



the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group

Bulletin 108 / March 2012 / www.rhodogroup-rhs.org



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Andy Simons - Chairman

Another spring gardening season is almost upon us, or should I say, has been with us since Christmas. The "intelligence" of plants with regard to flowering timing is a constant point of interest to me. Possibly, as someone interested in showing Rhododendrons and Camellias, I pay attention to it more than most, but what actually drives the timing has me moderately confused. When organising a garden visit or group tour we are always at the mercy of the weather conditions but we also constantly return to the statement "That date will be OK if it's an early/late/normal flowering season". But why do we not know more accurately? I am sure many of you will be saying that it is just the factors of day length and temperature that decide when one of our plants decides to show its colours. Whilst I must of course agree that those two parameters are the key, some longer term issue seems also to be at play. Consider this season, when on the whole it was a normal summer followed by a slightly mild early and mid winter. However, for some the flowering season has been very early - causing severe damage to Magnolias during the post Christmas cold snap. Surely given the evidence a normal or slightly early season was to have been expected? Perhaps the botanists amongst you can enlighten me as to the other less obvious drivers for the timing of the flowering season.

The RCM group's relationship to the wider RHS continues to develop as the society itself works through its governance and committee management issues. As many of you will be aware the society is seeking to modernise how its plant committees work and the plant groups, including the RCM Group, have a role to play in this and are impacted to a greater or lesser degree by it. As I have indicated in the past I believe the Group's new constitution provides us with the correct balance of autonomy of action whilst remaining clearly under the RHS umbrella. However this relationship needs to be under constant review, as I do not believe anybody can predict the longer term impact the changes in RHS governance will have on the society. The Group committee and the RHS Rhododendron and Camellia plant committee have been meeting jointly for some time now; this has worked well despite a few technical issues regarding specialist support services.

As expected, the RHS has now elected to formally fold the plant committee into the Group committee, this will not be without challenges as the two functions are not identical even if they overlap significantly.

As I have said, this action was to be expected but was still a surprise when it actually happened, more so for the plant



Magnolia sieboldii subsp. *sinensis* 'Grandiflora' Photo: Kevin Hughes
(See article on pages 3 & 4)

committee rather than the Group I should add, but we will make it work. On a related RHS issue, you will be aware that the Lawrence Hall in Westminster is to be part leased by the RHS to Westminster School, this will cause some changes to the timings and layout of RHS London shows. I think this should not impact on competitions involving our genera (at least initially!)

but please double check your diaries against the RHS web site for any changes of show dates.

Finally, Pat Bucknell our stalwart group secretary, has elected to step down from this role after many years of effective service to the Group. I know this was a difficult decision for Pat to make being such a strong supporter of the group. I am sure you will wish to add your thanks to that of mine and the committee for the work that she has done over the years and wish her many years of successful flowering. *An advertisement for the role of Group Secretary is contained within this bulletin.*

ADDENDUM

Mr Martin Slocock has indicated his intentions to step back from being an active committee member, Martin has been a key advocate for the merger of the two committees (RCM Group and R&C Plant Committee) and now that this has been successfully achieved he feels able to step back. Martin will be greatly missed and the vigour with which he applied his plantsmanship and RHS experience will be irreplaceable.

EDITOR'S NOTES

John Rawling

New Honorary Secretary required for the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

A new Honorary Secretary is urgently needed for the Group. Please see the details and duties of this important position in the **NOTICES** on page 8 of this Bulletin.

This issue has become, during its compilation, largely a Magnolia issue! This is quite appropriate for this time of year, as the magnolia buds swell and begin to show colour. I am excited that several 'new' plants in my garden, which will be flowering for the first time – grown from seed and planted in 2003 and 2004.

We also have the Group's Tour to the Lake Maggiore region of Northern Italy, starting later this month. A great area to visit at this time, with so many fine gardens, both formal and informal.

A time of promise and suspense!

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I need your letters, reports from branches, articles, future events etc, to keep the members up to date! So, please send me your letters and copy for the next issue

**BY 10TH June 2012
for the July 2012 Bulletin**

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

TOURS

Judith Hallett

Autumn Tour 2012

Plans are underway for our joint RCM and ICS Autumn Tour: this year we shall be visiting the Peak District. The itinerary will include talks and visits to some fine gardens. We shall be staying at 'The Rutland Arms', Bakewell for the nights of **8th, 9th and 10th October**. This hotel is conveniently placed for garden visiting and we shall travel by coach to the gardens. Full details of the tour will appear in the next bulletin and should appear on the website by the end of May.

All members are very welcome on our tours – you don't need to be an 'expert' and indeed most of us are not!!

A full itinerary will be in the July issue of The Bulletin.

Judy Hallett

SPECIAL EVENTS

What's new in Magnolias - Dates for your diary

The RHS Woody Plant Committee is very fortunate to have secured Erland Ejder of the University of Lund, Sweden and Philippe de Spoelberch of Herkenrode/Wespelaar Arboretum, Belgium as the two main speakers at a special open meeting to take a **new look at *Magnolia sprengeri***.

This species is the origin of what arguably is the finest group of tree magnolias for general planting in gardens anywhere in N Europe.

The meeting will be held at the RHS Show on 10th April 2012 and will begin at 10.30am, on the Dais in the Lawrence

Hall at Vincent Square on Tuesday April 10th. RHS Director of Horticulture and past President of the Magnolia Society International Jim Gardiner will host the proceedings and introduce the subject and the speakers.

