently made a Bursary Award to Mark Bobin, Head Gardener at Minterne, to help him visit Arunachal Pradesh in October 2019. As a member of the expedition arranged by Group member Keith Rushforth he will be trekking in a group of four exploring the hills above Mipi, studying and recording the plants and their natural habitat. He will be focusing on Rhododendron species, with the aim of improving his knowledge and understanding and studying their taxonomy.

Spring Tour

We will be having a tour this spring of private gardens in Brittany. The itinerary which you can see at www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/current/tours/ looks very interesting.

Volunteers

I am disappointed that no one has so far stepped forward to volunteer to fill the posts of Yearbook Lead Editor or Webmaster. The latter I can almost understand since it does involve some understanding of website design but the position of Yearbook Lead Editor would suit anyone with an interest in our plants, some free time and administrative ability.

If anyone thinks they might be able to undertake either role then please give me a call on 01326 280382 for an informal conversation about what it would involve.

Graham Mills

chairman@rhodogroup-rhs.org

2020 AGM

The AGM will be held in the Bothy at Bowood on Saturday 9th May 2020. This will be followed by a guided tour of the Walled Garden. After lunch members will be able to explore the Woodland Garden. We are most grateful to Lord Lansdowne for offering to host our AGM and for his generosity in allowing us the use of the Bothy and free entry to the Garden. There will be a small charge for our guides and all refreshments will be at your own expense. Full details will follow in the next edition and will be published on our website.

Seed donations for the 2020 Seed List

Once again we need the help of the entire membership to put together an exciting Seed List for the coming year. I don't need to remind you of the impact of the Nagoya Protocol but I do hope you will appreciate the efforts we have made since 2014 to keep our Seed List not only going but also growing and vibrant.

If you haven't already done so, please may I urge you to look around the garden for ripening seed pods of suitable candidates for the list. I would also encourage you to look at all the woody plants in your garden for interesting seed – spectacular flowering and plenty of heat at the right time may well have delivered a good crop of viable seed which shouldn't go to waste. Similarly, suitable companion plants are always very welcome additions so don't dismiss them either. And if you garden in the Southern Hemisphere and have spare seed from last autumn, please do consider sending it on to us.

So the message is, while we are principally seeking seed of named rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias, other collections may well be of interest to our members and if you are certain of their identity, they will be most welcome. As you will remember, for the time being we can accept wild collected seed only if it has been collected with documented permission. Hand pollinated seed is desirable and we do our best to encourage members to develop their skills in this regard, but we recognise that in order to keep enthusiasts growing, we need to accept open pollinated material provided the seed parent is known and is accurately recorded on the packet.

Visit www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/seeds/donors/ for information on collecting and sending seed.

Donations should be sent to Julie Atkinson, 184 Crow Lane East, Newton-le-Willows, ST HELENS, Merseyside WA12 9UA

Without our donors (particularly our loyal hand-pollinators) the Group's Seed List would have disappeared some years ago. Help to keep it going for another year!

If in doubt, contact me for any help or advice – pam@woodtown.net

Pam Hayward

Membership Renewals 2019

Our subscription year begins on November 1st and members who take advantage of the discount and pay their subscriptions by Direct Debit may like to be reminded that their payment of £20 is debited from their bank account annually on or around that date and will be tagged on their statement with the reference EAZYCOLLECT.

Members who pay by other methods and whose subscriptions are due for renewal this year will have already been notified by email or letter.

Full details of our subscription alternatives are available on the Group website where you will also find details of how to renew online using the PayPal service.

Visit www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/membership/renewal

Shows and Competitions 2020

The August Bulletin was published too early to confirm all the dates and venues for the 2020 season so here is a complete list for your diary:

RHS Garden Rosemoor – March 14/15

RHS Early Camellia Competition SW Branch Early Magnolia, Rhododendron and Spring Ornamental Plant competitions

Savill Garden, Windsor Great Park – April 4/5

RHS Early Rhododendron, Main Camellia and Spring Ornamental Plant competitions

RHS Garden Rosemoor – April 25/26

RHS Main Rhododendron Competition SW Branch Camellia, Main Magnolia and Floral Display competitions

RHS Garden Harlow Carr – May 2/3

RHS Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition

Ramster – May 2

Wessex Branch Annual Flower Show

Ness Botanic Gardens – May 3/4

NW Branch Show

Full details will appear on the Group website in due course and in the March 2020 Bulletin.

The Group's Collections – past, present and into the future...

A little over a century ago the influx of rhododendron species from Asia prompted an elite band of gentleman gardeners to form the Rhododendron Society. Their aim was to better understand the nature and cultivation of these exotics through shared experiences gained as the novelties were raised to flowering in differing locations across the nation. We have all benefited from this far-sighted initiative in the legacy of the *Rhododendron Society Notes* compiled and published between 1916 and 1931.

A little over two decades ago, a similarly inspired and elevated group recognised that much could be learned about the largesse of new collections of rhododendron species resulting from the re-opening of China, and previously unexplored areas, if these introductions were grown en masse in a comparative trial planting. And so the first Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group Collection was born – the Rhododendron Species Collection at RHS Garden Wisley

– brainchild of the Group Committee during the late 1990s and seen to fruition by its driving force, chairman John Bond. Correspondence and committee minutes from the time evidence the sheer determination, hard work and organisation that went into transforming the idea into reality. Over 70 unique rhododendron species collections were planted out on Battleston Hill in the original exercise.

Under Bond's enthusiastic leadership, two more representative collections were to follow in quick succession: by the end of the first year of the new millennium 150 varieties of hardy hybrid rhododendrons had been planted at Ramster and 21 different deciduous azaleas on Battleston Hill, RHS Garden Wisley, forming the Alan Hardy Collection of Rustica Flore Pleno Azaleas.

