



The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN - 99

www.rhodogroup-rhs.org

MARCH 2009

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Mike Robinson

Chairman's Notes

The sudden burst of relative warmth in the last few days has been most welcome, with the spring bulbs apparently appearing and flowering overnight - a very pleasant change after the cold, the snow and so many grey skies. Much of the country and, it seems, especially those areas such as parts of Cornwall which expect mild winter have had very low temperatures and considerable amounts of snow. On the other hand the usually colder east has not been badly affected. Those of us ancient enough to remember 1962-3, when the temperature remained below freezing for over 3 months, not to mention the Methuselahs who remember the even worse 1947, will appreciate that what we have had has been simply a return to the norm: the recent mild winters have deceived the optimists, the global warming industry and the young who appear to own no warm clothes.

So far as plants are concerned we have been living in a fool's paradise for some years, with species that used to be regarded as tender appearing for sale as suitable for outdoor cultivation in even the colder parts of the country, and succeeding, with the fashion for 'tropical' gardens becoming widely broadcast. Wild collected plants from China were traditionally not considered hardy if they originated from below 3000m altitude, but now many of us are planting out species that were collected down to 2000m. or even less. So what, I wondered has been the effect of the winter on our gardens?

It should have been a test for many recently introduced evergreen magnolias formerly designated as *Michelia* and *Manglietia*, *Parakmeria* etc., for the considerable number of new camellia species, for the Vietnamese rhododendrons, and, as always for the marginal subsections such as *Maddenia*.

The worst weather of which I have had reports was in Pam Hayward's garden near Yelverton, which has suffered this year from being at some altitude. The Haywards had temperatures down to -12 Celsius near the house, and a great deal of snow.

Temperatures in Penzance fell to -6 C. In John Marston's garden near Barnstaple the minimum was -9 C. In Suffolk (Rupert Eley) and Kent (Maurice Foster) the minimum was higher, at -6C.

Continued on page 2



Subgenera *vireya* *R. himanatodes* – by Robin Whiting
One of the winning photographs in the Group's Photographic Competition. Winner of Class 1.
For other prize winners see page 8.

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In none of these gardens, however, are many losses apparent among our three genera and it is a great pleasure to learn of the survival of the newer evergreen magnolias. I can report severe damage only on *M. macclurei*, though *M. figo* has been defoliated in some gardens, and negligible damage on *M. doltsopa*, *M. ernestii*, *M. fordiana*, *M. foveolata*, *M. insignis*, *M. laevifolia*, *M. lotungensis*, *M. maudiae*, or even on *M. nitida*. Whether any flower buds will be unaffected is a question still to be answered.

The same is true of the low altitude camellias. I'm delighted that *C. transnokoensis* is unscathed everywhere, and Maurice Foster reports that *C. forrestii*, *C. pittardii* and *C. yunnanensis* are completely undamaged with even *C. bailinshanica* alive even if a bit miserable.

With the rhododendrons it is often difficult to distinguish losses due to wet from losses due to low temperatures, and that is certainly the case with the plants of subsection Maddenia. With sodden roots and cold tops I think some losses can be expected, but no deaths are reported, even *R. dalhousiae* surviving in John Marston's garden. More serious to me at least is the sad looking state of the wonderful *R. kasoense* – not dead, but certainly unhappy – probably the lack of sharp drainage. The Vietnamese plants are almost all in rude health.

The picture is very different when Australian plants are concerned, with deaths of many acacia species being recorded in the West Country, and some large trees at that. Only *A. pravissima* seems to have been totally unaffected. Physical damage caused by the weight of snow, especially on wet ground, has caused many breakages and much capsizing.

On balance, however, I suppose that the colder winter must be welcome, and am hoping that the soft scale insects that are appearing outside more and more have been severely affected, and that there will be some effect on the fungal diseases of which we are hearing so much, though I can't believe that the ground has been cold enough to have much effect on soil dormant species.

The key to the survival of so much must be the fact that the temperature did not remain below freezing for long periods, and that soil temperatures were not vastly reduced, and, of course, the snow gave some protection. Thus we have still not tested all the new taxa to the limit of what our climate can do.

We can look forward to a good spring with good bud set on magnolias yet again, and an outstanding amount of flower to come on almost all the rhododendrons and on the camellias.

Happy gardening!

Stop Press – SEED LIST 2009 – ADDENDUM

Thanks to the generosity of Ness Botanic Garden we are able to offer seeds from *Camellia forrestii* KR3892 (Yunnan, Chiuxiong) collected at Ness, as mentioned in Ted Brabin's article in *Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias 2009*.

Order from Seed List as normal quoting: **List No 08162**

Hydon Nursery - open and thriving – an apology

It was reported at the February Committee meeting and unfortunately recorded in the draft committee minutes that Hydon Nurseries had closed.

I should like to make it absolutely clear that there is no truth in this rumour, and that the nursery is open for business with its existing range of plants and many exciting new varieties. The minute has been corrected, but I must apologise to anyone who has been misled by this rumour and to Anne and Arthur George in particular.

We all hope that this excellent nursery will remain a first class source of plants for many years to come.

Mike Robinson

EDITOR'S NOTES

John Rawling

In this issue we have very interesting articles from members. Firstly we have a precise record of almost 20 years of climatic conditions in the south east of England with some very challenging conclusions; very appropriate to the recent more severe conditions experienced in many areas of the British Isles this year.

Secondly we have a timely article about early flowering plants of two of our genera. Again a welcome reminder with new ideas for this time of year and matches the Group 'Early Flowering Rhododendron Day' held recently at the RHS Show in London.

Then we have a further contribution from Maurice Foster on attacks by small vermin on plants of our genera.

