THE RHODODENDRON STORY

200 Years of Plant Hunting and Garden Cultivation

Edited by Cynthia Postan
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TO THIS ONLINE EDITION

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RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA & MAGNOLIA GROUP

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Chapter 16

Rhododendron Lovers Around the World

Cynthia Postan

Rhododendron lovers (or Rhododendronphilloi, as the British Rhododendron Society liked to call themselves) were not slow to discover the benefits of joining together to help each other. The British Society (including Scotland, Ireland and Wales) was the first to see the advantages in 1915 (see Chapter 15) and for a decade remained the only one. When, in 1928, as the Rhododendron Association, it widened its field to all comers, its advice and assistance were readily available to gardeners in other countries. Whether its existence was known in North-West Germany where a specialist nursery industry was establishing itself is not clear, for the German Rhododendron Society was formed in 1936, making it the second in time. It was not until the end of wartime restrictions that the next phase began. The USA and New Zealand vie for pole position here, both being formed in 1944, to be followed by Australia in 1954. Canada and Japan formed societies in 1972, the Swedes not long after, and in 1983 the Scottish Rhododendron Society broke away from their English colleagues. Smaller groups exist, some national like the Sikkim Rhododendron Society and the Danish and, most recently of all, the Estonian Chapters of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) and others regional, like the Rhododendron Group of the English Northern Horticultural Society. The last to be formed is the French Rhododendron and Companion Plants Group of the Société Nationale d’Horticulture de France. Total numbers of Rhododendronphilloi may now have reached between 7,000 and 8,000 worldwide. A formidable army.

As will be seen below, there are more similarities than disparities in their organization, and certain trends can be observed. In their early days, societies were hesitant in their aims: arranging for cultural instruction and distribution of plants at first, only later becoming aware of the possibilities of creating new hybrids and, more importantly, of learning about the original wild species. The creation of a species collection may, therefore, be taken
as a sign of a Society’s maturity.

Each Society is governed by what is possible in terms of climate and geography, but all have certain basic organizational problems. Among these are how to give widely separated gardeners access to others. The ARS quickly invented the ‘Chapter’, a device which enabled them to draw into the fold members from all the States of the Union as well as from other countries. Smaller national societies have created regional groups, in the case of New Zealand, autonomous. All, however, have to face up to financial realities and the difficulty of achieving all their desired aims.

The ultimate objective must be to create a viable international association. Tentative steps have been made in this direction and Ralph Sangster (Australia) has for many years worked hard to maintain links with the national societies through the International Rhododendron Union. There have been five official international conferences in various venues worldwide, drawing together experts to inform each other of botanical, scientific and horticultural progress. The conference literature has disseminated the resulting advances in useful knowledge. Apart from species and conservation collections, laboratory and garden research is going on in institutions too numerous to mention.

The German Rhododendron Society
(Deutsche Rhododendron Gesellschaft)
Founded in 1936, before the 1939-45 War, the German Rhododendron Society was the second oldest such society. However, in two major respects its origins were strikingly different from those of all the others. The Society had from the start a close relationship with a specialist garden under public control. The second difference was that its creators were not the owners of broad acres with the space and inclination to experiment with unknown species, as in Britain, nor yet were they prosperous amateurs with the desire to beautify relatively small gardens with their own hands, as on the Pacific coast of the USA and the countries of the Antipodes. They were men with an urban background. By a fortunate chance they had a flourishing commercial nursery industry near at hand.

The medieval Hanseatic port of Bremen had a wealthy merchant class who had for generations built themselves houses with large ‘parks’ on the outskirts of the city. Intensely patriotic, they had a tradition of generous public benefactions. Not far to the south, the town of Oldenburg was the centre of a lowlying region with a peaty soil, perfect conditions for growing ericaceous plants. These two factors were to prove a winning combination.

Although the first rhododendrons to be grown in North Germany were in the Schlossgarten of Oldenburg about the year 1800, the first nursery specialising in ericaceous plants was that founded in 1845 by G D Böhlje of nearby Westerstede. Some rhododendrons, such as *R. catawbiense* and *R. caucasicum*, had been
introduced into Germany by the great firm of T J Seidel of Dresden (see Chapter 9), but in 1881 Böhlje brought many more from Boskoop in Holland. So successful was he that between the two World Wars at least 30 more nurseries were established in the area. The trade had always been in hardy rhododendrons because the severe North German winters do not permit species to survive in the open, and there was thus no incentive for German botanists and nurserymen to undertake plant collections.