These latter collections were inspired not just by the opportunity to create a valuable educational demonstration but also the growing recognition that rhododendrons were increasingly 'out'. Hardy hybrids were no longer the darlings of suburban gardeners and without gathering varieties which had been the mainstay for decades together in one place, there was a risk they could disappear altogether. Conservation was 'in' and 'in' to stay.

An earlier chairman of the Group, Alan Hardy had particularly loved the venerable double azalea varieties planted in his memory. They too were falling out of circulation – difficult to propagate and unloved by mainstream nurseries, this was an important collection to have established.

Sadly, in the spring of the following year, it was John Bond's memory which was celebrated in the John Bond Large Leaf Rhododendron Collection at Abbotsbury. A favourite of his, these impressive rhododendrons were perfectly suited to the sub-tropical gardens at Abbotsbury in Dorset. Masterminded by then chairman Maurice Foster, ably supported by Brian and Iris Wright, this collection was the first to be promoted in the national press, much positive exposure being given to the Group as an additional benefit.

Maurice had already begun to devise our first magnolia collection. Championing the virtues of *Magnolia x loebneri* varieties for our modern gardens, by the spring of 2003 he had overseen planting of the Group's collection at Harcourt Arboretum, part of the University of Oxford's Botanic Garden, where eight distinct varieties can currently be compared.

In the intervening hiatus of well over a decade the Group collections largely went unmentioned. Despite this, these five original collections endure; another from the same time – the Kunming *Camellia reticulata* Collection – was not successful, although much was learned from the exercise. In due course, and a good deal wiser, we hope to attempt it again.

Continued overleaf

In recent years the Group has become much more focused on conservation: becoming a charity, reviewing the legacy of our centenary, negotiating the various aspects and impacts of international plant collection rules and legislation, plant diseases and the continued demise of rhododendrons in the public's eye have all served to concentrate the mindset of the Group. A Plant Committee was set up to define this element of our role and manage strategies for its delivery. A review of our existing collections was set in motion, inventories taken and efforts initiated to replace lost plants and add where appropriate. At the same time a newly appointed Conservation Officer began the task of conducting a nationwide census of extant examples of our three genera.

Exciting developments have taken place in the last two years with the establishment of two new collections: the Amos Pickard Magnolia Collection at Canterbury Cathedral and the *Camellia* Species Collection at Ness Botanic Gardens. The first was borne out of a major rescue exercise following the demise of the Pickard's Magnolia Gardens nursery in Canterbury and an inspired idea by Sally Hayward to bring together a representative collection in the grounds of the cathedral. The *Camellia* collection at Ness established earlier this year seeks to be an educational resource to highlight the variety and usefulness of species camellias in the garden. Without the support and commitment of Ted Brabin to this project, it would not have got off the ground so easily and thanks are also due to fellow Group member Nick Lightfoot, Garden & Collections Manager at Ness.



Nick Lightfoot (Garden & Collections Manager at Ness Botanic Gardens) planting *Camellia oleifera* - one of the first camellias in the new species collection. Photo: Phil Kay

Detailed plant lists of all of our existing collections can be viewed on our website at www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/information/collections/

The Plant Committee is dedicated to ensuring that these collections are secure and vibrant; a custodian has been appointed for each of them and we continue to source new varieties to add on an ongoing basis.

And now we have a new collection to announce! We are currently sourcing plants and propagation material for the RCM Group Collection of Cinnabarina Rhododendrons at Minterne which will be under the custodianship of Mark Bobin, the Head Gardener. Minterne is well known for its success with these tricky rhododendrons and can provide a large open site where species and both old and new hybrids can be planted out to be introduced to new potential growers and assessed and compared by enthusiasts. A truly representative collection of a unique *Rhododendron* Subsection is planned – the first of its kind but one which we hope will lead to others. Tailoring particular plants to an environment where they prosper will both show them off to their best and help to secure their future. As with all the collections we have established, this one will serve as a source of propagation material for collections in other gardens in the future. Further details will follow as our plans develop.



Philip Oostenbrink (Head Gardener at Canterbury Cathedral) preparing the planting hole for *Magnolia* 'Pickard's Schmetterling' in the gardens of Canterbury Cathedral. Photo: Sally Hayward

The majority of our collections reside in gardens regularly open to the public and, of course, to all our members. Watch out for details

of a special visit to the gardens at Canterbury Cathedral and the Amos Pickard Magnolia Collection planned for next spring.

The future for Group collections is bright: we are properly focused, innovative and dedicated. New signage is planned which will highlight our involvement in gardens where collections are hosted and help to bring our cause into the public eye.

The success of our conservation efforts relies on the ability to draw on our records to discover where species and hybrids are growing in the UK. This is where **you can help us too!** Sally Hayward is continuing the work of our former Conservation Officer and is currently assembling a combined database of extant plants of our three genera in the UK. At the moment this involves drawing together the records of our public gardens and more recently, the lists provided by our Plant and Management committees. [This exercise has already proved productive – revealing varieties lost in the gardens that raised them and starting the process of ‘repatriation’. Camaraderie among gardens is crucial and thankfully seen to be evident – this is no time to be precious about exclusivity when plants are under threat!] Now we want to extend this to include ALL our UK members’ lists – this will be quite a task, but so worthwhile and Sally is undaunted by the prospect! (Any information you send will be treated with the utmost confidentiality – nothing will be shared without your express prior permission.) So, please send your lists of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias, ideally with their provenance and preferably in electronic format (Excel or Word) to rcmconservation@gmail.com or send hard copy by post to 9 Old Park Avenue, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1DL. What you may think of as a commonplace variety may well prove to be the sole living example in the nation!