Erland will give an account of his travels in the footsteps of Wilson in the rugged mountains of Hubei province on a joint expedition with Chinese botanists, undertaken to shed light on the mystery of *M. sprengeri* var *sprengeri* 'Diva', the only plant with pink flowers to germinate from Wilson's seed. A fascinating variety of different pink forms were discovered on the expedition (see: E H Wilson's rose pink magnolias in Hubei, 2009 RCM Yearbook; and *The Plantsman* December 2008) and Erland will discuss the morphology, distribution, flower variation and taxonomy, and propose taxonomic revision.

Philippe will add to this discussion and explore the confusion surrounding the 'rare and misunderstood taxon' of *M. sprengeri* var *elongata*, both in the wild and in cultivation, looking at taxonomic options. (see spring/summer 2011 issue of the Magnolia Soc International journal) He will also describe his work on controlled crosses using the Kew form of *M. sprengeri* var *elongata*.



Magnolia 'Raspberry Swirl'

Photo: Maurice Foster



Magnolias 'Caerhays Belle'(L) & 'Sweetheart'(R) Photo: Maurice Foster

There will be time for questions, discussion and debate, when we want to hear of the experiences and preferences of gardeners who grow derivatives of *M. sprengeri*. The new discoveries in China add exciting potential to the existing range of forms and hybrids, all raised from 'Diva', many of which we are hoping (weather and volunteer providers permitting) to have on display for the benefit of the public at this Vincent Square Spring show. To this end, RCM

members are invited not only to come to the meeting and enjoy the presentation and discussion, but also to bring specimens of *M. sprengeri* forms and hybrids for vase display. If you have specimens in flower on April 10 please do bring them along well before the start of the meeting, clearly labelled with cultivar name and provider. Assistance and vases will be on hand.

It should be a great meeting and I hope to see a big congregation of RCM members and friends there.

Maurice Foster

Magnolia Study Weekend – 13th-14th April 2013

Arboretum Wespelaar in Belgium (founded by Philippe de Spoelberch) will be organizing a Magnolia weekend in April 2013. An invitation is extended to members of RHS RCM Group, the Belgian Dendrology Society, and the Magnolia Society International.

The first day, Saturday 13th April, will be international with talks and guided walks in English. Philippe de Spoelberch, Andrew Bunting and Jim Gardiner have already confirmed their presence.

More details are available on www.arboretumwespelaar.be and will appear in future Bulletins.

Put these Tour and Events dates into your diary! *The Editor*

MAGNOLIAS

Kevin Hughes

MAGNOLIAS TO GROW AND LOVE

When I was asked to write a couple of pages on magnolias and foolishly agreed I found myself with the dilemma of keeping it short, I have way too much to say!

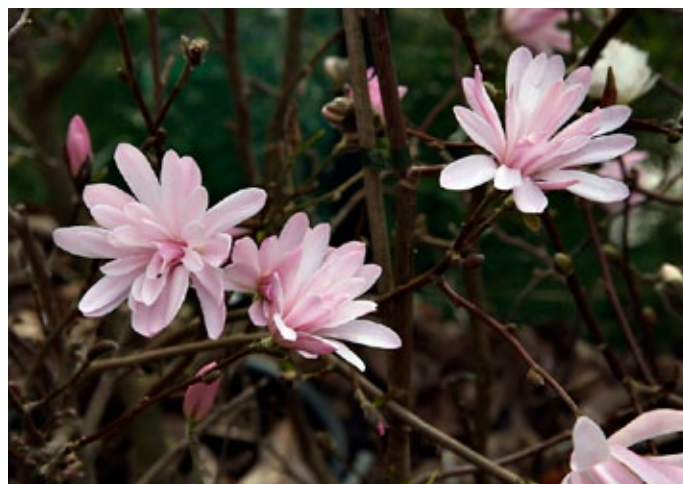
So I thought 'Which were the magnolias I would be unable to garden without?'. My garden is only 30m long and like all plant enthusiasts (nutters) I do overplant, but big trees are out of the question. Here are a few magnolias that I am very fond of and would be loathe to leave out of the garden.

My first choice and perhaps my favourite of all magnolias would be *M. macrophylla* subspecies *ashei*. Native to the South Eastern USA this is a 'big leaf' magnolia that flowers in the summer. In the wild I have seen trees with first growth leaves just under 1m long (leaves are sequentially smaller through the growing season so that they do not shade out the older growth). The undersides of these big 'tropical' leaves is glaucous grey, a nice feature when you are looking up into the canopy. Big white plate sized flowers with crimson blotches at the petal bases, rather like *Cistus ladanifer*, open over a period of several weeks. The garden is then filled with an exotic spicy fragrance which in my garden transports me to an old growth Alabama forest fragment I know, bordering alligator country and filled with trilliums, orchids and other exciting plants, and all of them growing on limestone. Like much of the American flora this magnolia suffers from the persistent misunderstanding in British gardens that it dislikes alkaline soils. In one English garden I know, its failure to grow well has been put down to a dislike of the chalk soil it's been planted on, but the site is shady and wet. These conditions might suit it in the heat of Florida but in England we need to plant it in a warm location. My own small garden is on the chalk, north of Salisbury, but I have deep fertile free draining soil and my plant is showing no signs of chlorosis. However, I bet it would not like shallow chalk any more than it would nutrient poor acid sands and gravels. It is also important to remember its big leaves, they tell you it is not a seaside plant! To grow it well in the UK it

needs a sunny site protected from strong winds with fertile soil. Given these conditions *M. macrophylla* subsp. *ashei* will bless you with its magnificent flowers and foliage on plants as little as 80cm tall or 4 years old, which is why it's possible to grow it in a small garden. An ideal urban plant.