The City of Bremen had had a Botanic Garden since 1905, founded by an oil millionaire, Franz Schütte. When he lost his fortune in the great German inflation, the garden was taken over by the City and was removed to the neighbourhood of the newly established Rhododendron Park, which also owed its origin to private benefactions and support from the City Fathers. The existence of these two flourishing public gardens and a successful nursery industry had a profound effect on the future of Rhododendron cultivation in this part of Germany and hence, inevitably, it led to the formation of a specialist Society.

The preparatory meeting took place on 18 October 1935 in the Council Chamber of the Bremen City Rathaus just when the organization to set up the present Rhododendron Park (on the site of an old private ‘park’) was going forward. This Park was always intended to be the home of rhododendrons and azaleas, together with other kindred plants. Bremen was considered to be a central situation for the development of horticulture, and a Society devoted to rhododendrons was an obvious accompaniment. The Rhododendron Park and the Deutsche Rhododendron Gesellschaft thus proceeded hand in hand.

The first President, Arnold v. Engelbrechten, was elected, and the Society was launched in May 1937 with the appearance of a small publication entitled *Rhododendron und Immergrüne Laubgehölze* (Rhododendron and Evergreen Shrubs) with contributions from Richard Homann, Dr H Sleumer, T J H Seidel and Camillo Schneider.

Since World War II the Rhododendron Park, and with it the Society, has entered a new and successful era. Enthusiasm for rhododendrons has increased enormously with the appearance of many new and exciting hybrids suitable for small gardens. Membership grew from 82 in 1951 to more than 600 five years later. By 1966 the number had risen to over 1,000 and about 80 per cent of the membership is now private gardeners, five per cent nurserymen and the rest scientists and institutions. Honorary Members included the former President Dr Nolting-Hauff, Herr G D Böhlje and Herr Dietrich Hbbie, both well-known nurserymen. The Society has branches in Essen and Munich, also members overseas in more than 17 countries.

The original aims of the Society were the same as those of other societies: to
provide members with information about the cultivation of rhododendrons, to support research and to facilitate distribution. But the proximity of the Rhododendron Park has clearly been of the greatest advantage to the Society. New facilities such as the construction of the various glass and propagating houses have been partially financed by the Society. Study tours to other countries have been popular with between 55 and 85 members taking part. There is a flourishing Journal, *Immergrüne Blätter*, first published in 1962, and currently edited by Professor Dr Wolfgang Spethmann. There is close contact with the Institute for Fruit and Nursery Science of the University of Hannover, where fundamental research on rhododendrons is being carried out.

The present President of the Society is Herr Berndt-Adolf Crome, and the address of the Society is Marcusallee 60, 28359 Bremen.

**The American Rhododendron Society**

It was hardly a coincidence that the American Rhododendron Society had its beginnings in 1944. Prior to World War II, those addicted to rhododendron culture west of the Atlantic relied on contacts with members of the Rhododendron Association and with nurserymen in Britain or on the Continent. There had been a steady stream of information, seeds and plants to American growers and hybridizers. The war brought this all to an abrupt end, and prodded into action those enthusiasts who felt especially deprived. The idea of an American Rhododendron group had been talked about – even seriously considered – in the 1930s, but the element of necessity was absent until the wartime scarcity provided it.

Two Americans, George Grace and John Henny, travelled up and down the north-west US coast in 1942 and 1943, talking to rhododendron growers, trying to kindle interest in a rhododendron society. A preliminary gathering of growers and collectors met on 29 May, 1944 at the home of ER Peterson in Portland, Oregon. At a second meeting on 20 June, John Henny was elected President and George Grace Secretary. An invitation was then mailed to all persons known to have an interest in the genus, announcing a public meeting for 7 July, 1944. ‘A day to be remembered in horticultural history’ was John Bacher’s prediction. Thanks to publicity, membership applications were received from many states. The name the American Rhododendron Society was adopted in the autumn of 1944.

The members’ dues of $5 a year helped finance the publication of a series of informative year books on Hybrids (1945), Species (1946), Stud Book (1947), Azaleas (1948), and Hybrids again in 1949. In that year the membership chose to focus the Society’s efforts on the quarterly Bulletin, edited by Rudolph Henny.

Perhaps the greatest contribution to the growth of ARS membership came from the formation of local chapters in
cities some distance away from the parent ARS organization at Portland. This enabled local groups to exchange information, seeds and plant materials. Their dues provided the income needed to finance the greatly improving quarterly Bulletin, as well as booklets on culture and other information.