Do get in touch if you have any comments or ideas – we are listening!

Pam Hayward
pam@woodtown.net

Membership

We welcome our new members and hope they will enjoy all the benefits of membership of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group.

Rupert Eley

UK

Emma Bouchard Calmore, Hampshire
Mr Richard Munday Kenilworth, Warwickshire

Australia

Mr Anthony Anderson Mylor, South Australia

Canada

Dr John S Lumsden Elora, Ontario

Editor's note

Copy date for the next bulletin is February 1st 2020. This will be the March Bulletin, no 132. Member's Notes are always welcome on any aspect of our three genera. My email address is peterfurneaux@gmail.com and postal address is Peter Furneaux, Lucton Court, Lucton, Herefordshire HR69PQ UK

Appreciation

Dr George Argent 1941–2019

(A fuller appreciation of the life and contribution of Dr George Argent written by Tony Conlan will be published in the next Yearbook. Ed)



George Argent admiring *Rhododendron meijeri* in the Vireya Collection at RBG Edinburgh. Photo: Phil Wilkinson

To Group members the name Argent is almost certainly synonymous with the word Vireya and indeed, without George's dedication to these rhododendrons, we are unlikely to have ever been able to enjoy them for ourselves or been thrilled by their gorgeous colours and floral diversity. His inspiration went beyond the botanic garden he gave the majority of his working life to, reaching out to the horticultural community with his seminal books and articles and kindling an interest in so many of us.

A shockwave went through the rhododendron community in April when news of his untimely death was announced and since then the true nature of his legacy has been revealed. Forged from his belief that horticulture and science could work together to bring cultural perfection to plants collected in the wild, he is responsible for raising the rhododendrons of subgenus Vireya from specimens to ornamental delights, particularly demonstrated in the Montane Tropical House at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

We are fortunate that George devoted much of his time post-retirement (since 2004) to publishing his definitive work *Rhododendrons of subgenus Vireya*, republished in a second

Continued overleaf

edition just four years ago. It remains and probably will forever be the Vireya 'bible'.

George is known in the wider botanic community as an inspirational and exemplary plant collector, mentor and committed conservationist. His talents in plant systematics and taxonomy are often cited. He was responsible for nearly 2000 additions to the living plant collection at Edinburgh and for describing some 130 species. His name is celebrated in eight species but strangely enough, as yet no rhododendron.

A full appreciation of George Argent's life and legacy will be published, as is fitting for a man of his stature, in the 2020 yearbook but, if you will indulge me, I would like to add a personal tribute.

I had known George since well before I took on the editorship of the yearbook, mostly because of our mutual friendship with another great Vireya man and fellow Group member, John Bodenham. When I became editor, we knew each other well enough for George to speak with me frankly about the publication I was taking on and how he felt it could be improved and elevated to journal status. This advice stayed with me and was my lodestar throughout those years. I can chime with so many others I have spoken with by stating that George was one of the kindest people I have encountered, generous, amusing but focussed and totally dedicated, utterly professional and always a delight. I am proud to have known and learned from him and been able to call him a friend.

Pam Hayward



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Book Review

The Bench Grafter's Handbook:

Principles & Practice, Brian E Humphrey 2019

Publisher: CRC Press, FL, USA

Hardback: 638 pages

ISBN-13: 978-0367224844

Product Dimensions (Hardback):

18.4 x 3.8 x 25.4 cm

Cover Price: £139.99

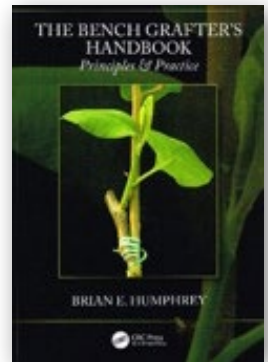
Cheapest online price at 1/10/19: £121.82

Paperback: 680 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1138046221

Product Dimensions: 18.4 x 3.2 x 26 cm

Cover Price: £69.99 Cheapest online price at 1/10/19: £56.76



We are indeed fortunate that once in a while along comes a book that not only greatly adds to our knowledge of the subject but also contains the distillation of a lifetime's experience. In the acknowledgments section at the beginning of the book the author rightly acknowledges the pivotal role that R J Garner's *The Grafters Handbook* and Bruce Macdonald's *Practical Woody Plant Propagation for Nursery Growers* have had in the education of all those with an interest in the subject of grafting. He also acknowledges the 'treasure house of knowledge' that the *Proceedings of the International Plant Propagator's Society* record. The gratitude that the author extends in particular to those who encouraged and enthused him in his early career at Hillers is particularly interesting. It reads as a Who's Who of notable propagators.

The book is clearly laid out and easy to follow with chapters devoted to camellias, magnolias and rhododendrons.

In the section on camellias (7 pages) it is interesting to note the observations and experience with the grafting of *Camellia reticulata* and hybrids between *C. reticulata* and *C. japonica*; the section on rootstock selection and timing of grafting being most useful.

In the section on magnolias, the subject is covered in depth and spans 15 pages. If your interest is magnolia propagation this is a must.

In the section on rhododendrons (18 pages), the grafting of large leaf species and hybrids is covered. Rootstock compatibility across such a wide genus is addressed and the merits and qualities of rootstock selection comprehensively discussed. Examples quoted include grafting *Rhododendron magnificum* on to *R. calophyllum* versus *R. sinogrande*. Other species sections are also discussed.