Next we cross the sea to Szechuan, China for the source of my second, and possibly equal favourite species. I first saw it in the private garden of the great plantsman, John Gallagher, where it grows under the canopy of several other magnolias in quite heavy shade. The species is *Magnolia sieboldii* subspecies *sinensis* and the form that John grows is 'Grandiflora'. He tells me he was given the plant by his friend the late Vic Paulowski, the renowned propagator, some 30 years ago. John's tree is a lightly spreading specimen on a single trunk about 3m tall and when I first encountered the plant in May it had some 25 flowers hanging serenely from the branches. There was something of clouds in the sky about them; I found them breath-takingly beautiful. Pure white parachutes of tepals surrounding a central boss of dark-wine coloured anthers and a heavenly scent that is cast down to the earthly beholder! It sets seed quite happily and in early autumn the light red seed pods split to reveal the showy orange seeds. You can tell I love this plant! Sited in a sunny location it will set more flower buds but you run the risk that late frost will often destroy them along with the new leaf growth, possibly even killing new plants. Therefore, I believe, like John's tree, the species is best planted in dappled shade which as any gardener knows reduces the risk of frost damage. I have also seen this plant trained against a wall but I think this rather spoils the effect that is given by the naturally spreading canopy of a 'free' tree.

My present garden is a vile frost pocket so I'm prone to late frost and winter freezes of -15C, and as I've mentioned, it's a chalk soil too. I once said to my customers on chalk, that the best thing they could do was move! While I no longer think this, I do recognise the limitations such soils present. So my magnolias have to be chalk tolerant and late blooming to give me a good chance of seeing flowers rather than brown paper bags, so no *soulangeanas*! There are, however, a few early flowering types that I can get away with, that have hardier flowers and successional blooms so even if one set is taken out others follow. Notable in this group are *M. stellata* and *M. xloebneri*. Back in the early 1990's I was lucky enough to be taken around the Jane Platt garden in Oregon by the noted plantsman Sean Hogan, where two plants in particular caught my eye. One was a double form of *Trillium grandiflorum* and the other a remarkable pink *M. stellata* named after the gardens' creator. Everyone knows the beautiful *M. xloebneri* 'Leonard Messell' which is often sold in the trade as a pink *stellata*.



Magnolia stellata 'Jane Platt'

Photo: Kevin Hughes

Preservation of species - Brian Humphrey

Dear Editor

There have been a number of references in recent Bulletins to the efforts involved in preserving species and cultivars within the genera of interest to the group. In the November 2011 Bulletin much attention was given to both species and cultivars of *Rhododendron* and reference was made to the *Rhododendron* Species Conservation Group based in Scotland. Enquires made previously have failed to elicit any information on the strategy or results of the RSCG and as far as I am aware no information beyond a brief outline has been published in previous Bulletins or Year Books.

Covering activity in the South West a list of 32 varieties of *Rhododendron* was given by John Harsant but it is unclear whether or not these have been produced. If so, are they available as made plants ready to reintroduce to gardens and can they be obtained by members of the group or are they intended only for the garden of origin?

As an outside observer the strategy adopted for this conservation effort which appears to rely heavily, if not totally on micropropagation, causes some surprise. Having been involved with the production of woody plants as a professional nursery manager and nurseryman for almost fifty years I have been fortunate to experience all the traditional methods of plant propagation and also included twelve years responsibility for a micropropagation laboratory.

The outstanding feature of micropropagation is its ability to provide large quantities of clonal material of a relatively limited range of genotypes. Even within the same genus it may take months to culture one variety compared with the comparative ease of producing another. Some of the *Rhododendron* species in particular must represent a real challenge.

While it is true that a number of micropropagation laboratories, particularly in America, did and still are producing *rhododendrons*, these concentrated mainly on cultivars which responded well to the technique with the objective of selling these types worldwide. A cause for concern with micropropagated plants was (is?) the possibility of mutations occurring during the procedures used. Because of this a number of growers refused plants produced from a micropropagation source preferring those arising as a result of cutting or grafting systems. It is interesting to note that the huge *rhododendron* market in Germany is still very much involved with production by grafting and cuttings.

In the 1960s through to the 1970s and early 80s Hillier nurseries produced one of the largest ranges of *rhododendrons* commercially available. The stock/propagation records show that 149 species were produced by grafting, 16 by cuttings or grafts and 213 by cuttings; only very few were produced from seed because of the high risk of hybridisation. A total of 378 + species produced vegetatively without recourse to micropropagation is perhaps a reasonable starting point.

Regarding the choicer hybrids, which would presumably encompass the group mainly under discussion, the figures show that 178 were grafted, this would include the following and their variant forms:- Albatross, Angelo, Barclayi, Carita, Cornish Cross, Damaris, Hawk, Isabella, Jalisco, Loderi, Luscombei, Naomi, Penjerrick and Sir Frederick More, to name some of the more iconic *rhododendron* cultivars.

Of course it grows rather larger than the average *stellata* and if you truly want a smaller pink magnolia I would suggest you try *M. 'Jane Platt'*. It is multi-tepalled rather like *M. stellata* '*Chrysanthemumiflora*' (which I have also seen sold as 'Jane Platt') deep pink in bud and a lovely delicate pink when open. Partly because of fond memories but mostly because of its quality this is the *stellata* of choice for me. One *Magnolia xloebneri* that has taken my fancy over recent years is 'Mag's Pirouette'.