By the 10th year the ARS had nearly 1000 members with chapters at Portland, Seattle, Tacoma, Eugene, Northern California, New York and Virginia (called Middle Atlantic). A plant-name registry was established (coordinated with the RHS), standards for plant ratings and awards were adopted, rules for flower shows were promulgated, two plant explorers (J F Rock and F Kingdon-Ward) were funded and their seed collections distributed. The Portland Chapter was the ARS for the first 10 years or so, and its leaders did double duty as chapter and national officers. In addition they oversaw the national test garden at Crystal Springs Lake Island, which was later turned over to the Chapter to manage. This 10-year incumbency by the Portland Chapter proved a disadvantage as it was almost 29 years before the Society was led by an eastern. A new by-law provided two vice-presidents, one from the Western and one from the Eastern region. (Membership was about equally divided between the two.)

John Henny presided over the Society for five years until 1949 when he was succeeded by C I Sersanous who served for almost 10 years until his death in 1958. 'He led the Society through its best years', said his successor, J Harold Clarke, who presided for five years.

By the 20th anniversary in 1964 there were 2,500 members, and 15 more chapters had been added (including Vancouver, BC). A salaried post of Executive Secretary and Editor was created following the unexpected death of the Editor, Rudolph Henny, in 1963. J Harold Clarke was appointed. As a result the Vice-President, Edward B Dunn, became the fourth ARS President. He also served a five-year term. Thereafter the President's term of office was two years. In the ensuing 30 years there have been 13 more presidents: the present incumbent is Herbert A Spady.

In 1965 the Rhododendron Species Foundation was incorporated independently of the ARS to provide a focus for the study and distribution of rhododendron species (see p. 205). A seed exchange initiated by Esther Berry in 1963 had by 1965 grown to be a major enterprise: 2,500 packets were sent out to 227 applicants. Twenty-two years later, seed from 36 states and 13 countries was listed and 12,000 packets were sold. The income provided support for the ARS budget and also helped to fund research projects.

Most of the plants enjoyed by ARS members in the early years were of European origin, but by the 1960s Americans themselves had begun to hybridize and their creations were finding hospitable reception across the country. Thanks to pioneering work in the Pacific Northwest,
many fine new plants were introduced. In the eastern USA other breeders produced new hybrids for their less salubrious climate, but this story has been told in Chapter 11.

The quarterly Bulletin printed many articles from home and abroad and when, in 1982, it became a Journal and included research papers, it was recognized as an outstanding publication. There have been eight editors; the present Editor is Sonja Nelson.

The great expansion of chapters and membership had not been foreseen. The Board of Directors (six officers and 12 elected Directors) was increased when the new Chapter Presidents were made Directors. By 1974, with 38 Chapters, the Board with 56 members was unwieldy. Decisions of meetings held alternately on West and East coasts, tended to be inconsistent. New by-laws, approved in 1981, reduced the Board to 19. Chapters were grouped together geographically and were represented by a District Director. By 1994, the 50th anniversary of the Society, there were 72 Chapters, some of them overseas (represented by a Director at Large), and 5,600 members. Dues were $25. An Executive Director was responsible for the smooth running of this considerable organization. J Harold Clarke was the first of these officers and the only individual to have held all three offices of President, Editor and Executive Secretary. The present incumbent is Barbara Hall.

One outstanding achievement has been the creation of an endowed Research Foundation, proposed by August Kehr. Income from the invested endowment helps fund a small number of research projects each year, selected by the committee on research. One important benefit has been the discovery by Dr WC Anderson of the means of propagating rhododendrons by tissue culture.

Much of the work of the ARS is performed by its committees. Appointed by the President, they attend to the increasing number of functions and interests of the Society and its membership. A yearly meeting of the membership takes place at the National Convention, hosted by a chapter or district on alternate coasts each spring. Smaller district and regional meetings are held in the autumn on each coast.

The Rhododendron Species Foundation

While the ARS was organizing its members and stimulating the appetite of gardeners and hybridists, about 1961 a smaller but equally enthusiastic group were trying their hand at growing rhododendron species. They were disappointed to find that many so-called species grown from open-pollinated seed were turning out to be hybrids. The early post-war expeditions to China, the home of the most desirable species, had ceased and American specialists found themselves turning toward Britain to fulfil their demands for authenticated wild species.