Again, with all of the above, this information is comprehensive and accessible and all contained within a single volume. Of particular note is where failures have occurred, recording these is invaluable to prevent repetition and to push forward exploration of the subject.

Chapter 19, dealing with the role that grafting can play in conservation is thoroughly explored and easy to follow, raising many issues which should be particularly interesting to readers of this bulletin.

At the end of the book is a grafting table list (Chapter 56). This is fascinating; it covers approximately 200 genera not dealt with in detail in the main text detailing the various species, the rootstock suggested, the method of graft suggested and the system in which the completed graft is housed, with comments regarding each genus/species all drawn from personal experience. The plants listed include:

x Sorbocotoneaster pozdnjakovii
+ *Pyrocydonia 'Daniellii'*
Meliodendron xylocarpum
Lepidothamnus laxifolius
Cathaya argyrophylla

Where else would you find such information – stunning!

It is worth recalling the old adage that a book should be read from cover to cover – IN ORDER! It is a feature of modern life that with the internet one is able to 'dip into' subjects and pursue lines of enquiry as one wishes. However, one of the great qualities of this book is the structural and progressive narrative that educates and fosters understanding as it is followed. It is easy to dip into the relevant chapters that deal with the grafting of our chosen genera (camellias, magnolias and rhododendrons). The knowledge gained from reading these sections is considerable, but the greater understanding and significance of that knowledge is only apparent if the parts 1 – 6 are read first.

To distil a review of this book into a few short paragraphs is not easy. If the intention is to give the reader a flavour of what is contained within, I would simply say this.

It quite simply supersedes and excels what has gone before it.

Should you buy it – YES.

Why? If you have a practical interest in plant propagation it is better than what has gone before it.

If you wish to understand what it takes to propagate some of our most treasured plants this will give you that information.

In the case of the focus of the RCMG all the information you could require concerning grafting of our favourite genera is in one place.

It seems customary when reading other book reviews of outstanding works that there is always an observation added at the end by way of constructive criticism. Mine would only be this, the financial disparity between the cost of the paperback and the hardback. For a book that will last and be used and referred to by some for many years, paying £70.00 extra for the hardback edition seems extortionate.

In reviewing this book my final thoughts would be this:

Whilst the experience, scholarship and technical information contained within the book are exceptional, what we should particularly celebrate and acknowledge is the desire, scholarly ability and dedication on the part of the author it has taken to produce this manuscript for us and future generations to enjoy and benefit from.

Roderick White

Outstanding Gardens Scheme

In the last bulletin I reported that, following the experience from the first two applications, we would be making some improvements to the Outstanding Garden Scheme, and that in the meantime we would not be taking further applications. There has been a delay to these changes, and at the time of writing this update, they are not complete.

However, we hope to have them up on the website soon, in time for gardens to make applications over the winter, during the quieter time of the year, so please check the website for updates if you are considering applying. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me with questions, concerns or suggestions.

Nick Butler

ogs.rcmg@gmail.com

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Living Legacies

Most of us, as gardeners, are generous souls and if someone expresses a delight in a particular plant and we have some spares we will happily give one to them. Equally, we all have specimens given to us by friends and I can remember who gave me what and treasure the plant and its memories.

Two specimens have given me great pleasure this year, because of their late flowering times. The first is *Rhododendron glanduliferum*, given to me by one of our late members, Col. Geoffrey Churton MBE, MC (and bar), TD, DL. The species was only introduced in 1995 and Cox's species encyclopaedia states the flowering time is not known. Well, it is to me (and Col. Churton). After giving me the plant, for some years afterwards, he would phone in July, with one question. 'Has his *glanduliferum* flowered yet?' Wife would call the question into the garden and I would reply in the negative, producing the same reply each year 'He's overfeeding it. Jolly Good.' Off we would go until the next year. Finally, a couple of years before he died (two months short of his century), it did flower. Wife photographed it for me and a print was sent to the Colonel.

At his Memorial Service, led by the Bishop of Chester, the Bishop mentioned that he had two loves in life apart from his family: horses and rhododendron species. He mentioned that he sowed some species seed when he was 97 – surely the triumph of optimism over experience!

Back to *R. glanduliferum*, which this year had about 50 enormous trusses of white, fragrant flowers, starting about the second week in July and continuing to the end of the month. So now we have a flowering time, at least in the Wirral.

This display was followed and exceeded, time wise, by perhaps the most vigorous of all Denny Pratt's late flowering and fragrant azaleas. This came into flower about the same time as *R. glanduliferum* – the second week in July, and there were still a few flowers on the 5 August. The variety has been named 'Thurstaston' by Ness Gardens (after a Wirral village). Mr. Pratt was one of my botany lecturers and long after his retirement I called to see him at his home in Fittleworth. He was then 82 and explained that he had not retired and was breeding (or trying to) late flowering and fragrant azaleas, I explained that I had about 70 azalea seedlings at home and he delighted in telling me that he had a thousand. That put me in my place!

Both these plants have given me great pleasure this year and are a lovely way to remember the donors or developers of the varieties.

Ted Brabin



Rhododendron glanduliferum



Rhododendron 'Thurstaston' Photos: Angela Brabin

Wessex Branch

Annual Flower Show held at Ramster.

Due to the number of exhibits and people entering the show this year, John David had to take some time entering all the exhibitors and plant names on the judge's sheet and show certificates. He managed to stay calm under pressure and was, as always, a good steward for the exhibitors. Colin Tomlin was our judge and we are very grateful for the time he gives us.

The committee decided that next year we will only put names on the First Prize certificates to help cut down the administrative work and then everyone can enjoy the day. A list can then be sent out to the exhibitors so they can see the prize winners and exhibits shown for their records.