Sadly we have to report the recent death of the Royal Horticultural Society's President **Peter Buckley**, who died suddenly in December last year. A full appreciation appeared in *The Garden* in February this year.

Secondly we are saddened to report the death of **Edmund de Rothschild** of the well known bankers and of Exbury Gardens, on 17th January this year, aged 93. A figure of international renown in horticulture and with a tremendous interest in rhododendrons. He was very supportive of our genera and was very helpful to our Group, personally welcoming parties to Exbury on many occasions. A full obituary will appear in the Yearbook.

I also have just learnt of the death of a knowledgeable and very long standing member, **Ken Lowes**, aged 95. Ken was the Hon. Bulletin Editor for the years 1979, 1980 and 1981.

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 July 2009 Bulletin by 14th June 2009.

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

REPORT

Joint Autumn Tour to Cumbria

8-11 October 2008

A group of 22 members of the ICS and Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia group assembled at Netherwood Grange Hotel for our Autumn tour. With such a rich garden heritage it was difficult to decide what to include in our tour. I am indebted to Shelagh Newman for her invaluable help with selecting the gardens we visited: every one was a delight!

Thursday 9 October 2008

We arrived at **Holker Hall** in autumn sunshine for our first garden visit. Holker is the estate of Lord and Lady Cavendish and on arrival we were greeted by Lord Cavendish, spent an hour enjoying the delights of the hall and garden before he and his head gardener led us on an extensive tour of the planting.

I guess there is no 'best time' to visit this garden, for there are plants in bloom for most months of the year and the garden is constantly undergoing changes to encourage visitors to return. Lord Cavendish is a restless plant collector, an enthusiast who reminded us that a garden appeals to all the senses.

The garden is full of treasures; too many to list here.

For me the 'star' plants of our visit were:

The pink tinged trunks of a group of 'Loderi' rhododendrons.

A superb broad crowned *Quercus macrolepis*.

The aromatic leaves of *Rhododendron heliopsis*.

The clipped trees of *Crataegus laciniata* in the formal gardens, one of which was covered in red fruit and looking spectacular.

A magnificent example of *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* showing marvellous autumn colour and smelling of 'burnt raspberry jam'.

And, best of all, a superb specimen of *Schima wallichii*.

We had an excellent lunch before departing; our first visit had been a truly joyous experience in the company of our kind and hospitable host.

Judy Hallett

Our second visit was to an equally magnificent garden: **Gresgarth Hall**, the home of Lord Mark and Lady Arabella Lennox-Boyd. Their head gardener, Tom, gave us an introduction to the planting and then we wandered at leisure around the estate. The garden is full of treasures, many of which have been added by Arabella, who is an experienced landscape and garden designer.

I have selected my ten personal favourite features and plants:

The view across the lily pond looking towards the rich colours of *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*.

The Chinese bridge designed by Robert Locke

The fine cobble pavement designed by Maggie Haworth.

The breath-taking mass of mauve and white Colchicums in the grass.

The herbaceous borders with their deep orange-red Kniphofias and autumn flowering asters.

The mass of white starry flowers of *Saxafraga nuda*

Deep blue aconitum with *Hydrangea* 'Goliath'.

The neat rows of espalier apple trees ripening in the kitchen garden

Finally, the sculpture of wild boar at the entrance to the house (Gresgarth means 'Boar Yard') and which brought back fond memories of my visits to Florence.

Audrey Sutcliffe

Friday 10 October (1)

Our first visit of the day was to the Lakeland Horticultural Society garden at **Holehird** near Windermere where we were met by L H S member Sheila Newman. We were invited into the members meeting room for coffee and a brief introductory talk about Holehird and its various plant collections, entirely run by volunteers. It soon became clear that it was going to be a very wet visit but nevertheless we proceeded with a short guided tour around the herbaceous borders, the rhododendrons, the nursery beds and some welcome shelter in the alpine houses. We then returned to the reception area where Sheila offered us the choice of plan A or B.

The hardier members opting for plan A were taken to the national collection of Hydrangeas and given an absorbing talk on the extensive collection by Sheila – the keeper of the collection.

The highlight of the visit was the offer of secateurs and poly bags with instructions from Sheila "to help yourselves to as many cuttings as you could fit in your bags" while she returned to the members meeting room to implement plan B for the less hardy members – a slide show of Hydrangeas. Despite the rain a very enjoyable and productive (!) visit for us all.

Andy Hallett

Friday 10 October (2)

It was still raining heavily when we arrived at **Windy Hall**, the garden of David Kinsman and his wife Diane Hewitt. We were ushered into their garage when Diane had laid out an excellent buffet lunch and endless supply of hot drinks, while she took away our wet clothes for drying and provided fleeces for the very chilly members! While we ate and thawed out David explained the history and development of the garden.

While some opted to remain in the warmth of the garage and peruse interesting documents about the garden and livestock others of us braved the weather, put up our umbrellas and set off on a garden tour with David at the helm, entertaining us with endless anecdotes about the creation of the garden.

As we approached a large pond area we realised that this was far more than a garden: a haven for rare breed ducks and geese. The ponds were surrounded by mature *Styrax* and *Stewartia* with a backdrop of sooty black sheep seemingly oblivious of the weather!

Perhaps the most striking part of the garden was a small quarry area which has been turned into a Japanese garden of moss, ferns and stones. As we returned to the house we passed a forty yard hedge of Camellias 'Spring Festival' and 'Les Jury', planted by David as a windbreak some four years ago.

Despite worsening weather we were enthralled by the diverse planting, and the enormous energy of its owners in achieving this garden; to say nothing of their kindness and hospitality.

