The Royal Horticultural Society

The Rhododendron Story

200 Years of Plant Hunting and Garden Cultivation

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TO THIS ONLINE EDITION

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RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA & MAGNOLIA GROUP

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As recently as 150 years ago very few species of *Rhododendron* were known in the western world. Linnaeus (1707-78) had been aware of only a handful of species. In the 19th century a small number (of mostly deciduous species) trickled across the Atlantic from North America. More notably by the dawn of the 19th century army personnel and surveyors were discovering rhododendron forests in the Himalayas. Dr Buchanan Hamilton is credited with the earliest introduction of *Rhododendron arboreum* from that region, closely followed by Nathaniel Wallich, who collected on a wider scale and provided a catalogue of his acquisitions. In 1825 we have the first report of the crimson form of *R. arboreum* flowering in Alexander Baring’s garden at the Grange, Alresford, Hampshire. Then Robert Baxter of Dee Hills, Chester, received an award for the white form of *R. arboreum* in 1839.

Baxter’s plant had been raised from seed received in 1821 from N Wallich, by H Shepherd, Curator, City of Liverpool Botanic Garden, an establishment founded in the centre of the city and declared open in 1802. (This was two years prior to the meeting in Hatchard’s bookshop which led to the formation of the London Horticultural Society, later to become the Royal Horticultural Society.)

Accounts in the *Botanical Magazine* reveal that many early introductions from the Far East were grown under glass. Uncertainty about the degree of hardiness of particular species was complicated by the variation in response to climate – within a species – due to provenance. It is widely recognized that the flower colour in *R. arboreum* varies with altitude; the deeper colour forms are generally from lower levels and the paler ones from higher up. The rich colour forms are less hardy.
than the paler ones and thrive only in gardens with notably mild climates. The accounts of *R. edgeworthii* mention that it first flowered in cultivation in ‘a cool greenhouse’. This species is found growing wild over a wide area and plants of different provenance are likely to show variable response to climatic conditions. The point is borne out by reference to specimens in gardens. I have been familiar with *R. edgeworthii* in the open in the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (RBGE), for almost 50 years. The Award of Merit (AM) form of this species with delightfully pink-flushed petals is trained against a sheltered wall at Bodnant and, one assumes, is less hardy than the Edinburgh plants. Similarly, *R. cinnabarinum* was originally given protection, but it became widely grown in the open in many gardens.

Huge rhododendrons are to be found on a number of estates, some nearly 20m (65½ft) high and over 140 years old. These venerable specimens are found in areas of high rainfall, high humidity and relatively mild winters. This represents the maritime climate of West-Coast Britain, but the varying requirements of species makes it possible to grow rhododendrons in almost any part of the British Isles.

The main limiting factor is an alkaline soil: in areas where chalk or limestone is present there are difficulties in growing most members of the Ericaceae. From observation in Yunnan, George Forrest concluded that some species of *Rhododendron* could be accommodated on soils derived from limestone rock. Attempts to grow these species on base-rich soils in Britain have, however, ended in failure. Several explanations for these results spring to mind. First, there are very different types of limestone, and, secondly, climatic conditions could account for the difference between success and failure. In areas of high rainfall and humidity plants can thrive on a thin layer of organic material above the influence of the underlying rock. (A number of species are epiphytes in their natural habitat.) There are well-known examples in Britain where a classic calcifuge plant can form thriving populations on layers of organic soil above limestone, for example the heather moors of North Wales.