I used to be a fan of *M. xloebneri* 'Merrill' but she has been supplanted in my affections. Cream in bud and white when open, every flower of 'Mag's Pirouette' is a water-lily of perfect symmetry. Although multi-branched, its habit is somewhat upright and flowers are freely produced on young plants. Not one to ignore.

*Magnolia xloebneri* 'Pirouette'

Photo: Kevin Hughes

Finally, a new introduction from Korea. John Gallagher for many years teased me with pictures of a dark purple-black *M. liliiflora* that he'd seen in South Korea. We now grow this form and have named it *M. liliiflora* 'Raven'. It is a small slow growing tree that flowers in April with the olive-green new foliage. If it was a yellow this would be a disadvantage as the flowers would blend with the leaves but dark flowers are brought to life by the green back-cloth. Beware planting dark cultivars such as *M. 'Felix Jury'* where they will be seen against a sky background, it takes the subtlety of shading out of the flowers. Far better they be seen against forest or valley sides where their true beauty can be best appreciated. *M. 'Raven'* provides its own background to enhance the beauty of its flowers and is late flowering so tends like other *liliifloras* to avoid the late frosts, a real plus for me and anyone else away from the milder west.

It has been said that your favourite plant is the one you are looking at now. I'm not looking at any as we come out of frozen February but as I write, I can think of so many others: 'Star Wars', 'Spectrum', 'Daphné', 'Lois' and 'Spring Rite' to name but a few that are also highly desirable plants. I could go on forever, fortunately for you with only a couple of pages to write I have to stop now. Spring is coming, February has ended and done its worst, let's get planting.

Kevin Hughes has his nursery at Heale Gardens, Nr. Salisbury, Wiltshire. He can be contacted by email: info@healegarden.org or 01722 782504.

Much of the work above was carried out using far from ideal rootstocks (ponticum) and techniques which while good and effective have been improved upon in recent years. The use of rootstocks such as *R. 'Cunningham's White'* and the recently introduced INKARO will unquestionably improve takes. Subsequent performance after planting out, would show better results for grafted plants than for those on their own roots. Further work will be necessary to identify ideal rootstocks for the large leaved (*R. grande*) types and the lepidote species and hybrids although many of the latter respond well to cuttings techniques.

Procedures for propagation by cuttings has developed greatly in recent years and the use of appropriate formulations of growth substances (rooting hormones) and improved mist/fog control will undoubtedly produce better rooting percentages than in the past.

From the relatively scant information available to the outside observer it appears that one of the main reasons for the choice of micropropagation as the main (only?) method of propagation has been concerns surrounding disease control. Fortunately I have no first hand experience of the two recent and serious diseases of danger to rhododendrons namely *Phytophthora ramorum* and *P. kernoviae*. However the other important species *P. cinnamomi* has plagued rhododendron production for years and is likely to continue to do so. The use of fungicides to combat this disease has proved only partially successful mainly because those available fall into the fungistatic category and have consequently been unable to eradicate the disease. Growers have learned to live with the problem by adopting a policy of skilful culture, good sanitation including irrigation water treatment, ruthless destruction of plants showing symptoms, the timely use of fungicides and more recently for some growers the use of bio control systems such as compost tea.

The presence of *Phytophthora* has not precluded propagation by cuttings or grafting on a commercial scale. I received a consignment of rhododendrons from a German specialist in February 2011 and as usual grafted a duplicate set from scions obtained from the plants. Subsequently one of them developed symptoms of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and eventually collapsed and died. The duplicate graft has continued to develop well and I do not expect any problems with it in the future. Of course this outcome is not always guaranteed and if the disease has progressed into the tissues of the scion there is no chance of success. An experienced grafter will usually be able to detect signs of disease at the time of grafting and eliminate the scion. A good shoot with apparent health and vigour and no sign of internal discolouration is usually a safe scion. Even in old worn out non-vigorous, possibly partially diseased plants, healthy shoots are often produced, usually in small quantities but sufficient to provide a start.

It is accepted that the tiny portions of tissue taken to initiate micropropagation procedures are more likely to be disease-free or can be rendered so. If not, the problem will soon become manifest in the laboratory. However the problems of achieving disease-free material for culture in vitro are considerable and certainly no less than requirements for culture in vivo.

The second concern appears to be what might be done with excess numbers of plants produced as a result of carrying out the rescue policy. Certainly a successful micropropagation procedure, as already noted, has the capacity to produce enormous numbers of plants. Having spent weeks, months, occasionally years, getting a given plant successfully into culture there is every incentive to bulk up the resultant propagules. In the case of grafting, numbers can be adjusted to a reasonable degree to provide what is required. Referring back to the list of *Rhododendron* species discussed previously the target numbers for a high percentage of those

grafted was fifteen plants per year

The role of grafting in plant conservation has in my opinion been very much underrated and ignored. A number of species currently under cultivation and to some extent protected from becoming endangered as a result of the use of grafting is significant. *Tilia endochrysea* immediately comes to mind. The realisation that the subgenera and sections within the Magnolias are likely to be graft compatible with each other highlights the use of grafting as a means of preserving types in danger within this genus. So far *Magnolia kobus*, *stellata* and the Kosar and deVos hybrids have provided compatible rootstocks for a whole range of magnolias including *campbellii*; *sprengeri*; *sargentiana*; *wilsonii* Highdown; *xwiesneri*; Nimbus; *figo* var. *crassipes* (*Michelia*) and *lotungensis* (*Michelia*). I have not yet encountered problems of incompatibility within the camellias but the range tested has so far been small. Species successfully grafted onto *C. japonica* rootstocks so far include *reticulata* cultivars (standard procedure in nurseries for many years); *xwilliamsii*; *sasanqua* cvs.; *pitardii*; *forrestii* and *transnokoensis*.