Keith Sprague and Judy Hallett

Friday 10 October (3)

By the time we reached the third garden we were feeling chilly, damp and perhaps just a little dispirited! The rain was torrential, there was no coach access to the garden so most of us trudged 200 yards to reach **High Cleabarrow**, Kath and Dick Brown's home. Kindly, Dick was waiting at the road for our arrival and transported the coldest members of the group to the house. As we approached the gate Kath plus large umbrella appeared, to greet us with her customary cheery welcome. Despite the weather, our spirits lifted as Kath explained the planning and planting of their two acre garden: her enthusiasm was infectious. The hardier (more foolhardy!) members of the group paddled off behind Kath and Dick to view the garden, while others scurried into the warmth of the garden room.

This is a garden that many of us would like to 'steal'! It provides ideal conditions for our genera (moist, shady, and with its own mini mountain known as The Knoll) where Kath and Dick have created a garden full of vistas and fine plants. Dick takes charge of the lawns and hard landscaping while Kath designs and plants the garden.

Although they were rather slippery we made our way up the winding paths of the Knoll, noting Kath's fine collection of rhododendrons on the way. Dick has installed an irrigation system and water tank in this area – we wondered if he really needed it! At the summit we were rewarded with a misty view of the Cumbrian landscape.

Kath has built up wonderful collections of plants throughout the garden: hellebores, hostas, perennial geraniums, old varieties of roses, and hydrangeas. All her gems sit comfortably amid the backbone of trees and shrubs. I particularly admired the *Cornus mas* 'Aurea' and the group of *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* 'Jermyns'.

With no sign of the rain easing we joined the rest of the party for tea in the garden room. Kath and Dick were so kind and welcoming to our bedraggled group, but I can't help feeling they were just a little relieved that we were the final visitors of the season, as we dripped all over the floor and huddled near their Aga!

So, after a long day it was back to the hotel for hot baths before dinner followed by a lecture.

Our speaker, Christopher Holliday, lives and gardens in Cumbria. He has published a book entitled 'Sharp Gardening', and this was to be the subject of his lecture. This caused much discussion beforehand – was it to be about garden tools? When he put up his first slide the audience realised his subject was spiky, sword-leaved evergreens, and how we might use architectural plants to create a bold structure in our gardens.

Saturday 11th October.

After the deluge of the previous day it was a great relief to have a fine morning for our last garden, **Yewbarrow House**, owned by Jonathan and Margaret Denby. The owners were away but we were ably looked after by the Polish gardener, Matt Wilcuzyński and his wife.

The garden is situated on a steep slope above Grange over Sands, facing south east with wonderful views across Morecambe Bay and has been largely created during the past nine years, clearly at considerable expense. Choice of adjectives is not easy (one suggestion was 'whacky'!) A series

of Italianate terraces with a great variety of plants including the tree *Dahlia imperialis* up to 12 feet and other growth to match, took us up to a crenelated tower for viewing and a new Palm House containing Banana, datura, tree ferns and an 8 foot wide swimming pool fed by a wall of water down the back wall.

In the Japanese garden is a 'Moon Pool' used for swimming with a tea house containing the filter plant. At the bottom of this garden is a row of 1000 year old olive trees planted with ancient vines.

In the sunken garden below the house, we found a *Grevillea rosmarinifolia*, the Chilean *Lobelia tupa* 'Brick red' and the Mexican *Pinus patula* with its long drooping needles, as well as several *Magnolia delavayi*.

Elsewhere there is a large collection of dahlias, a kitchen garden, fern garden, rhododendrons, rock outcrops – some carved and I noticed a hybrid mahonia, probably 'Charity' in full bloom.

All in all, an intriguing garden, full of surprises and interest.

John Clemes

GROUP SPRING TOUR OF SOUTH WALES 2009

18th to 22nd April 2009

Our Spring Tour 2009 is to South West Wales. Details were printed in the November Bulletin.

There are still a **few places available for last minute applications**, so do contact Judy Hallett, Hon Tours organiser at: Judy.Hallett@googlemail.com or 01981 570401, as soon as possible.

JOINT AUTUMN GET-TOGETHER TOUR

15th -18th October 2009

The International Camellia Society with the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group.

Autumn tour to France to visit the Autumn Plant Fair at Coursin, near Paris

We shall assemble at St. Pancras Station for a mid-afternoon Eurostar (approx. 3 p.m.) on Thursday 15 October. A coach will meet us at Gare du Nord and take us to our hotel outside Paris, near Chateau du Courson.

We shall have two full days of garden visits, including the autumn plant fair at Courson that probably is France's closest equivalent to the Hampton Court Flower Show.

* We have been given approval to attend Les Journées des Courson on Friday morning, before the general public is admitted; in the afternoon, we will have a tour of the domaine gardens.

* On Saturday, we will go to Arboretum Vallée aux Loups in the morning, and to Jardins Albert Kahn, Boulogne-Billancourt in the afternoon.

* Sunday we will check out of the hotel and travel to Conservatoire National des Plantes à Parfum, Médicinales et al, at Milly-al-Forêt; then travel back to Gare du Nord for the Eurostar (approx. 4 p.m. CST) for return to St. Pancras at about 6 p.m. (BST)

The cost is £395 per person*. Please note, there will be no single supplement. The costs include Eurostar return trips, hotels, most meals, and coach travel. Any questions, contact Pat Short, patricia_short@btconnect.com; 41 Galveston Road, London SW15 2RZ; or tel 020-8870 6884. If you have not already indicated an interest, please let her know as soon as possible to help with planning. A booking form with request for a deposit is available from Pat Short as above.

Numbers will be strictly limited.

*The cost is based on early-booking group fares on Eurostar. Late bookings may incur a supplement if Eurostar fares are higher than the initial group rate.