The Westonbirt Arboretum is in the Cotswold limestone area but in certain parts there has been an accumulation of organic matter which makes it possible to grow rhododendrons quite successfully. In such cases the high levels of lime, which raise the soil pH and make it difficult to take up the minor elements so essential to rhododendrons, have been leached away. Trials at RBGE demonstrate, however, that the optimum pH for rhododendrons is in the range 5.0-6.0. Readings above this figure give rise to the sickly state known as ‘lime induced chlorosis’. On the other hand, significantly lower figures result in unsatisfactory growth. That mistakes were made in attempting to cultivate some of the earlier importation of plants on unsuitable soils is beyond doubt.
F & J Dickson of Upton Nurseries, Chester, recorded the first flowering of *Rhododendron campanulatum* in Britain in 1839. Proximity to the port of Liverpool and the presence of H Shepherd, of the City Botanic Garden, must have helped. The Dicksons acquired seed of *R. lacteum* in 1841 and flowered it in 1848. Though no longer in existence, the firm continued well into the 20th century. Another nursery firm, Standish & Noble, were early handlers of rhododendron seed, including some of Joseph Hooker’s importation of *R. campylocarpum* which they had in flower in a frame in 1856 (see Chapter 5). Rolllisons of Tooting received an award for one of the forms of *R. arboreum* in 1836 and Victoria Nursery, Highgate, were awarded the First Class Certificate (FCC) for *R. nuttallii* in 1846. Before long the firm of Veitch was assuming an important role. As well as growing a number of species hybridization began. The fact that the best forms of *R. arboreum* and the magnificent *R. griffithianum* were not hardy in many parts of Britain may have provided the incentive. To combine the qualities of these species with the hardiness of others seemed a worthy target. Plant breeders must have a reason for their activities. Many early hybrids had genuine garden value, however most have vanished from current nursery catalogues (see chapter 10).

That cultivars of the 19th century have been superseded is a general rule verging on a truism. Few are still on offer and those that are, owe their position to some feature beyond intrinsic appeal. For example, *R. Cunningham’s White* raised by the man whose name it bears in his Comely Bank Nursery, Edinburgh, about 1830, grows in more extreme conditions than almost any other rhododendron. It also roots so readily from cuttings that it is often used as an understock for grafting. Then, *R. Nobleanum*, an Anthony Waterer hybrid of the same period, will flower throughout mild spells in winter. Another, *R. × Praecox* raised by Isaac Davies in his Ormskirk nursery, also survives as a fairly tough winter-flowering shrub – the pale purple flowers of this plant are in evidence in half the gardens in the street where I live. A K Bulley refused to have this early flowering cultivar in his garden at Ness, and the colour of *R. mucronulatum* is infinitely more pleasing. Yet another, *R. × Fragnantissimum* was awarded the FCC when exhibited by Rolllisons in 1868 and was presumably raised by them.

The mixed blessings of hybridization became evident with the arrival of the vast array of new species between 1880 and 1930. Information on the flora of West China was beginning to reach Europe; the firm of Veitch had received seed of *R. racemosum* and presented it in 1892 to receive the FCC. They were keen to add to their success. They commissioned E H Wilson to collect for them in China in 1899 and among his considerable haul of new species were *R. orbiculare, R. sutchuenense*
and *R. calophytum*. A few years later he introduced the superb *R. williamsianum*. The horticultural world was enthralled with the new rhododendrons and a period of intense collecting activity soon followed.

In 1904 A K Bulley launched George Forrest on his career as a plant collector. The success of his first expedition led him to concentrate his six further explorations on the floristically rich area of Yunnan and the adjoining territories. The earlier claims on the number of new species Forrest introduced are now seen to be an overstatement, but the significance of his work cannot be exaggerated. Among his discoveries are *R. impeditum*, *R. russatum*, *R. clementinae*, *R. rex* subsp. *fictolacteum*, *R. sinogrande* and *R. griersonianum*. The list could be extended to resemble an index of the genus: to quote P D Williams, 'Wilson's plants came in manageable proportions, those of Forrest came in a tremendous and sustained flood.' The contribution to the garden scene was only one aspect of George Forrest's contributions; his earlier training in herbarium work resulted in his compilation of a wealth of dried specimens. Most are lodged in the Herbarium of the RBGE and did much to establish that institution as the international centre for research on the genus *Rhododendron*. (The purchase of specimens from a French Herbarium by A K Bulley for his old friend Professor Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour also helped.)

In 1911 Frank Kingdon-Ward began to collect for A K Bulley and his finds included *R. pemakoense*, *R. leucaspis* and *R. wardii*. He is also credited with reintroducing the magnificent *R. macabeanum*.