Russell Beeson – Cup Winner for Best in Show for his exhibit of *R. 'Charlotte de Rothschild'*



Jim Inskip and Trudy Breen, winners of the Lady Adam Gordon Plate for a group of three elepidotes (*R. 'XXL'*, *R. 'Springtime'* and *R. unknown.*) In both photos, Dr John David, standing on the right, presented the trophies.

Jenny and I were delighted to win the Katherine Beadle Shield for the most points.

The floral displays provoked a lot of interest among the garden visitors and many questions were asked.



Part of the show tables at the Wessex Branch Show

Summer Picnic held at Loder Plants, Long Hill, Brighton Road, Lower Beeding, Horsham

I would like to start by thanking our hosts Chris and Tania Loder for making us so welcome and the constant cups of tea and coffee with delicious homemade biscuits. They arranged our venue so we could overlook the lake and far scenery. The weather was perfect!



Summer picnic at Loder Plants. Photos: Jenny Fly

After our picnic, different members got up to give a 5 minute talk about different plants that they had in flower at this time of year or what they thought was worthy of growing. It proved very interesting and entertaining!

We all agreed that the most outstanding exhibits were the late flowering rhododendrons hybridised by Paul Strike. The health and vigour of the flowers and leaves were incredible. Paul has

Continued overleaf

been the gardener at The Malthouse in Chithurst, which is owned by Mr. & Mrs Graham Ferguson, for almost 30 years. He trained at a horticultural college in Somerset and has worked at Edinburgh Botanic Garden, Kew and other gardens in the south east of England.



Above three photos are of Paul Strike's hybrids (see above).
Photos: Jenny Fly

During his time at the Malthouse, Paul has followed on in the footsteps of the well-known author and nurseryman, Michael Haworth-Booth, father of Graham's wife Alys, whose interest was late flowering rhododendrons.

Paul has used *R. 'Leonora'* as a parent plant for many of the crosses he has made, along with *R. 'Argosy'*, *R. 'Tally Ho'*, *R. 'Grand Finale'*, *R. 'Flameheart'* and *R. 'Polar Bear'* together with the species *R. auriculatum* and *R. kyawii*. As you can see from the photos above they are quite spectacular.

I was at the Malthouse today (14th August 2019) and took note of rhododendrons with buds still to break. David Millais has now registered some of Paul's previous crosses and I am sure there will be more to follow.

Andy Fly

MEMBERS NOTES

In praise of *Camellia trichocarpa*

It's true that lately we have not suffered one of those damaging periods of protracted frost lasting several days where the temperature fails to rise above freezing during the day. This means that in recent years nothing of dubious hardiness has been tested to destruction. We may be living in a fool's paradise, but it also may be that we are witnessing a longer term trend to relatively warmer winters.

Having said that, last year the Beast from the East was a real trial for those plants generally described as vulnerable to low temperatures, especially wind-borne frosts. Temperatures were not excessively low, but the frost-bearing wind was a potential killer. The conventional wisdom is that vulnerable plants should be avoided, to escape disappointment and gnashing of teeth.

A favourite camellia species of rare quality, *Camellia trichocarpa* is usually described as in this vulnerable category. Our website says this species 'has prospects as a garden plant in gardens that do not experience temperatures much below freezing'. Given recent experience in Kent, not noted for its kindly winters, this advice may be rather too conservative and playing it safe. As a result, the plant may be perceived as another certain case of winterkill sooner or later, with a concomitant reluctance to plant it.

Three plants here in west Kent, outside for 8 years, unprotected and planted side by side on a well drained stony bank and from two different provenances, are almost identical in form, foliage and flower. Sheltered from the north and east by a holly screen filtering the wind, they were partially defoliated by the Beast, particularly the plant at one end which was slightly more exposed. There was no twig or bud kill and after a full season of growth there was no sign that they were at all affected. They are now full of developing flower bud. The literature generally has it that -5 or -6C is about the limit of its cold tolerance. It has survived this

without damage in several winters though, it has to be admitted, for only short periods.



Camellia trichocarpa

I am labouring the point because I believe the quality of the plant is worth the risk – it has that almost indefinable touch of real class. It is a superb plant of the first rank in foliage and flower, as well as bark.

The foliage is very distinctive. Leaves are dark green, glossy and up to 13cm long with a short petiole, acuminate, rounded at the base, serrate but with a characteristic wavy edge and a rugose finish with reticulate veining. The young growth is coppery red.



Young foliage of *Camellia trichocarpa*

The flowers, opening in early spring, are held singly or in twos at the shoot tips and in the upper leaf axils and are 5–8cm across, white, slightly wavy and crinkled with 6-7 petals framing a prominent boss of deep yellow stamens.



Camellia trichocarpa. Photos: Maurice Foster

The bark is a further attraction as plants mature. It is a suede dun/grey and well worth exposing by selective pruning. It features on strong stems that support a sturdy upright bush which at White House Farm has so far grown to some 2.5m. The literature claims heights of up to 9m in the wild but it is likely to need a warmer climate and higher rainfall than ours to achieve anything like this.

Camellia trichocarpa is scarce and not widely available but it's worth seeking it out – and I believe where soil and shelter conditions are generally in its favour, its exceptional quality is well worth the winter risk.