Proposed Future Tours

May 2010

Dresden, Germany. Cost in the region of £1000

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### September- October 2011

New Zealand. Cost in the region of £3000.

**We would be pleased to hear of your interest in these proposals – numbers will be limited.**

Please let us know by contacting  
[Judy.Hallett@googlemail.com](mailto:Judy.Hallett@googlemail.com) or 01981 570401

## RHODODENDRONS

John Harsant

### Preservation of the Aberconway Hybrids at Bodnant Gardens

Following on from the article in the November Bulletin, we can now give you further information on the progress of the plans to preserve some of the excellent Bodnant Hybrids which are not generally available.

#### Further Bodnant Hybrids now under Micropropagation

The Committee has funded the propagation of a further ten hybrids bring the total to twelve, the complete list being:-

|                               |                              |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Rhododendron 'Alan';          | Rhododendron 'Elsie Phipps'; |
| Rhododendron 'Aspansia Ruby'; | Rhododendron 'Mikado';       |
| Rhododendron 'Beadá';         | Rhododendron 'Neda';         |
| Rhododendron 'Calrose';       | Rhododendron 'Redwing';      |
| Rhododendron 'Cardinal';      | Rhododendron 'Seta';         |
| Rhododendron 'Edusa';         | Rhododendron 'Varna'.        |

Rhododendron 'Penjerrick' is also being cultivated (not a Bodnant hybrid)

These could be available for growing on in about two years time when it is intended to make them available to Group members. Further details will become available in due course.

Just two from the range of those being propagated are pictured on the back page of this Bulletin.

## MEMBERS NOTES - 1

John Lancaster

### THE WEATHER IN BALCOMBE FOREST

I started to take weather records in 1990, nearly twenty years ago, and this seems as good a time as any to see what trends and portents they may indicate. The measurements were very simple; they comprised maximum and minimum temperatures and the amount of rainfall. As a check, I have also taken note of maximum temperatures on the Sussex coast and London, as published in daily newspapers.

We are situated on the north slope of the sandstone ridge that stretches eastwards from Handcross, the height being about 500 feet above sea level, so daytime temperatures are about one degree Celsius below those at the coast, and rainfall is slightly higher.

I started with a mercury-in-glass thermometer; then in 1980 graduated to an electric device, which sent messages by radio to an indoor temperature recorder. This has recently been replaced by a more sophisticated version, which provides much additional information and also (not very successfully) forecasts the local weather. These various devices have given consistent results, and I am satisfied that they have been sufficiently accurate.

“Winter temperatures are of special importance to gardeners, because they affect the range of perennial plants we can grow.”

Winter temperatures are of special importance to gardeners, because they affect the range of perennial plants we can grow. In recent years *Rhododendron burmanicum*, *lindleyi* and *sulfureum*, which are normally classified as needing greenhouse protection, have been grown successfully in the open. By contrast, there does not seem to have been a corresponding rise in summer temperatures.

So the first step in analysing the temperature records was to plot average winter (that is to say for December, January and February) and average summer (June, July and August) temperatures.

The result is shown in **Figure 1**.

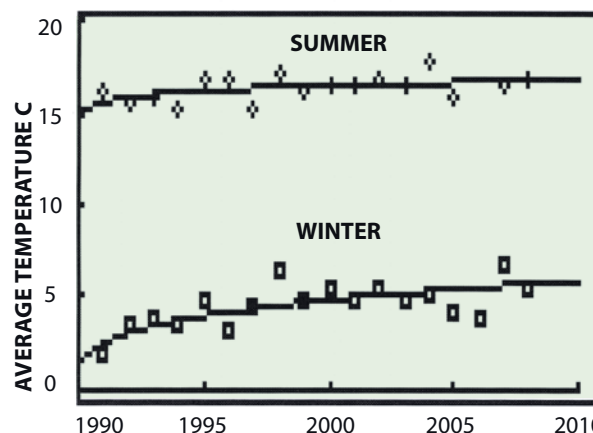


Figure 1. Average summer and winter temperatures 1991 to 2008

Also shown are the relevant trend curves. These are the curves that provide the best fit to the data points plotted, as determined by normal mathematical techniques. This figure confirms our human instincts; winters have indeed become less cold, but summer temperatures have hardly changed. However the rise in winter temperatures appears to be coming

to an end: according to the trend curve the rate of increase in 1991 was 0.7C per year, but by 2008 this had fallen to 0.09C annually. The corresponding figures for summer are 0.2C a year in 1991 and 0.02 a year in 2008 so that there was a very modest rise of about 1C for the whole period.

The temperatures that I record are generally about 1C below those reported for the south coast, as would be expected for an elevation of 500 feet. They are about 2C below that for London. However, the temperature variation at these two locations is closely similar to that which I observe. So my records can be regarded as representative of the south-east region other than east Kent, which sometimes has its own chilly winter climate.

The average temperatures for winter and summer were obtained by adding minima and maxima and dividing by two. So they represent an approximation; to obtain an accurate figure it would be necessary to make a continuous record, which is beyond the capability of an amateur observer. Such reservations do not attend the yearly averages for minimum and maximum, which are plotted with their trend curves in **Figure 2**. The result is very similar for winter/summer comparison; minimum temperatures have increased more and at a greater rate than maximum temperatures, and in both cases the rate of increase has diminished with time.