On a visit to England at this point, Carl Phetteplace met Mrs Roza Stevenson,
the widow of JB Stevenson of Tower Court, whose pioneer species collection had been moved to Windsor Great Park. Her fear that many fine species were in danger of being lost to cultivation struck a chord. Phetteplace's report set Dr and Mrs Milton Walker off on a similar trek to Windsor. There Sir Eric Savill and Mr Hope Findlay assured them that they could have any cuttings they wanted from Windsor and that they would help them to obtain cuttings from other British gardens where authenticated species (labelled by collectors' numbers) were growing.

The practical results for the US turned out to be a selection from various British gardens of the finest forms of species. Plant material was sent for propagation to the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, where Evelyn Jack and Nick Weesjes (later to be her husband) grew the plants on for two years.

Meanwhile, the Rhododendron Species Foundation had been incorporated in the state of Oregon, directors and officers chosen and by-laws adopted. Finances were extremely limited and Dr Walker's hope for a substantial endowment whose income would support the work of the Foundation was dashed. The Board opted to accept Dr Walker's generous offer to sell his home place to the Foundation for half its appraised market value and the bulk of the plants were brought there from Vancouver in 1964.

Unfortunately, the Foundation's finances failed to improve and in 1971 the plants had to move once more. As luck would have it, Percy Hadden (Jock) Bryden, lately Director of the Strybing Arboretum at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco had bought land near Salem, Oregon. As a member of the Species Foundation as well as the ARS he provided a new home for the species collection. New facilities were constructed to house the collection and to propagate plants for distribution to members and the nursery trade. Despite some freezing weather and more financial problems the collection prospered. So dramatically indeed that the new accessions outgrew the facilities and another move was imperative.

George Weyerhaeuser of Washington, was persuaded to grant the Foundation a permanent home at his firm's headquarters in Federal Way, Tacoma, Washington. Not only did he provide 9.7ha ( 24 acres), but he also constructed a perimeter fence, and built a greenhouse and lath house. He cleared the land, installed water and electricity as well as giving some financial assistance. The collection was moved to its final home in 1974.

In the last 20 years the collection, now known as The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, has seen great changes. Not only has it grown enormously, but its professional staff monitors the purity of the species, and the propagation facilities have expanded. The Foundation has a library, a corps of volunteers, a worldwide newsletter, educational programmes and visitors from around the world.
New Zealand Rhododendron Association
The New Zealand Rhododendron Association can lay claim to be early in the race for the first national society. It was born at the Massey Agricultural College in Palmerston North on 10 August, 1944, while the War in the Far East was still being fought. Rhododendrons were grown in New Zealand from an early date (see Chapter 5). The climate is favourable almost everywhere from North to South Island, though conditions vary somewhat from warmer to cooler. Even so, the late Edgar Stead’s garden at Ilam has been described as ‘an inspiration and a cause for grievous envy’. However, six enthusiasts met at the Massey Agricultural College on that August day to adopt the provisional constitution and the inaugural meeting of the New Zealand Rhododendron Association was held on 4 October, 1944. Mr EF Stead was the first President and Dr J S Yeates the Secretary/Treasurer – a post he held for the next 21 years.

The aims were simply to encourage the cultivation, the study and the improvement of rhododendrons by such means as the Association should see fit. Members were to receive two plants each, propagated at Massey College, where the Botanical Department undertook to grow the Association’s collection. These mostly came from Edgar Stead’s garden at Ilam, but both seeds and plants from Britain (Edinburgh, Exbury and Bodnant among others) and the USA were imported as well as seeds from a late Kingdon-Ward expedition. For about 30 years this plant distribution was to provide members with plant material until commercial specialist nurseries began to fill the gap.

Administered by a council of officers and six members drawn from most districts of New Zealand, the activities of the NZRA have steadily grown. First, a type-written newsletter kept members informed, then, from the mid-1970s the annual Bulletin was published, with colour pictures from 1981. The NZRA Registration Authority was set up in 1975 with Graham Smith as its first Registrar. Nearly 250 NZ cultivars have been registered with the International Registrar at the RHS Garden, Wisley.

In 1950 land was acquired by Mr W D Cook at Pukeiti Hill, Taranaki in North Island, for a national rhododendron collection, but for financial reasons it was run by a separate Trust: the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust was incorporated on 31 October, 1951. However, in 1970 the NZRA collection, kept until that time at Massey College, became so congested that a plot of land at Kimbolton, near Palmerston North, was purchased as a new home for the collection. For some years this was maintained by the local Kimbolton Rhododendron Society. In 1989 a specially formed committee undertook to landscape the 4.9ha (12-acre) site and to create a garden that now attracts many visitors.