R R Cooper travelled for A K Bulley in Bhutan and Sikkim from 1914 to 1916, from where he introduced *R. dalhousiae*
var. *rhabdotum*. It was Cooper’s misfortune to arrive home with his material in the midst of World War I, but Ludlow and Sherriff found his notes a valuable aid. Only the last named pair and Kingdon-Ward continued with extended plant exploration activity after World War II. Ludlow and Sherriff discovered the appealing *R. ludlowii*. It has proved to be an outstanding parent in breeding programmes.

The plants which arrived at the peak of the exploration activity were rapidly distributed to gardens on the large estates from Caerhays in Cornwall to Blackhills in Morayshire and all favourable locations in between. Nurseries were by no means excluded from the distribution and some became keen exhibitors, as evidenced by Messrs Gill of Falmouth gaining the AM for *R. falconeri* in 1922 and Harry White of Sunningdale receiving the AM for *R. rigidum* (in 1933). Both firms became involved with hybridization, Gill producing *R. ‘Shilsoni’* which has stood the test of time and is considered by some to be one of the all-time greats.

It is on the large estates, nonetheless, where so many of the fine specimens are to be found. Who can ever forget the first encounter with genuine trees of *R. arboreum* at Benmore near Dunoon, where conditions are so favourable that Dick Shaw could compile a long list of species which naturally regenerate. So many of the gardens of Argyll contain mature specimens of great age: Stonefield Castle, for example, has specimens raised from seed collected by Joseph Hooker on his celebrated Himalayan journeys. One is tempted to ask: did our Victorian forebears know something about the mild winter climate in West-Coast Scotland—a fact beyond belief by many in England. The truth is more prosaic, the Campbells of Stonefield were friends of William J Hooker, then in Glasgow, and knew of his son’s travels in the Himalayas. Several Scottish gardens began growing rhododendrons a generation before most of the Cornish ones.

Members of the subsections Falconeria and Grandia reach tree proportions in the milder districts of Britain. One of the finest collections of species in these groups is at Brodick on the Isle of Arran. On my first visit in 1954 Jim Russell spent some time contrasting the growth habits of specimens of *R. macabeanum*, raised from seed collected by Kingdon-Ward on one hand and by J F Rock on the other. Today there is much discussion on the comparative quality of flower colour in various plants of this species. One enthusiast from the North of England, who paid regular visits to the Cornish gardens, was fond of reciting ‘that the *R. macabeanum* at Trewithen is the finest yellow-flowered rhododendron in the Western World’. I have read that the plant at Trewithen was a gift to George Johnstone from Colonel Bolitho of Trengwainton. It would be poetic justice if this proved to be the case, because Colonel Bolitho’s plant was awarded the FCC in 1938. I do not wish
to imply that there are no other specimens of comparable quality; to do so would remind me of H H Davidian singing the praises of the Edinburgh plant, followed by a chorus of claims for some of the plants in other parts of the country. The group of *R. macabeanum* at Muncaster shows quite a degree of variation and the size and number of plants lead one to believe they are of a batch raised from Kingdon-Ward’s seed, a view sustained by the knowledge that Sir John Ramsden was a member of his sponsoring syndicate. It was Sir John who led Brodick into the rhododendron world by a gift of plants some 70 years ago. Today Brodick can boast of one of the finest collections to be seen anywhere. This claim applies particularly to the large-leaved species. My most impressive photographs of *R. sidereum* and *R. falconeri* were taken at Brodick. One of the large-leaved species — *R. montroseanum* — is named in honour of the former owner, the Duchess of Montrose. The collection since then has been carefully managed for the National Trust for Scotland, mostly by one head gardener, John Basford, and only inevitable retirement could have drawn him away from this garden.