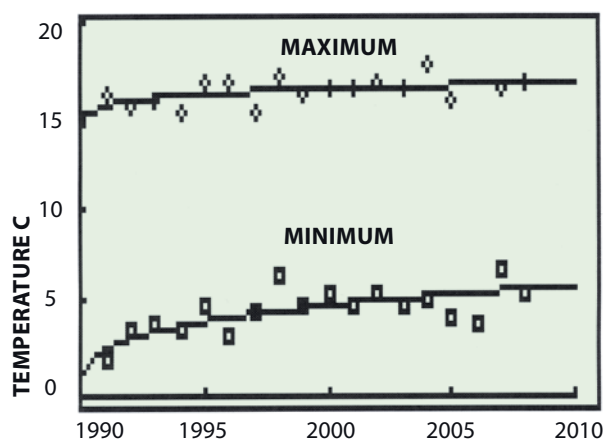


Figure 2. Annual average maximum and minimum temperatures C

The significance of these observations will be considered later. In the meantime there is the question of rainfall. The amounts that I measure are very similar to those recorded for the Sussex coast, significantly higher than those for London. For the nineteen year period the annual average is, in round figures, 850mm (34 inches) with a variation up and down of 350mm (14 inches). As shown in **Figure 3**, the annual amount of rain is cyclic, with a cycle time of 7 years.

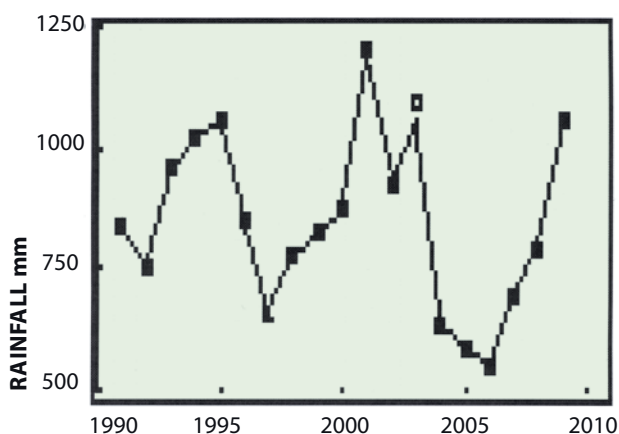


Figure 3. Rainfall in mm., 1990 to 2008

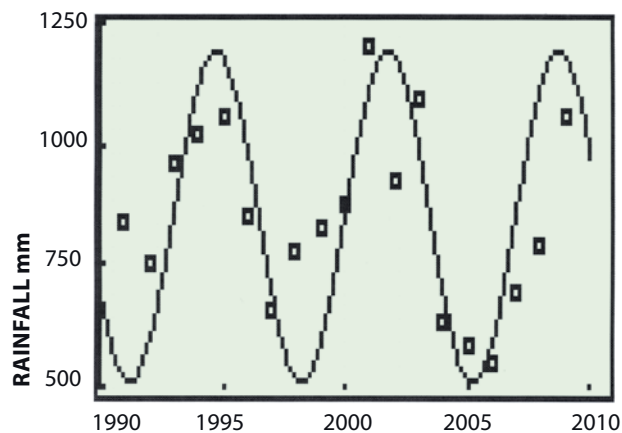


Figure 4. The sinusoidal variation of rainfall in Balcombe Forest. The sine wave shown has a wavelength of 7 years and an amplitude of 700mm.

**Figure 4** shows that a sine wave of a seven year wavelength fits the data points reasonably well. Thus the rhododendrons have 3½ fat years followed by 3½ lean ones. We move twice as fast as the Egyptians.

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“There is currently fashionable theory, according to which carbon dioxide in the Earth’s atmosphere, some of which has been produced by burning fossil fuels, somehow enhances the effect of the sun’s rays and thereby causes the present phase of global warming”.

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There is currently fashionable theory, according to which carbon dioxide in the Earth’s atmosphere, some of which has been produced by burning fossil fuels, somehow enhances the effect of the sun’s rays and thereby causes the present phase of global warming. Now it will be evident that any such effect can only occur during daylight hours. However, according to my measurements and, by implication in southeast England generally, maximum temperatures which occur during daytime, have only increased slightly, whereas minimum temperatures, which occur at night, have risen substantially. Moreover the rate of increase of temperature has fallen very considerably between 1990 and 2008, whereas there has been a steady increase in the amount of carbon dioxide pumped into the atmosphere from power stations and motor cars. Southeast England is a minute spot on the Earth’s surface, but we produce a great deal more carbon dioxide per head than does the world population as a whole, so we should be more, not less affected.

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“So the carbon dioxide theory of global warming is wrong.”

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So the carbon dioxide theory of global warming is wrong. Other theories exist: for example, the amount of radiation emitted by sun has increased. But this, too, must be wrong for the reasons already adduced. In fact the only known heat source that could be responsible for winter warming and the other observed effects is the Earth itself.

The earth contains a number of radioactive elements, principally uranium which, due to nuclear instability, break down progressively and in doing so, produce heat. In my book “Fatal Accidents”, due for publication later this year, I suggest a mechanism by which deposits of such elements could produce variations of temperature at the Earth’s surface. It is encouraging to find that these notions are consistent with observed facts.



So what of the future? With the weather, as with anything else, it is very unwise to use existing trends to make predictions. But there is reasonable chance that the run of mild winters will persist for at least a few more years, and plants of marginally hardy types would not constitute an unreasonable risk.

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## MEMBERS NOTES -2

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Everard Daniel

### SOME RELIABLE EARLY FLOWERERS

Christmas passes and we strain to find the first signs of spring. Don't we just love the very first flower on each plant (and probably ignore the last?). With the current run of mild winters in S E England we are being rewarded early, though a hard frost does great damage. (NB In hard winters, we may have to wait until March.)