To fulfil the founders’ aims, the
NZRA has been supporting research and the funding of interchanges with botanists and specialists from overseas. Of particular satisfaction has been the visits of botanists from the Kunming Botanic Institute in Yunnan SW China which has led to a permanent Agreement for Partnership between Pukeiti and Kunming. From this has come NZ planting, hunting and seed collecting expeditions of great value and interest to those participating and to members.

The widespread interest of rhododendron growers in the South Island far from Kimbolton and Pukeiti has stimulated the formation of local groups: Dunedin in 1970, South Canterbury in 1973 and Christchurch in 1976 — nine in all from Southland to Auckland. The groups are independent, but share some activities such as entertaining visiting lecturers every other year. Lastly, the National Collection, so much longed for, is at last being established, probably on several sites.

A membership of 1,000, its Kimbolton garden, its Bulletin and the annual conference are all proofs of New Zealand’s leading role in the world-wide community of rhododendron lovers.

The Australian Rhododendron Society
The Australian Rhododendron Society owes its origin to those members of the Ferny Creek Horticultural Society in Victoria who wished to study the genus *Rhododendron*. They formed a study group for that purpose in May 1954 and its success was such that they decided to call themselves the Australian Rhododendron Society (albeit remaining as a section of the FCHS) and to start the quarterly Journal of the Australian Society in 1959. Later in 1990 this became an annual, *The Rhododendron*. Its contents have always been of a consistently high quality.

The aims of the infant Society were anything but modest: its founders wished to extend their influence across Australia as well as within the State; to keep a Register of Australian raised cultivars; to build a library; to publish information; to develop the Australian Rhododendron Festival and to start a garden. At a general meeting on 12 February, 1960, 53 members of the original study group voted to form an autonomous Society which was the nucleus of the Australian Rhododendron Society as it is today.

Almost immediately the search was on to find a suitable site to develop a garden. The site, considered to be ideal was found at Olinda in the Dandenong Range. In August 1960, 40.5ha (100 acres) of the State Forest was set aside by the government of Victoria for the Australian Rhododendron Society to ‘develop and maintain [a] garden without cost to the State‘. Olinda is densely landscaped with rhododendrons and compatible plants and together with the Show Hall, glasshouses and other equipment it has been built and maintained by volunteers.

At one point in the 1970s the enthusiasm for the development of Olinda
produced a nationwide membership of 750-800. Branches in other states were formed, each creating their own garden: at Wollongong on the steep Illawarra Escarpment in New South Wales; in the Mount Lofty section of the Royal Botanic Garden in Adelaide in Victoria.

The Society has formed strong links with the academic research at Melbourne University and it funds plant hunting expeditions, a periodic Baron von Mueller Memorial Lecture and international conferences.

There are great variations in climate, that of New South Wales being tropical and humid, while at Olinda frost and even occasional snow occur. The gardener’s task of cultivating rhododendrons is thus quite formidable. Of all the Australian states Tasmania has the most ideal climate and soil conditions, and the Burnie (NW Tasmania) Branch has, in the last 10 years, established at Emu Valley what will probably be the best rhododendron garden in Australia.

The proximity of Papua New Guinea has created a permanent interest in the tropical Vireyas and has led to plant collecting and research into methods of cultivation and hybridization. This is perhaps the most interesting and distinctive avenue for Australian members to pursue, and certainly offers advantages which other national societies do not share. The second generation of members are full of fresh ideas and are more than ready to carry on the Society’s ambitious objectives.

The Rhododendron Society of Canada

For over 50 years a number of Canadian gardeners and some nurseries had been growing hardy rhododendrons in isolation, before a small group of devotees met in 1972 to form a society. They decided to retain a Canadian identity rather than become a part of the American Rhododendron Society to which several of them already belonged individually. As an encouragement and service to new members the executive arranged to provide a few introductory specimens and growing instructions. This led to the publication of a 32-page bulletin, usually circulated twice a year.

In the 1970s and early 80s the Society grew quickly to a membership above 400. Most members lived around Toronto, in Ontario’s Niagara peninsula, near Halifax and in the southern part of British Columbia. Because these areas were far apart, three Regional organizations were formed – Toronto, Niagara and Atlantic. However, most members in British Columbia already belonged to the American Rhododendron Society.