Other gardens in ‘the West’, as the Scots say, add interesting facets to the ‘Rhododendron story’. J A Campbell started planting rhododendrons at Arduaine around the turn of the century and his enthusiasm was passed on to his son and daughter-in-law who devoted much attention to the garden. I paid my first visit in 1949 with Dr J M Cowan and H H Davidian. Sir Bruce and Lady Campbell, the head gardener and the former nanny were then tending the garden. It was here, in 1936, that *R. protistum* first flowered in cultivation. One writer described it as having grown into a ‘monumental tree’. It is claimed that J A Campbell brought seed of *R. arboreum* subsp. *zeylanicum* from Sri Lanka and the plants he raised are still growing at Arduaine. Outstanding in the garden are amazingly large and floriferous specimens of *R. griffithianum*, quite unusual outdoors in Britain. My second visit to Arduaine took place in 1959 when I saw the former nanny collecting flowers for the funeral wreath of the head gardener. We realized that this elderly lady was the sole survivor of the gardening quartet of 10 years previously. The garden went into utter decline but was restored by the brothers Wright, who after 20 years, handed over this remarkable garden with its superb collection of plants to the National Trust for Scotland.

Another Campbell family has developed and maintained the garden at Crarae (see figure 8) and a number of the large-leaved species can be found thriving here. This garden has good forms of *R. wardii*; the same species is also well represented at Strone Palace.

The favourable climate for large-leaf rhododendrons extends further north than Argyll. Osgood McKenzie and his daughter, Marie Sawyer, established a selection
in their celebrated garden Inverewe, Wester Ross. In the same county J Holms propelled himself with vigour into a planting programme at Larachmhor, Arisaig, but as the plants were reaching maturity the owner died and the property became vacant. Some of the staff of the RBGE began a rehabilitation programme some years ago and significant plants, threatened by competition, are being given scope to thrive. It was here that \textit{R. sinogrande} first flowered in Britain in the early 1930s. The most impressive specimen of this species I have encountered is at Trewithen and it seems entirely appropriate that George Johnstone should have received the FCC for it in 1926.

It is not only on the large estates that members of the genus have found congenial conditions. A C and J F A Gibson built up an exciting range of species at Glenarn, Rhu, a large suburban garden; when the Gibsons arrived they inherited established specimens of \textit{R. falconeri} and \textit{R. thomsonii} and little else. The brothers greatly extended the rhododendron collection. They were also keen exhibitors, winning many awards, including the AM for \textit{R. glisichrum} subsp. \textit{rude} in 1964 and the AM for \textit{R. hirtipes} in 1965.

The extreme South-west of Scotland provides an ideal environment for rhododendrons and it is not surprising to find a group of estates with a long association with the genus. Logan on the Mull of Galloway is almost akin to an island site with the sea on three sides. The estate is now divided with wall garden and immediate surrounds now in the care of the RBGE. In this area are rhododendrons of the Maddenia subsection and \textit{R. edgeworthii}. In the other part around Logan House there are a number of huge specimens, including the largest example \textit{R. grande} I have ever seen. There is a veritable forest of different rhododendrons belonging to the subsections Falconera and Grandia. One specimen brought down in a gale more than 30 years ago was then accurately aged at within a whisker of 100 years. That some of these plants could have been raised from the earliest importations from the Far East is entirely feasible. Interestingly, Kenneth McDouall and his brother who owned Logan before the 20th century and for many years on made a significant contribution to the cultivation of dwarf rhododendrons. It was they who first cut blocks of peat and built them into low terrace walls, a system which has been imitated around Britain and has proved so successful. The Hambro family took over Logan and George Steadwood served as a loyal head gardener. Martin College succeeded him and laboured with great commitment through a very lean spell, to be rewarded with the Assistant Curatorship when the RBGE took over.

Slightly inland from Logan is Lochinch, an estate in the grand style, long associated with rhododendrons. Thomas Calia and a Mr Fowler spent many years working in the garden and were certainly involved in propagating
rhododendrons from seed. The Earl of Stair was a member of the Rhododendron Society, a group of estate owners, many of whom supported the collectors in their search for their favoured genus. During the First World War R Findlay was encouraged to move from Logan to Lochinch; his sons followed him into horticulture and one, T Hope Findlay, held a senior position in the Savill Gardens, Windsor. R W Rye had the longest association with Lochinch in the 20th century,
working there for 38 years. A cultivar derived from members of the Maddenia and Boothia subsection is named after him.