**Camellias.** With the new year, the baton is passed from the *C. sasanqua* varieties to the bravest of the *C. japonica*, with their offspring the *C. x williamsii*. Of the *C. x williamsii*, *C. 'November Pink'* is reliably first in Cornwall, living up to its name, and is also out with the *C. sasanquas* on the wall at Leonardslee Gardens. In my garden in Surrey, *C. 'St Ewe'* is usually first, early in January. Named after the Cornish village and, I rather suspect, perhaps not a mother sheep of great piety, but rather Cornish pronunciation of the great Medieval bishop, St Hugh of Lincoln! The camellia is single pink of good substance and a reliable flowerer through to Easter. Close behind comes the entrancing tubular *C. 'Bow Bells'* in a slightly paler pink, equally profuse. Alas that these singles get so much attention from the birds, pecking holes from above to reach the nectar. Some years however, they are beaten by the superb rich pink of *C. 'Inspiration'*, another profuse flowerer with a very long season and vigorous upright growth. It is said to have *C. reticulata* blood, but this is not very apparent.



Rhododendron 'Nobleum Album'

Photo Mike Robinson

I'm told that the two earliest *C. japonicas* can have flowers for the Christmas table in mild and coastal areas. Everyone should grow the double pink *C. 'Gloire de Nantes'* even if there is only room for one camellia in the plot. Compact and bushy, it is another with a great supply of buds over a very

long period. The second of the earliest ones is *C. 'Noblissima'*, pure white and double. As with all whites it needs shelter, as they don't half show the marks, going brown so easily in rough weather. My single white *C. 'Charlotte de Rothschild'* is rather exposed in my front garden but copes well with all but the hardest weather, and now regularly competes to be the first into bloom in January. The old blooms drop very cleanly from the singles. Please let's get rid of this fallacy that the *C. x williamsii* drop more cleanly. They don't. It varies from one variety to another, but singles are better. Just look at *C. 'Donation'* - rightly very popular but often a mess. Two other early ones are worth a mention as they are often out by early February in Sussex; the carnation-like *C. 'Mabel Blackwell'*, white with pink edges and the single pale pink *C. 'Tarokaja'*, which is one of the oldest Japanese varieties, known from an ancient specimen in a Kyoto temple garden.

The late John Hilliard grew a small single pink *C. japonica* that is very reliable, such that he called it the Christmas Camellia. We would love to know its name and origin.

Any ideas, dear reader?

**Rhododendrons.** The first is always the indispensable *R. 'Nobleum'*, an old hybrid of *R. caucasicum* x *R. arboreum* done originally in about 1832 at Knap Hill Nursery, Surrey, UK. There are several forms including pale pink and white, but it is usually grown in a rich reddish-pink form. The darkest is the Lamellen form raised by Magor in 1932. The trusses are small and in mid-season wouldn't get much attention, but are such a treat in January (and sometimes earlier). It is a reliable flowerer and tough, compact grower and takes up relatively little space for many years, though it will eventually get big. There are pink plants in the Winter Garden at RBG Wakehurst Place, labelled *R. 'Pulcherrimum'* which often open quite a few flowers in the autumn. Be warned not to get *R. 'Christmas Cheer'* as its name is misleading. It can be forced, but in the open usually waits until March.

Next come the azalea-like purples and mauves, of which *R. 'Praecox'* is the most well known, but quite a bit later than one of its parents, *R. dauricum* which comes in various shades of purple and mauve, and even white, though these seem later flowering and not all the named forms impress. The earliest is the aptly named *R. dauricum 'Midwinter'* which is a lovely dark purple and sometimes out by Christmas. Much sought after because of a popular plant at the RHS Wisley Garden, it is only rarely available, alas. A rather similar but deciduous species is *R. mucronulatum*, generally pinker, especially in the clone *R. mucronulatum 'Cornell Pink'*. Both species reach about 1.5m eventually. Don't get confused with the white evergreen azalea *R. 'Mucronatum'* (EA) syn. *R. 'Ledifolia Alba'*. (We now have a clearer way of naming and differentiating what all gardeners know as Japanese azaleas.)

If we stretch this article into February, we get many more larger species starting. *Rhododendrons calophyllum*, *praevernum* and *sutchuenense* are all magnificent pink-whites with red spotting and blotches in the throat. Their hybrid *R. 'Geraldii'* seems one of the earliest and are magnificent at Wakehurst Place. The origin is unknown, but chief suspect must surely be Sir Edmund Loder's brother, Gerald Loder, later made Lord Wakehurst. At the same time, the superb rich reds are starting and the Cornish *R. 'Fireball'* is perhaps

the first, as well as having one of the largest trusses; it was raised by R. Gill and Sons, probably before 1900 using *R. barbatum* x *R. 'Ascot Brilliant'*.

There is some confusion with another Cornishman, *R. 'Cornubia'*, which is *R. arboreum* x *R. 'Shilsonii'*, from the Fox garden, Penjerrick, - but we are getting towards March so STOP!

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## MEMBERS NOTES -3

Maurice Foster

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### More wildlife woe and weather

After reporting in the Bulletin last year on squirrels eating rhododendron buds for the first time, this time a first for rabbits.

Giving more attention to grandchildren than gardens over Christmas and New Year, we gave rabbits time out to do their worst and failed to notice that they had attacked mature magnolias, causing extensive damage. They had assiduously chiselled away the bark on the trunks of trees up to 30 years old, some specimens up to 12" in diameter, a size we had considered no longer vulnerable and from which we had long since removed the wire protection. Protection is given to young plants, but removed once the stem has achieved a proportion considered to be without appeal to the average coney looking for tooth exercise.



One tree had bark removed from some 80% of its girth and may not survive. In all 8 trees were damaged to varying degrees before we noticed it and were able to replace the protection. Mature *sorbus* in a neighbour's field have been similarly attacked.

