

RCMGSW Visit to Old Glebe, Eggesford, North Devon 17th May 2016

Our group of fifteen members drove along the drive to The Old Glebe, an eighteenth century vicarage, between rhododendrons grown very large, and in full bloom. We gathered for coffee in the courtyard by the house where we were met by Nigel Wright, former South West Branch Chairman and creator of this splendid rhododendron garden and rhododendron nursery since 1985. Having been in business and living in a chalky area Nigel was unable to indulge his long passion for rhododendrons until he retired and moved to North Devon where conditions were eminently suitable. He improved the garden round the house, and landscaped the garden below the house, making a chain of ponds as part drainage of boggy ground in order to expand the plantings. The idea was to have a living library of rhododendron specimens, mainly hybrids, to show his prospective buyers so they could see what the plants would eventually look like. Most of this was done within a carefully landscaped garden which has now become mature. One area was however devoted to a more formal demonstration bed of azaleas in alphabetical order, clearly marked for customers to make their choice. A broad group of mainly *Yakushimanum* hybrids full of flower had grown to over five feet tall, and many other large and mature specimens in groups around the garden were flowering well with some lovely old trees. Among the other plantings we noted a beautiful specimen of the flowering cherry 'Shimidsu-sakura' near the house, also noted was a large plant of *Viburnum cylindraceum*, *Staphylea colchica* flowering by the courtyard entrance, a long Box walk etc.. Many of the groups of plantings framed various vistas of the countryside beyond. The working area around a greenhouse and shaded tunnels showed that in spite of his advanced years, Nigel has not stopped propagating and selling his plants, and indeed, one of our number went off with a prize specimen after the visit. Many gardens in North Devon and beyond have been filled with hundreds of Nigel's rhododendrons over the years and his legacy will live on in many gardens near and far.

John Marston