I would be interested in members' response to this letter and in particular any experiences regarding compatible or incompatible combinations within the genera under discussion

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Preservation of rhododendrons - John Harsant

Further Thoughts

This note arises from reading the Chairman's Notes in the Bulletin No. 107 and my own experiences. It also provides an opportunity to examine how we can obtain maximum use of our resources. Where any opinion is expressed or implied it is personal to me not of the Group

The production of plants from the laboratory to those ready for the garden can be divided into three phases each of which greatly increases the space required.

1. **Laboratory Phase.** This covers the cleaning of the stock, preparation of the growing medium and the actual production of the tiny plants. This is a specialist process for which few qualified staff are available but for which fortunately little space is required relative to the subsequent requirement. It ends with the tiny plants being set in the medium for the weaning phase which follows.
2. **Weaning Phase.** This requires facilities similar to those needed to root cuttings; mist and controlled temperature. Up to ten times the space needed for the first phase is needed but such facilities and the experience of their use are much more common. It is at this stage that the ultimate destination of the plants needs to be considered whether for specialist use alone or for a wider distribution. I have no doubt that there are cultivars of great merit which have not been generally distributed and which would be enjoyed by many if they were available. The number of plants produced will reflect this objective. It is at this phase that the resources of commercial growers would be of help the plant thus produced being shared by all those interested.
3. **Growing On Phase.** The plants having been weaned will require the same conditions as cuttings which have been rooted and even more facilities exist for this purpose than for the preceding phases but again much more space is needed.

I hold that by recognising these three separate set of conditions and by cooperation between those involved maximum use of

resources can be achieved. For example, plants from Phase 1 may be grown on by a commercial nursery who after returning a small number of the plants now weaned to the provider of the initial stock keeps the rest to be ultimately sold to the public.

All of this is complicated by the incomplete understanding of phytophthora and current attempts at control; hopefully once the disease is better understood a more rational approach will emerge.

I thank Ros Smith of the Duchy College and Troy Smith of Bodnant Gardens for their assistance in the preparation of this note.

John Harsant john@harsant.uk.com

***Magnolia sargentiana* 'Robusta' Chenault Form at High Beeches.**

Magnolia *sargentiana* var *robusta* is a native of the mountains of West Szechwan, China. It is acclaimed as one of the most beautiful and spectacular of all flowering trees.

Seed was first collected by Ernest Wilson, in 1908, when collecting for the Arnold Arboretum, USA. They sent the seed to Chenault's Nursery, Orleans, France, as they thought it needed a warmer climate. Grafted plants were distributed, but very few, perhaps two or three, survive today. The original wild tree, or trees, has never been re-discovered.

At High Beeches, this magnolia made a very large tree, with many branches from near the base, 36ft high in 1987.

This marvellous tree fell in the Great Gale that devastated the South East of England that autumn, but hundreds of shoots sprang up from the fallen trunk, and in some years each one flowers. At the same time, we were advised of its importance and rarity, as an original 'Chenault' grafted plant, and not now known in the wild. We are taking steps to have it propagated again.

This year, there is a bud on every twig, thousands of them! The gardens are open from March 17th, from 1pm to 5pm, but closed on Wednesday. The magnolia should be spectacular towards the end of March, not to be missed!

Anne Boscawen High Beeches Gardens Conservation Trust,
Registered Charity No 299134.

Tom's collection of new material was much more advanced than the new plants at UBC. One species of particular interest was *Dipentodon sinicus*, a deciduous tree from S.W. China. It grows to 3 to 5m and has small white flowers. Tom's had bloomed but Peter's had not.

The range of Victorian glasshouses with their tender vines was an unexpected and exciting bonus as Vancouver is far too new to be blessed with such structures.

Also well worth a visit is Tom's parent's garden, Gwavas located in the Hawkes Bay area of the North Island of New Zealand. From the 1850's five generations of the Carlyon family have worked this land. It's extraordinary woodland garden was laid out in the 1880's. As well as having a large collection of mature rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias, and camellias, there are a great many choice selections of other genus. Cardiocrinums grow like weeds. Tom has contributed many new introductions, carrying on a family tradition. The garden is open by prior arrangement – there is a website. Carola and Mike live in the original family home built in 1858. The long vacant handsome family house built in 1890 is set beautifully in the garden. It has recently been restored by Tom's sister Phyllida as a Bed & Breakfast.

Margaret Charlton and Charlie Sale
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Dear Editor,

As one who has given talks to garden societies over a wide area of London and the South East, I fear the answer to the question of why we are losing membership is generally *anno domini!* There are a few exceptions where there are a reasonable number of members in the 30-40 age group, but at the age of 74 I am often nearly the youngest there.

Perhaps, as suggested by Dr Parry in the November bulletin, we do need to stress the advantages of rhododendrons – which are many. They are easy to move (take them with you by arrangement when you move house), colour range across the spectrum, sizes from prostrate dwarves to giants, outstanding foliage effects and ideal as foils or background for inter-planting herbaceous plants and bulbs.

However, the sheer diversity can cause problems. I learnt a great deal when at the Edinburgh RGB many years ago, but the sheer volume of species can make the experts slightly intimidating. It certainly keeps me humble in that talking to garden clubs is one thing – but I can only sit at the feet of our membership in terms of knowledge.