The Cornish gardens began early to recognize the potential of the new Sino-Himalayan rhododendrons and by 1885 J C Williams had started a planting programme at Caerhays Castle. This activity was to grow in volume and significance to the point when he became the principal member of the syndicates supporting the later expeditions of George Forrest. Much of the seed raising was undertaken by the then head gardener, James Martin. The mature plants of *R. williamsianum*, I estimated, could have been raised from Wilson's seed by him and no doubt he, too, raised the large trees of *R. sinogrande* and *R. rex* subsp. *fictolacteum* from Forrest's seed. His successor, Charles Michael, spent much time with J C Williams deciding where in the garden certain plants should be placed. He and George Blandford carried out the actual planting, later to be maintained by Reggie Uglow. The present head gardener, Philip Tregunna, has spent many years at Caerhays ensuring the preservation of fine old specimen plants, some of which are extremely rare in Britain.

In the sheltered parts of the garden many plants grow exceedingly vigorously and the blossom on rhododendrons becomes remote in the sky above. To obviate this problem many species of rhododendron are cut back hard from time to time and most will again develop into shapely bushes bearing flowers at eye-level. There are, however, words of caution on the universal application of this treatment; the smooth-barked species fail to sprout new shoots from severely pruned trunks. The seemingly ideal climate at Caerhays is not suitable for all species and some were transferred from the mild coastal garden to the inland Werrington Park (also belonging to J C Williams). *R. lacteum*, it was reported, grew far better at Werrington Park than at Caerhays and this is consonant with the claim that this species requires a cooler climate for it to thrive. Certainly the best plants are in cooler areas; at Corsock House in South-west Scotland, for instance, rather than Logan and Lochinch in the balmy influence of the Gulf stream. The other notable plant of *R. lacteum* of which I am aware is at Blackhills in Morayshire, the garden owned and maintained by the Christie family. My visits have never coincided with the flowering of *R. lacteum* but the description indicates that the quality of clear yellow flowers is similar to the Corsock plants.

To focus attention a little longer on species requiring milder conditions, such as many in the Maddenia subsection: the most representative selections of these predominantly sweetly scented rhododendrons are at Brodick and Trengwainton, but there are also massive plants of *R. johnstoneanum* at Muncaster and Clyne Castle Swansea. The former owner of
Clyne, Admiral Walker-Heneage-Vivian, grew several slightly tender species in the sheltered tree-clad valley and in the interwar years was awarded the FCC for *R. dalhousiae* and for *R. lindleyi*. The huge funnel-shaped flowers of *R. lindleyi* vary in colour from pure white to white with a strong tinge of pink and those who have observed this plant over a number of seasons at Arduaine say that the colour varies in individual plants from one season to the next. Differing temperature regimes obviously influence chemical reactions in the pigmentation. Careful siting of the less hardy species can often lead to success in districts not recognized as being particularly favourable. For example, *R. lindleyi* flourishes on a sheltered patio in Dr Florence Auckland’s garden near Bolton in Lancashire, as does Peter Cox’s plant against a sheltered wall in Perthshire. A marked degree of variation in several species in this subsection have often been recognized with awards to particular clones. Major A E Hardy received the AM for his plant of *R. maddenii* ‘Ascreavie’ grown at Sandling Park, in Kent, a part of England most prone to icy blasts generated by high pressure systems over the continent in winter. *R. spinuliferum* is reputedly grown in gardens in various parts of Britain but one recalls seeing it in only sheltered gardens. A clone called ‘Jack Hext’ received the AM when shown by Nigel Holman, Chyverton, Truro. The AM was also awarded to another clone, ‘Blackwater’, when exhibited by Brodick Castle. A connoisseur of the deciduous species assured me that the flower quality of *R. schlippensbachii* at Chyverton was equal to any he had seen of this plant.

Many selections of *R. cinnabarimum* were made in former times in gardens of the South-West, and several from Caerhays were given clonal names. Some were crossed with other species to give rise to well-known cultivars, for example *R. ‘Alison Johnstone’*. The garden at Minterne in Dorset began growing rhododendrons just before World War I when Lord Digby brought a plant from Inverewe and from then on the collection developed steadily. Arthur Smith managed the collection most economically for several decades around the middle of the 20th century.