Maurice Foster VMH

***Magnolia conifera* – Rare and unpleasant!**

Some years ago I bought an evergreen magnolia labelled *Mangletia yuyuanensis* which I read had wonderful tropical foliage even without flowering. I planted it in a light woodland situation, stood back and watched it grow. It seemed happy enough, and the foliage, though fairly lustrous and up to about 15cm long, did not appear overly tropical. The new growth was not all that colourful, although a reddish orange colour for a few days. Last year, after an interval of about 12 years, I was excited to see a few buds forming which were pendulous and firm; a promising look. After a few weeks, they opened to white flowers with rather strap like petals enclosing red stamens subtended by thin strappy white bracts. These, within a day, had turned brown and moved upright, giving the flower the appearance of a surprised rabbit. The white petals with red stamens inside then started to turn brown about a day later, and the appearance of the flowers was not very pleasing.

Continued overleaf



John's magnolia before the unpleasant change he describes in this note.

This year the flowering was copious and I hoped for better things. The flowers opened in succession from the top of the tree downwards, and the tree was covered. Looking up into the branches, there were a few flowers still retaining their white colour but most had become brown and from a distance looked as if they had turned to mush. A rather unpleasant sight.



Magnolia conifera. Photos: John Marston

I went to my Chinese book of magnolia species and looked up *Mangletia* (they refuse to call them *Magnolia*) *yuyuanensis*, and saw a lovely white flower looking straight at you, and not a pendant brown and mushy flower looking down. I turned the pages trying to find an illustration of my magnolia flower whose flowers are rather distinctive in form, and came upon *Mangletia chingii* (now correctly *Magnolia conifera*) and there it was. A rather spruced

up and perhaps optimistic watercolour catching the appearance of the flower a few hours after opening. I was very disappointed at this not being what I thought I had bought. Not only that, but to my horror I remembered buying a *Magnolia chingii* a few years ago thinking that I had not got one, and planting it in another wooded part of the garden. Oh dear; I can only hope that this turns out to be *M. yuyuanensis* mis-labelled, but I fear not. I shall await the flowering with trepidation, and it might be destined for the chop if it is the same as the other one.

John Marston

Garden Friendly Vireyas

Vireya Rhododendrons with few exceptions have beautiful, vibrant and sometimes perfumed flowers but sadly, nature did not consider human preference for bushy, compact growth habits, pest and disease resistance and continual flowering for garden plants. There are obvious variations in both the species and hybrid Vireyas but generally a lot of them have a tendency towards open growth habits that are inclined to be top heavy and can suffer a number of environmental insults.

The adaptations of Vireya species, allowing them to take advantage of their surroundings, are vital to survival in a tropical montane forest setting. The ability to extend branches to capture light which is often scarce in the understory, is very useful. The seedlings of *Rhododendron viriosum* growing on Mt Spurgeon in North Queensland, Australia germinate on moss covered boulders, sending roots out like a strangler fig to the mulch covered ground below. Branches may extend up to 2 metres sideways to reach a shaft of light breaking through the overhead canopy. These fantastic adaptations often result in rather unattractive bushes from a horticulturist's point of view.

Over the last 20 years I have grown over 200 hybrid and species Vireyas, many of which have been discarded and composted as a result of the same traits that serve them well in their natural habitat. Shameful I know but some hybrids were non-conformers regardless of the intervention. In more recent years I have tried to present for sale Vireyas that have the commercial characteristics of repeat flowering, compact growth habit and disease resistance. The task has been challenging, the more traits you select against, the fewer Vireya varieties remaining in your stock population.

The 200+ soon reduced to approximately 40 and they included some that did not make the grade on all three criteria but produced flowers that were exceptional and had to remain as part of the collection. Below is my list of Vireyas that I have found to be most successful in a garden setting in the sub-tropics and the traits that confer their garden-friendliness translate into commercial assets. It is worth noting that these hybrids may perform differently in another environment. The first six listed below require little or no intervention and fit my criteria for selection almost 100%:

'Haloed Gold', 'Kisses', 'Fireplum', 'Arthur's Choice', 'Andrew's Orange', 'French Vanilla'



R. 'Haloed Gold'



R. 'French Vanilla'



R. 'Kisses'



R. 'Fireplum'

The remaining varieties in my list are all considered performers and I would also classify them as garden-friendly but they match my selection criteria maybe 80%. I am not suggesting that Vireya hybrids that did not make my short list are not worthy of cultivation, in fact many others have more spectacular blooms and are beautifully perfumed. I continue to grow and propagate a large range of Vireyas that I have not listed as garden-friendly. In my selection I have tried to assess the Vireyas I market for ease of growing to increase success for the gardener. The intervention required with the above mentioned Vireyas is reduced to achieve a marketable product.

I acknowledge my nursery issues are not every gardener's or collector's problem and that other criteria for selection do exist. Vireyas for export to La Reunion and Tahiti were selected for large vibrantly coloured flowers, growth habit was not so important. A cut flower producer including Vireyas in his catalogue requested Vireya with large flowers on long stems, this grower wanted and selected Vireya hybrids that produce flowers on sticks, compact growth habit was not a criteria. In discussion with gardeners that have chosen a specific Vireya hybrid for the beauty of its flower I do suggest that the growth habit should then be used to determine its placement in the garden. Plant compact and bushy types in the front and tall, open growth habit types to the back. Similarly a shy-flowering Vireya can bring a great deal of joy when that precious truss finally opens. Lack of repeat flowering is also not a reason to exclude a particular hybrid Vireya or species from the garden. Disease susceptibility in the subtropics is however a sound reason for leaving a plant on the shelf and removing its name from the propagation list. These hybrids cost extra time and money to reach the same standard. Commercial production for sale into a retail garden market should consider the above and save unwitting gardeners from disappointment when their new Vireya reaches for the sky on leggy canes and becomes unsightly with mildew, anthracnose and/or rhododendron rust.