This is the first time that such damage has occurred and the reason would appear to be the return to a 'normal' winter with a prolonged cold snap, with one night down to -9C, several nights between -3 and -5C, and an inch of snow cover that lasted about a week, thus denying our furry fat foragers their main course diet of geraniums and grass.

Tom Hudson confirmed similar damage at Tregrehan on the south coast of Cornwall where rabbits even attacked the trunks of the venerable *M. mollicomatas* in that great garden, where temperatures fell to an unusual -6C, and further west, even -7C at Penzance, a low that many SW members in sight of the sea had not experienced for a very long time. Gardening down there may not be without challenge after

all. The good news, though it may be a bit premature, is that our large *magnolia (michelia) doltsopa* seems quite unperturbed, not shedding leaves, although it may turn out to have suffered some damage to the more exposed flower buds. The same applies to *M. dianica* and *M. ernestii* and amazingly and gratifyingly enough, to *Camellias forrestii*, *yunnanensis*, *henryana*, *reticulata* and *pitardii*. Perhaps the answer is that this latest spell of low temperatures moved in mainly from the north and northeast with not too much wind. The real terminator is that shrivelling easterly blast that comes straight off the great north European plain, crying havoc and destruction and in this garden filtered by only Margate pier and a few telegraph poles. Jan 2009

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## PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

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### Group Photographic Competition Member's Photographs

This competition ran through 2008 and provided our web site with another 107 excellent pictures.

In view of the mix of pictures received from our various genera it was decided to segment the Rhododendrons into three classes.

The winners were:

#### Rhododendrons:

Class 1: Subgenera *vireya*:

*R. himantodes* supplied by Robin Whiting

Class 2: Other Rhododendron species:

*R. davidsonianum* supplied by Russell Beeson

Class 3: Rhododendron hybrids:

*R. 'Gardenia Odyssey'* supplied by Eric Annal

#### Magnolias:

*M. sprengeri* 'Diva' supplied by John Marston

Camellias: The judge decided that none of the Camellia entries was worthy of a prize. The winning photos will soon be displayed on our web site's home page. I am sure that there are many more excellent photos residing in our members' collections and hope that more members will now be spurred on to participate in the 2009 Photographic Competition.

The remainder of the winning photographs and further details of the competition are given on the web site.



The winner of Class 2:- *R. davidsonianum* by Russell Beeson





The winner of Class 3: - R 'Gardenia Odyssey' by Eric Annal  
See [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org) for the winner of the Magnolia photograph - M. sprengeri 'Diva' by John Marston.

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## BRANCH REPORTS

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### Peak District Branch 2008

David Ives

During the year 2008 our programme was limited unfortunately to just one outing on a very cold damp day, May 17th. We met up at **Woodhouse Eaves** near Loughborough to visit the long established garden at Long Close, the home of Pene and John Oakland, which we had previously visited several years before. The garden covers five acres, sloping away from the house, part terraced. Much of the planting was carried out by Pene's mother who kept detailed records of the plants and their sources. There are many mature trees including a fine, tall *Crinodendron hookerianum* against the house, *rhododendrons*, *magnolias* and a few *camellias*, including quite unusual specimens, such as *Camellia japonica* 'Snowflake'. One group of quite old hybrid rhododendrons originally planted in the form of a broad hedge had been very successfully managed by cutting away all the lower branches to head height to yield a splendid architectural effect.

After a cold picnic, we moved on to another fine garden, **Brinkfield**, at Seagrave, developed personally by the owner Mr John Jennard, over 40 years. This garden is a rich mix of mature and maturing choice plants in variety but including *magnolias*, *camellias*, *rhododendrons*, *azaleas* and a fine group of *Rhododendron* 'Loderi':- 'King George', 'Venus' and others, the whole beautifully and thoughtfully laid out, together with generous underplanting, for example a carpet of *cyclamen* beneath a bed of deciduous azaleas. Behind all this was a series of glasshouses packed with flourishing plants in propagation, alpines and so on. Despite the poor weather our members enjoyed a very satisfying day.

### West Midlands Branch

Alastair Stevenson

The new branch has asked me to draw members' particular attention to their next visit.

The West Midlands Branch will be visiting the **Arley Arboretum** on **Sunday 26 April** ([www.arley-arboretum.org.uk](http://www.arley-arboretum.org.uk)) just north of Kidderminster and will be led by Head Gardener Michael Darvill. Established in 1820 the Arboretum was first opened to the public in 2002 and has 600 tree species

as well as Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias. There is a magnificent Magnolia Walk and with luck this will be a highlight of the visit.

For details and to book a place contact Alastair Stevenson: [alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk](mailto:alastairstevenson@mpaconsulting.co.uk) or 01989 780285.

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## THE GROUP WEBSITE

([www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org))

Graham Mills

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### Group Web-Site ([www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org))

The group's web site continues to grow with the addition of more high definition photographs of plants in our three genera. The web site provided the medium for the Group Photo Competition and in doing so provided another 107 excellent pictures for our web site.

### 2009 Seed list

The 2009 seed list has been available on-line since the 12<sup>th</sup> February and contains additional facilities this year so that members may download and sort the list into their preferred sequence as well as being able to cut and paste into the order form.

If there are additional features that you would like to see added to the site then please contact Graham Mills at [webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:webmaster@rhodogroup-rhs.org) or +44(0) 1326 280382.

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## MEMBERSHIP

Rupert Eley

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We are very pleased to welcome the new members listed below, and hope they will enjoy the many benefits of membership.

Together with **Yearbook Editor** and **Archivist** Mrs. Pam Hayward, **Convenor of the Seed Bank** Mr. Gerald Dixon and **Webmaster** Mr. Graham Mills, all are continuing in post.

Mr. Eric Annal and Mr. Andy Simons have served their present three year term on the Committee but both are willing to stand for a further term.