I do not think there is much chance of educating our media pundits – most would only think of the dreaded *R ponticum* – and in any case their brief today is very different from the Percy Throwers of the past and in some instances their horticultural background is sketchy to say the least.

Touching briefly on the winter of 2010/11, one tiny of example of the little understood microclimatic effect can be seen in my next-door neighbour's garden. He has two Bay Trees, one either side of his front door, one is dead and the other barely damaged. These Mediterranean plants – when will we ever learn!

Mr Hilary Newman, M. Hort (R.H.S.)
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Dear Editor,

The excellent letter in Bulletin 107 by Dr John Parry about the general demise of rhododendron and the declining membership of the RCM Group struck a very strong chord with me.

My love for rhododendrons started as a small boy seeing

LETTERS

Tregrehan

Dear Editor,

It was with much pleasure that we read in the November Bulletin Colin Brown's report of the Group's visit to Tregrehan Gardens. It brought back memories of our visit there in 2007. Urged on by Tom's parents, Carola and Mike Hudson, and by Peter Wharton, Curator of the David C. Lam Asian Garden at the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden (UBC), Tregrehan was at the top of our list of gardens to be seen when we visited Cornwall prior to joining the Group tour of Irish gardens. Peter was very interested in getting our report on the state of some trees that both he and Tom were growing from seed collected in China. On a very rainy day off we went with Tom, at remarkable speed, to view and admire his exciting collection of new introductions, all so well integrated into the long established garden. The rate of growth of Cornish plants surpasses those of coastal Vancouver. It was interesting to us to see the difference that a slightly warmer and sunnier environment makes. Our conditions are much wetter, in particular. As a consequence,

beautiful specimens in flower and reflected in the trout lake of Margam Castle in South Wales where I lived.

I have been a member of the Group for longer than I can remember but I must confess, not a great participant. However, I have been concerned for some time about the elitist and sometimes academic nature of the RCM Group. Although admirable in so many ways it tends to isolate itself from mainstream gardening. As Dr Perry stated in his letter “we need to attract the man in the street”, but I doubt if this will be possible with an increasing polarisation between the RCM Group and the RHS.

To put the relationship into perspective, the RCM Group has 750 members compared to the RHS with 380,000. If only 5% of RHS members are lovingly interested in rhododendrons, that would still be over twenty times greater than the existing RCM Group. It could therefore be controversially be argued that the genera would benefit greatly if it was fully embraced by the RHS even if it meant the demise of an increasingly isolated RCM Group.

So what should the future be? From the arguments outlined in this letter it would appear that the main thrust should be for activity to be heavily biased with the RHS and the RCM Group to be recognised as a very valuable activity but with a more specialist identity.

I understand that there is some current activity to restore the badly needed relationship with the RHS which is most welcome. It is hoped that this letter will contribute in some small way to this important subject.

Dr. Don Evans, Bewdley, Worcestershire DY12 2DA.

Dr Evans will notice that we have had 16 new members join the Group since the last Bulletin in November. *The Editor*

garden pointing out many of the plants of interest. We were able to shelter from the damp chill for food and drink in the busy tea-room; and to finish, there was a well stocked plant sales area, from which some members filled their cars with choice plants!

It would be good to see these gardens in the sunshine one day - another time.

David Ives

MEMBERSHIP

Rupert Eley

We are very pleased to welcome our New Members. We hope they will enjoy the benefits of belonging to our RHS Group.

BRANCH REPORTS

Peak District Branch - Spring visits 2011

On 26th May, a group of Peak branch members made their way on a dull damp May day to Nantwich, where, a little way west, stands a fine and well preserved 17th century house, **Dorfold Hall**, with a formal approach between tall trees. It poured with rain on arrival and we were glad to be ushered indoors for an interesting tour of the delightful old house.

The gardener, Nigel Oliver, then took us round the well kept garden, part formal, part informal, including a lovely dell filled with rhododendrons, like *R. Loderi* ‘King George’, many azaleas, a few magnolias such as *M. xloebneri* ‘Merrill’ and *M. wilsonii* and camellias too, such as *C.* ‘Cornish Snow’. Other established shrubs and trees, *Acers* and *Robinia*, shared the space under a loose high oak canopy, with a small stream running through. Despite the drizzle it was a pleasant place. The final show piece was a one thousand year old Spanish Chestnut of great girth, with branches bending to the ground.

From Dorfold we moved to **Cholmondley Castle**, which has a large garden, going back to the 18th century, but developed over recent decades by Lady Cholmondley, and still watched over by her Ladyship. The garden is beautifully designed, maintained and planted, with many fine tall trees spread through the different parts of the garden, all carefully selected for variety, and well spaced. There was a good group of magnolias such as *M. wilsonii*, in flower, down the hill from the Castle in a more sheltered spot, and elsewhere established rhododendrons spread up grassy banks. The Head Gardener kindly gave us a tour of the several parts of the

GROUP NOTICES

Pat Bucknell, Hon Secretary

New Honorary Secretary required for the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

Due to her recent sudden illness (she is now steadily returning to full health), Pat Bucknell, our hard working and efficient Secretary, has decided to retire from the post after 8 years. We are therefore urgently seeking someone who could take over from her in about 2 to 3 months time.

Pat Bucknell has listed below a summary of her duties in this important position for the Group. Pat has kindly offered to discuss her work in greater detail with anyone who may be interested.

This is a brief summary of the duties to be undertaken.