Continued overleaf

The 12 Vireyas listed below are my next preferred choices for gardeners as they generally exhibit good growth habit and will repeat flower:

'Superfleur', 'The Trophy', 'Joy Lenor', 'Susan Maree', 'Veronica Mauree', 'Sunny Coast Harry', 'Saint Leu Sunset', 'Bob's Daughter', 'Great Scent Sation', 'Pink Swan', 'Jimmy Sax', 'Coral Flare'.



R. 'Superfleur'

Two of the many species I have grown that have proven to be garden-friendly include *R. loranthiflorum* and *R. viriosum*.



R. *loranthiflorum*



R. *viriosum*

All photos: Neil Puddey

Vireya Rhododendrons are a large and varied group and hybridisers have introduced a fantastic selection into cultivation. From my many years of experience of growing Vireyas in the garden and nursery I have found that not all are equally desirable and suggest

greater importance for future breeding be given towards growth habit and disease resistance as well as flower beauty.

Neil Puddey

Conservation matters... more

Love propagating from cuttings but no room in your garden for more plants? Your Group needs you!

You will read about our Group Collections and the latest initiative to assemble a database of extant plants from our three genera elsewhere in this Bulletin.

Now our attention turns to the practical issues of conservation: propagation and distribution.

Within our membership we have passionate propagators with no more space in their own gardens but still that driving urge to raise new plants. As well as our growing collection, we also have young gardeners and members with new gardens looking to expand their own collections with unusual varieties. There are also those who could help with the in-between stage of growing young plants on to planting out stage but with no propagation facilities of their own. To complete the process we have members who could act as 'staging posts' for a distribution network. Everything is possible if we can organise a community dedicated to making it work.

So we have an army to be mustered! Our conservation efforts will be made much stronger, the more resilient our network becomes.

Sit back and consider what you could contribute to this important project and get in touch once you have decided.

pam@woodtown.net or by post to Woodtown, Sampford Spiney, Yelverton, Devon PL20 6LJ or phone 01822 852122

Pam Hayward

RHS Plant Awards - what became of them?

How many members are growing plants with an AM or FCC attached to their name? When did you last see a new one published in the yearbook? Whilst the AGM process does continue from year-to-year, selecting the absolute best of our three genera in terms of reliability and availability, what happened to those more specialist, connoisseur new varieties which used to be championed at the RHS committee meetings? Once recognised in Preliminary Certificates (PCs) whilst they were further assessed, Awards of Merit (AMs) or First Class Certificates (FCCs), reorganisation in the RHS and disagreement about their value led to a hiatus in making what had been very long standing awards in the RHS's tradition of acknowledging excellence.

I have always believed that these awards guide both our young enthusiasts to superior forms of species or hybrids

(Rhododendron 'Electra' AM for example) and delight our expert growers when they appear in nursery lists. Luckily, our former Chairman, David Millais, is also a 'believer' and has helped fight the battle to reinstate them. At last we can report that a renewed RHS Plant Awards Scheme which includes our three genera has been introduced, and has been tested during 2019. As part of our Partnership Agreement with the RHS, recommending plants for award is our responsibility and a great privilege, and we now intend to promote it with all gusto.

Space is limited here but details of how to submit a plant for award will appear on our website or can be emailed on request to pam@woodtown.net.

Pam Hayward

Questions on my *Magnolia angustifolia* (*grandiflora*)

Several years ago, I acquired some seed from a magnolia at Kew which was labeled as *Magnolia angustifolia* with an attribution to Ted Millais. One of these seedlings survived to be planted out in front of our house here on the Wirral. After 13 years it bloomed for the first time, which was very welcome as several pessimists questioned whether I would live long enough to see it flower! As you can see from the photos, it is quite unusual, with olive green leaves, and fabulous pale brown new leaves. Also note the lanceolate shape of the leaves (hence *angustifolia*). I have obviously researched this name and found it in Callaway's book, where it was subsumed into *M. grandiflora*. My questions are to do with the flowers, which you can see start as wonderful candles. However, it is downhill from there as they never open out like all the other *M. grandiflora* I have seen. The outer tepals eventually go brown and then the whole flower disintegrates! So, any ideas why it does this? I have read that magnolia flowers only open out once they have been pollinated by a beetle, so maybe no beetle can get into that very tightly bound candle? Has anyone seen any research that identifies which families of beetles do the pollination in the UK/Europe? As mine is so obviously different in several respects from the 'standard' *M. grandiflora*, does anyone else think that it ought to be at least a subspecies or maybe variety?

Stephen Lyus



Above: photos of Steve's magnolia taken by the author



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the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Group and Branch Meetings and Events

Members are more than welcome to attend events at any branches

OCTOBER 2019

Sat 26th 10.30am – 4pm
RHS and South West Branch

RHS Garden Rosemoor
Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH

Branch AGM and autumn meeting.

Special Guest Speaker Roy Lancaster

Plant sale, quiz, raffle.