Other mid-term Committee members continuing in post are: Mr. John Harsant, Mr. Stephen Lyus, Mr. Ivor Stokes and Mr. Brian Wright.

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Your voting form is enclosed

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## NOTICES

Pat Bucknell, Hon Secretary

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### NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009

This is to be held on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2009 at **2.30 p.m.** at **Kew Gardens, London**. Please do come. There will be a tour of the Garden before lunch.

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### COMMITTEE

**The Chairman** Dr. Mike L.A. Robinson

**Vice Chairman** Mr. Philip Evans

**Hon. Treasurer** Mr. Alastair Stevenson

**Hon. Secretary** Mrs Pat Bucknell

**Hon. Membership Secretary** Mr. Rupert Eley

**Yearbook Editor** Mrs. Pam Hayward

**Hon. Bulletin Editor** Mr. John Rawling

**Hon. Tours Organiser** Mrs Judy Hallett

The following publications are available to Group Members and are sold in support of the Group:

**PRE-PUBLICATION OFFER** (expires 30th April 2009)

**Pocket Guide to Rhododendron Species – based on the descriptions of HH Davidian – John McQuire & Mike Robinson** (See flyer enclosed for full description)

Full Price: **£59** Member's Price: **£35** (£42 from 1st May 2009)

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

**SPECIAL OFFER – International RHODODENDRON**

**REGISTER and CHECKLIST 2004** Full Price: **£90**

Member's Price: **£50** Postage at cost: please enquire.

**SEEDS OF ADVENTURE – Peter Cox &**

**Peter Hutchison** Full Price: **£35** Member's Price: **£27**

Postage: UK **£4**, Europe **£6**, Rest of World **£10**

**PLANTSMAN'S PARADISE Travels in China –**

**Roy Lancaster** Full Price: **£39.95** Member's Price: **£29**

Postage: UK **£4**, Europe **£6**, Rest of World **£10**

**Frank Kingdon Ward's RIDDLE of the TSANGPO**

**GORGES (Second Edition) – Kenneth Cox**

Full Price: **£35** Member's Price: **£26**

Postage: UK **£4**, Europe **£6**, Rest of World **£10**

**CAMELIAS: The Gardener's Encyclopedia**

**Jennifer Trehane 2007** 428pp, illust.

Full price: **£35** Member's Price: **£23.50**

Postage: UK **£5.50**, Europe **£10**, Rest of World **£19**

**THE RHODODENDRON HANDBOOK 1998**

352pp, illust. **NOW £19** post free. Airmail: **+£5**

**YEARBOOK Back Numbers 1946–2008:** please enquire.

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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**2009**

| <b>Date</b>  | <b>Organiser</b>     | <b>Location</b>                                        | <b>Event</b>                                                                     | <b>Contact</b>                  |
|--------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>April</b> |                      |                                                        |                                                                                  |                                 |
| 16th         | New Forest Branch    | Furzey Gardens                                         | Garden visit                                                                     | Martin Gates 023 8025 2843      |
| 17th–23rd    | <b>The Group</b>     | <b>Group Spring Tour of South West Wales</b>           |                                                                                  | Judith Hallett 01981 570401     |
| 18/19th      | SE Branch            | Borde Hill                                             | Branch Rhododendron & Magnolia Show in conjunction with the ICS Camellia Show.   | Barry Haseltine 01342 713132    |
| 25th/26th    | SW Branch            | Rosemoor                                               | <b>RHS Main Rhododendron Competition</b> & SW Branch Camellia and Magnolia Show. | Colin Brown 01647 277268        |
| 26th         | West Midlands Branch | Garden visit to the Arley Arboretum, nr. Kidderminster |                                                                                  | Alastair Stevenson 01989 780285 |
| <b>May</b>   |                      |                                                        |                                                                                  |                                 |
| 2/3rd        | NW & N.Wales         | Ness Gardens                                           | Branch Show                                                                      | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193        |
| 5th          | Lakeland Society     | Troutbeck                                              | Evening visit to 'Boot Gate' garden                                              | Robert Smith 015394 43041       |
| 7th          | New Forest Branch    | Petersfield                                            | Visit to Malthouse garden                                                        | Martin Gates 023 8025 2843      |
| 8-10th       | NW & N.Wales         | The Lake District                                      | Branch Spring Tour                                                               | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193        |
| 9th          | SE Branch            | High Beeches                                           | Spring visit to view 'Wilson Plants' – 2.00pm                                    | Barry Haseltine 01342 713132    |
| 12th         | Lakeland Society     | Holehird                                               | Spring Show – 7.00pm                                                             | Robert Smith 015394 43041       |
| 14th         | Lakeland Society     | Langdale                                               | Garden visit to Copt Howe – 3.00pm                                               | Robert Smith 015394 43041       |
| 16th         | NW & N.Wales         | Visits to Members' Gardens.                            |                                                                                  | Ted Brabin 0151 353 1193        |
| 16th         | Wessex Branch        | Hillier Gardens                                        | Spring Garden Visit                                                              | Miranda Gunn 01428 644422       |
| 21st         | Lakeland Society     | Ripon                                                  | Visit to Himalayan Garden , Ripon                                                | Robert Smith 015394 43041       |
| 28th         | Lakeland Society     | Windermere                                             | Visit to Gatefield – 6.30pm                                                      | Robert Smith 015394 43041       |
| 31st         | Wessex Branch        | Ramster                                                | Annual Show                                                                      | Miranda Gunn 01428 644422       |

TWO of the Bodnant hybrids being micropropagated:-



Bodnant hybrid: R. 'Alan'



Bodnant hybrid: R. 'Aspansia Ruby'