- Organise Executive Committee meetings – usually 4 or 5 times a year, mostly in London.
- Remind Members of the Committee of forthcoming committee meetings approximately 4 weeks prior to the meeting. Request them to email any Reports that they wish to be circulated to the committee, prior to that meeting for circulation with the Agenda.
- Send Agendas and Reports to Committee Members 1 week prior to meetings.
- Take notes and write up Minutes to be circulated to all Committee Members.
- Arrange Annual General Meeting on date decided by the Committee.
- Prepare Annual General Meeting Minutes for publishing in the Bulletin.
- Book Venues for Committee Meetings.
- Prepare notices for Bulletins as required.
- Answer telephone enquiries.
- Write letters as required from the chairman and the committee.

Email is used for almost all communications.

Would all those interested please communicate their interest to the Chairman of the Committee, Andy Simons, email – a.simons@ntlworld.com or to Pat Bucknell – patbucknell@btinternet.com (or Tel. 01503 220215).

Other members interested in the management of the Group are also being sought. In addition to needing a new Secretary, members should be aware that we always welcome participation of members in helping to make a success of the Group. We do not seek horticultural experts, just those with some time and relevant experience. At present we would really appreciate someone who would help promote membership by organising some marketing and PR activity that would make more people aware of the Group and drive visits to the web site.

Longer term, for our further member involvement our Treasurer would like some support on the financial management of the Group. If you would like to find out more about getting involved do contact Alastair Stevenson (01989 780285 or alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk) or have a word with your local Branch Chairman.

Annual General Meeting 2012

The date and the venue of the Group's Annual General Meeting has had to be changed, as the date clashes with the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and events.

RHS Wisley are unable to provide us with the necessary space for the meeting and a display area for a plant display.

With the kind permission of Paul and Miranda Gunn, the AGM is to be held on **Wednesday, 30th May at 2.30pm, at Ramster, in Chiddingfold, Surrey, GU8 4SN.**

This garden is the home of the Group's collection of hardy hybrid rhododendrons and it is hoped that members will take this opportunity to visit the garden and see the collection as well as attending the AGM. There will be a "Show and Tell" staging of any plants from our three genera that members would like to bring.

Bring along an interesting plant and tell us something about it, or alternatively bring along something you know nothing about, and see if anyone present can tell you something about it. If you have an unnamed hardy hybrid it might be possible to name it by comparing it to those in the Hardy Hybrid Collection. The programme for the day will be as follows:

■ Arrival from **11.00 am** – coffee available in the Tea House. Members of the Group have free Entrance to the Gardens; The staging of exhibits, and a Walk round the garden.

■ **1.00-2.30** Show open in the main house, follow signs from car park. A Sandwich Lunch will be available for members of the Committee and any members of the Group who would like to join them, also in the main house. £10 a head, to include drinks, cakes, biscuits, etc. Please e-mail Miranda@ramstergardens.com or phone 01428 644422 if you would like to join us for lunch but you are not on the committee, or if you need any further information, or dietary requests. Lunch is also available in the Tea House.

■ **2.30** AGM starts

■ **3.30** approx. AGM ends, the gardens and the Tea House are open until 5.00pm.

Ramster is 1.5 miles south of Chiddingfold on the A283. For sat.nav. GU8 4SN. From the south it is 8 miles north of Petworth. Trains run from Waterloo to Haslemere every 15 minutes and the journey takes 55 minutes. There are taxis at the station, approx. £10 (Good idea to share if possible.)

There are two double B&B rooms available at Ramster, phone or e-mail for details.

Enclosed brochure and map show the situation of the Garden.

GROUP WEBSITE

Graham Mills

www.rhodogroup-rhs.org

We continue to add further photographs of plants in our three genera on the site and progressively at a higher resolution.

Seed List / By the time that you read this, the seed list will have been available for some time on our web site. It is intended to keep the list open all year with updates to the list as seed becomes out of stock. First come first served!

Books / We hope to extend the number of books available to purchase from the web site during this year. The last 4 Yearbooks are now available.

Garden visits / Our favourite season is about to arrive, so please look at the large number of wonderful gardens that we have compiled on our website (under Services and then Links). Each name is a link to that garden's own website, so that you can easily find out opening times and directions. Hopefully you will be reminded of ones you have enjoyed before, as well as ones that you always meant to visit.

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

Pam Hayward's email certainly provoked an amazing response. Before this went out on the 12th November, I had received virtually no photos for 2011. By the end of December, 25 of our members had sent in pictures of 150 mostly different plants!

There were photos of 117 Rhododendrons (62 species, 55 hybrids), 30 Magnolias and 3 Camellias. Yet again, there were very few Camellias. I wonder whether this is because too many of them are unlabelled? Or are they just very difficult to photograph?

Given this large number of entries, you will be as surprised as I was to hear that Russell Beeson won all the sections! Our judge, John McQuire, said "I do not know the winner at all and I can assure you that the selection is not based on favouritism, but only on the quality of the presentation and the flowers." He also said that a large number of the plants were not in focus, which immediately rules them out of contention in a photographic competition.

The 2011 winners are:

Rhododendrons

Class 1 Rhododendron species



R. alutaceum var. *iodes* supplied by Russell Beeson

Rhododendrons

Class 2 Rhododendron hybrids



R. 'Charlotte de Rothschild' supplied by Russell Beeson

Magnolias



M. laevifolia 'Velvet and Cream' supplied by Russell Beeson

Camellias



C. sasanqua 'Plantation Pink' supplied by Russell Beeson

These winning photographs can, of course, now also be viewed on the home page of our website.