Member's plants on show

**£10 for members/ affiliates
£12 others**

Dr John Marston

01271 267091

artavianjohn@gmail.com

NOVEMBER 2019

Sat 9th 10am

New Forest Branch

The Lecture Theatre Hillier
Arboretum, Jermyns Lane,
Ampfield, SO51 0QA

10am AGM

11.15am Lecture by John Anderson, Keeper of the Savill and Valley Gardens 'Plant hunting in cultivation' Cost £6

Martin Gates

023 8025 2843

mgates@talktalk.net

Sat 9th 10.30am

Wessex Branch

Ramster Gardens, Petworth
Road, Chiddingfold GU8 4SN

AGM and Autumn walk around Ramster Gardens

Andy Fly

01903 742350

pincroftgarden1@btconnect.com

Sat 16th 2pm

Wessex Branch

Ramster Gardens, Petworth
Road, Chiddingfold GU8 4SN

Illustrated Talk by Rosemary Legrand 'Idyllic Italian Gardens' Cost £5

Andy Fly

01903 742350

pincroftgarden1@btconnect.com

**To advertise in this publication call
01568 780828**

Sat 16th 2pm

North West Branch

The Lecture Theatre, Ness
Botanic Gardens

Rhod Taylor 'The Lovell Quinta Arboretum'

Ted Brabin

0151 353 1193

angela.brabin@btinternet.com

JANUARY 2020

Sat 18th 2pm

North West Branch

Ness Botanic Gardens
Venue to be announced

Annual social

Ted Brabin

0151 353 1193

angela.brabin@btinternet.com

FEBRUARY 2020

Thurs 20th 11am

Irish Branch

The National Botanic
Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin.

Tour led by Glasshouse Foreman, Brendan Sayers. This will be followed by a tour of the Great Palm House and the outdoor collections by Seamus O'Brien.

Booking essential, no admission fee.

Seamus O'Brien

seamus.obrien@opw.ie

Tues 25th

Wessex Branch

Ramster Gardens, Petworth
Road, Chiddingfold GU8 4SN

Talk & Slide Show on Magnolias in the UK and New Zealand by Rod Wild

Cost £5

Andy Fly

01903 742350

pincroftgarden1@btconnect.com

MARCH 2020

Sat 7th 2pm

North West Branch

The Lecture Theatre, Ness
Botanic Gardens

Bill Warrell, Head Gardener at Plas Newydd and Penrhyn Castle, on his two gardens

Ted Brabin

0151 353 1193

angela.brabin@btinternet.com

Sat 14th / Sun 15th

RHS and South West Branch

RHS Garden Rosemoor
Torrington, Devon EX38 8PH

RHS Camellia Competition and the SW Branch Magnolia, Rhododendron and Spring Ornamental Competitions

Georgina Barter

020 7821 3142

georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

Dr John Marston

01271 267091

artavianjohn@gmail.com

Thurs 19th 11am

Irish Branch

Mount Congreve Estate,
Co. Waterford

Tour led by Curator Michael White

Seamus O'Brien

seamus.obrien@opw.ie

APRIL 2020

Sat 4th / Sun 5th

RHS

Savill Garden,
Windsor Great Park

RHS Early Rhododendron, Main Camellia and Spring Ornamental Competitions

Georgina Barter

020 7821 3142

georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

Thurs 9th 11am & 2pm

Irish Branch

Tourin House and Gardens
and Dromana House and
Gardens, Cappoquin,
Co. Waterford.

The Blackwater valley is noted for its many historic manor houses with good gardens. We will visit two notable piles with fine woodland gardens. Booking essential Admission free.

Seamus O'Brien

seamus.obrien@opw.ie

**Event updates to Christopher Legrand please:
24 Riverside Road, West Moors, Dorset BH22 0LQ
Email: clegrand@pirltd.org.uk Tel: 01202 873344**

Thurs 16th 10.30am

Irish Branch

The National Botanic
Gardens, Kilmacurragh,
Co. Wicklow

Tour led by Head Gardener, Seamus O'Brien.

Booking essential, no admission fee.

Seamus O'Brien

seamus.obrien@opw.ie

22nd - 29th

RCM Group

Brittany, France

Spring Tour of Gardens of Brittany, from Portsmouth

Brightwater Holidays

01334 657155

www.brightwaterholidays.com

Christopher Legrand

01202 873344

clegrand@pirltd.org.uk

Sat 25th / Sun 26th

RHS and South West Branch

RHS Garden Rosemoor
Torrington, Devon
EX38 8PH

Rhododendron Competition and the SW Branch Camellia, Magnolia and Floral Display Competitions

Georgina Barter

020 7821 3142

georginabarter@rhs.org.uk

Dr John Marston

01271 267091

artavianjohn@gmail.com

MAY 2020

Sat 2nd

Wessex Branch

Ramster Gardens, Petworth
Road, Chiddingfold GU8 4SN

Branch Show including Centenary Cup Competition

Andy Fly

01903 742350

pincroftgarden1@btconnect.com

Sun 3rd / Mon 4th

North West Branch

Ness Botanic Gardens

Branch Show

Ted Brabin

0151 353 1193

angela.brabin@btinternet.com

Fri 8th 10.30am

Irish Branch

The John F. Kennedy
Arboretum, New Ross,
Co. Wexford.

**Full details to follow.
Booking essential**

No fee

Seamus O'Brien

seamus.obrien@opw.ie

Sat 9th

RCM Group

Bowood House, Derry Hill,
Calne, SN11 0LZ

AGM

Polly Cooke

01932 863719

polly.cooke@btinternet.com

Wed 13th 11am and 2pm

Irish Branch

Ringdufferin Estate and
Mahee Island, Strangford
Lough, Co. Down

Ringdufferin House lies on the west side of Strangford Lough and is home to Tracy Hamilton, the current Irish vice-chair of the International Dendrology Society who will lead the tour of the gardens

Paddy Mackie is one of Northern Ireland's best-known plantsmen and from 1960 began a garden on a windswept island in Strangford Lough (See Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias, pp. 27-34. 2019). Booking essential. No fee.

Seamus O'Brien

seamus.obrien@opw.ie

AUGUST 2020

Fri 28th

The Annesley Gardens,
Castlewellan and the
Seaforde Demesne,
Seaforde, Co. Down.

Full details to follow

Seamus O'Brien

seamus.obrien@opw.ie