Although total membership remained static, the regions became increasingly active, with auctions, group purchases and importations to help swell the numbers of plants in individual gardens. Each region held monthly meetings and lectures and held flower shows, while the Society held a major show and competition each year at either Toronto, Hamilton, St Catharines, Montreal, Halifax, St John’s (Newfound-
land) or Ann Arbor (Michigan).

With the successful introduction of cultivars able to withstand Canada's climate, two new activities have emerged as major interests. The first is hybridizing and propagation and hybridizers have focused on hardiness as their main goal, some use being made of our native species, *R. canadense* and *R. lapponicum* and a number of new crosses have been registered. The second activity has been the voluntary help given by members towards creating public rhododendron gardens. Several promise to become impressive collections in their respective regions.

The gradual shift towards home and public planting, hybridizing and propagation, has reduced the time available for administration and increased the cost of the bulletin. Twenty years' experience and greater cross-border exchanges have persuaded the Society to accept the ARS's invitation to become one of their districts while still retaining its identity as the Rhododendron Society of Canada. Its three regions have become chapters within the district. There was much soul-searching and some opposition to this decision, which, coupled with an increase in dues, has accounted for a decline in membership. But the increased facilities and excellent bulletins have stimulated renewed enthusiasm and optimism.

**The Japanese Rhododendron Society**

Founded in 1972, the Japanese Rhododendron Society has a present membership of about 1,000. The Society has 40 chapters throughout the Japanese Archipelago, almost one in every prefecture. The aims of the Society, like many others, are to disseminate knowledge about rhododendrons through meetings, shows, research and publications.

The President's term of office is two years with the possibility of being re-elected for one more term. However, the office of Vice-President is a permanent one, and has been held for the last 20 years by Mr Hideo Suzuki, who is also the officer in charge of international liaison. There is a particular relationship with the RHS as Mr Suzuki is a Corresponding Member.

**The Swedish Rhododendron Society (Rhododendronsällskapet)**

The Swedish Rhododendron Society is a small society of about 650 members. The number is growing slowly but steadily. The majority of members live in Sweden, but there are others in the Scandinavian countries and also Iceland.

One of the founders of the society was Tor Nitzelius of the Gothenborg Botanical Garden, a specialist on rhododendrons who has made several travels to the Far East and had named *R. brachycarpum* subsp. *tigerstedtii*, one of the hardiest of the genus. There is a Chairman (currently Helge Persson), a Vice-Chairman and the usual officers, all of whom act on an honorary basis. For geographical reasons the country is divided into three
regions or chapters – East, South and West (because of the severe climate there is no northern region). Each region has its own activities – courses, lectures, garden visits and other things which cannot be centralized – leaving for the centre the production of information (a quarterly Bulletin, Rhododendron Blades), organization of travel, seed distribution and international contacts. Outstanding Swedish rhododendron gardens are the Gothenborg Botanical Garden and the garden of the late King Gustav Adolf at his summer palace, Sofiero, which he bequeathed to the city of Helsingborg. (His Majesty was a member of the British Rhododendron Association.)

The address of the Secretary is: Sven-Goran Alksgrand, Lonndalsv, 10, 450 33 Grundsund.

The Scottish Rhododendron Society
The Society was founded in 1983 by a small group of enthusiasts led by Ed Wright of Arduaine who felt there was a need to bring together those keen growers who were unable to attend the shows and meetings in London. From a small nucleus of experts and beginners the Society has grown in the last 11 years and in 1995 has a membership of about 220. It has benefited from the start from being a Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society (see p. 202). With its international organization, the ARS has provided many facilities that would have been outside the scope of a small society. The advantages enjoyed by the SRS include the quarterly Journal of the ARS and participation in the Seed Exchange.

The Society's own activities include its Newsletter circulated three times a year and a major show, normally with over 500 entries in the Rhododendron section. It is held in a different part of Scotland each year. The Wright Brothers' garden at Arduaine might be considered as the launching pad of the SRS: it has now been presented to the National Trust for Scotland, but members of the SRS (and the ARS) have free entry in perpetuity.

Membership is open to all and has an international flavour. It includes many people from south of the Border as well as other parts of the globe. The affairs of the Society are run by a President, a Secretary/Treasurer and a board of Directors. The first President was Dr S Mackenna of Tarbert, who was followed by Hamish Gunn, Ed Wright and the present incumbent, Mervyn Kessell. The Society has had the confidence to stage the 1996 Annual Convention of the ARS at Oban in Argyll – the first ever to have been held outside the USA.

Cynthia Postan has been a member of the RHS Rhododendron Group since the early 1950s and has edited their Year Book since 1988.