Russell has well and truly thrown the gauntlet down, can anyone beat him 2012? Details of the 2012 competition and how to send in your photographs are given on the web site. Can I encourage entries be submitted this year well before the end of the year as the avalanche that hit my inbox in December was overwhelming?

An important date for your diary!

Sandling Park is one of the legendary gardens located on the greensand in Kent. It is famed for its historic woodland gardens with significant plantings of trees and shrubs in natural settings and incorporating an important collection of rhododendrons.



For the last two years the garden has been closed, but for **one day** only

Sunday May 13th 2012

Sandling Park will again be open to the public.

All proceeds will go to *Pilgrims Hospices* – a specialist palliative care charity. For details visit: www.pilgrimshospices.org/events/open-garden-sandling-park/

Do take the opportunity to visit Sandling Park if you are able – you will not regret it !

Sandling Park, Sandling, Hythe, Kent CT21 4HN



the
Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia
group

BULLETIN BINDERS

Further to my note in the Bulletin 106 of July this year, I have been able to supply a small number of binders for issues of the Bulletin to members. These binders hold up to eight years of Bulletins (25 issues) and cost £12.50 each, plus postage. I now append

photographs of the binders. Please let me know if you are interested in obtaining a binder, to my address. *The Editor*



John Rawling
Hon. Bulletin Editor
The Spinney
Station Road
Woldingham
Surrey, CR3 7DD

Email: jr.eye@virgin.net
Tel: 01883 653341

The following publications are offered to Group Members exclusively and sold in support of the Group.

Back issues of the yearbook from 1946 and previously advertised titles not featured here may still be available – please enquire.

PLANT HUNTING TITLES

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Flowers of the Amazon Forest – Margaret Mee £16.95 (RRP £25)

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Seeds of Adventure – Peter Cox & Peter Hutchison £24.50 (RRP £35)

Plantsman's Paradise – Roy Lancaster £27.95 (RRP £39.95)

Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker – Ray Desmond £19.95 (RRP £29.50)

See leaflet enclosed with March Bulletin or email for details.

Price as quoted for each title **plus**

£5 postage per UK order (up to 5 books)

£6 per title for orders from Europe and **£10 per title** for orders from outside Europe. Please enquire about postage costs if you are outside the UK and wish to order more than one title.

In the Footsteps of AUGUSTINE HENRY

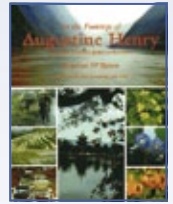
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Rest of World **£10**



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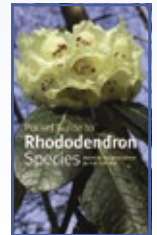
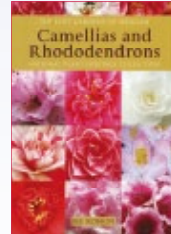
96pp Barman 2010

Full Price: **£9.95**

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Pocket Guide to RHODODENDRON SPECIES

John McQuire & Mike Robinson

704pp RBG Kew 2009

Full Price: **£59** Member's Price: **£42**

Postage: UK **£5.50** Europe **£8.50** Rest of World **£15.50**

Please make cheques (Sterling) payable to: *The Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group*. Payment may also be made by *Mastercard* or *Visa* or via *PayPal* to rcmgpaypal@woodtown.net

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03/12

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the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia group forthcoming events



MARCH / 2012	APRIL / 2012	MAY / 2012	JUNE / 2012	OCTOBER / 2012
<p>20-26 Group Spring Tour to Lake Maggiore</p> <hr/> <p>Judith Hallett 01981 570401</p> 	<p>14/15 South East Branch Tilgate Park</p> <hr/> <p>Branch Show Barry Haseltine 01342 713132</p> 	<p>3 South West Branch Dartmouth</p> <hr/> <p>Garden visits to Fast Rabbit Farm and Coleton Fishacre and others Colin Brown 01674 277268</p>	<p>9/10 New Forest Branch Jermyn's House</p> <hr/> <p>Display of late flowering Rhododendrons Martin Gates 023 8025 2843</p>	<p>8-11 Group Peak District</p> <hr/> <p>Group Autumn Tour Judith Hallett 01981 570401</p>
<p>21 South West Branch Penberth and Trewidden</p> <hr/> <p>Garden visits Colin Brown 01674 277268</p>	<p>14/15 North West Branch Ness Gardens</p> <hr/> <p>Branch Show Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193</p>	<p>20 New Forest Branch Ramster Gardens</p> <hr/> <p>Tour of the Group's Hardy Hybrid collection Martin Gates 023 8025 2843</p>	<p>23 South East Branch Crosswater Farm, Farnham</p> <hr/> <p>Denny Pratt azalea workshop with David Millais Barry Haseltine 01342 713132</p>	
<p>28 New Forest Branch Sir Harold Hillier Gardens</p> <hr/> <p>Tour of Brentry Woodland Martin Gates 023 8025 2843</p> 	<p>21/22 RHS & SW Branch Rosemoor</p> <hr/> <p>Main Rhododendron Competition plus SW Branch Show Colin Brown 01674 277268</p>	<p>30 RCMG Group Ramster Gardens</p> <hr/> <p>Group Annual General Meeting. See Notices Pat Bucknell 01503 220215</p> 		
	<p>23-27 North West Branch Cornwall</p> <hr/> <p>Branch Tour Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193</p>			
	<p>28 South East Branch Borde Hill</p> <hr/> <p>Garden Visit to Gores Wood, Borde Hill. led by Andy Stevens Barry Haseltine 01342 713132</p>			