Many species can be cultivated widely throughout Britain, granted a degree of protection from wind. Members of the Fortunee subsection such as *R. sutchuenense* and *R. oreodoxa* provide early blossom in many gardens. At Bodnant in North Wales the magnificent *R. orbiculare* regularly provides a stunning display and it seems appropriate that Bodnant received the AM for this species in 1922. Lord Aberconway, for many years President of the RHS, was a supporter of the collecting work of Forrest, Farrer and Kingdon-Ward; his staff raised their seed and cultivated the progeny with great skill. F C Puddle was the first in a dynasty of head gardeners; he was succeeded by his son C E Puddle, who in turn handed over to his
son Martin Puddle. The combined period of their stewardship is now approaching 90 years – how near to the century will they reach? There are notable specimens of species at Bodnant, *R. augustinii* in superb blue form, for instance, and the circle of *R. williamsianum* around ‘the Bath’. FC Puddle was an experienced breeder of orchids and turned his skill to raising hybrid rhododendrons, one of which bears his name.

*Rhododendron williamsianum* and *R. griersonianum* were among the species most frequently used at Bodnant in their breeding programme. The arrival of the last named species from Forrest’s 1917 expedition with its distinctive geranium-red flowers caused a considerable stir in the rhododendron world. Within seven years of arrival it was awarded the FCC when exhibited by E de Rothschild of Exbury and T H Lowinsky of Tittenhurst, Sunninghill. (The latter property is the latest to be restored to its former glory.) Unfortunately *R. griersonianum* is not hardy and this has given added impetus to try to transfer its features into hardy progeny.

Exbury became one of the noted centres for successful hybridization activity as well as for the cultivation of the species of *Rhododendron*. The first plants of *R. yakushimanum* to reach these shores went to Exbury and the original plants set out in 1934 can still be seen there. This species has achieved an unparalleled level of attention. World War II delayed recognition until 1947 when the specimen exhibited by Wisley received the FCC. It is compact, free flowering, hardy and an excellent foliage plant with potential for breeding, although none of the progeny quite equal *R. yakushimanum* in all its qualities. Francis Hanger, who was head gardener at Exbury before going to Wisley, believed the *R. yakushimanum* would provide the modern gardener with a range of cultivars appropriate to this more confined space. Arthur Osborne, his successor, no doubt was involved in breeding work at the instigation of his employer. Fred Wynnatt, who was in charge of the garden at Exbury for many years, certainly raised a number of cultivars, one of which is named after him. The present head gardener, Doug Betteridge, continues in the Exbury tradition of combining the desirable features of existing plants through breeding and one cultivar, *R. ‘Pearl Betteridge’* is named after his wife. Not far from Exbury the Whitaker family planted Pylewell Park with rhododendrons and their head gardener, W F Hamilton, raised a very fine cultivar which is simply known by his initials – *R. ‘W. F. H.’* – a replacement for the immensely popular *R. ‘Elizabeth’* when the effects of ‘powdery mildew’ were at their worst. Years ago we heard a lot about Lord Swaythling’s estate Townhill, near Southampton, when F J Rose was head gardener. Mr Rose represented the typical old-time horticulturist with experience in every aspect of the profession. There is no longer the same scope for such men, and
as I can find no reference to the current status of Townhill I fear it may have been submerged in some modern development.

After World War I, Mr and Mrs J B Stevenson began to create a garden at Tower Court, Ascot, with an emphasis on rhododendrons which came to be recognized as among the finest in Britain. Every effort was made to acquire every species and plant of merit. They grew, for instance, the unnamed McLaren T41 and exhibited it before Dr Cowan described it and named it *R. aberconwayi*, after the sponsor of the collector. J B Stevenson was Editor of *The Species of Rhododendron*, for many years the accepted text book on the genus.

On the death of J B Stevenson his widow took up the challenge of preserving the large number of important rhododendrons. This was achieved – against all odds – by reaching an agreement with the Crown Estate Commissioners to transferring most to Windsor Great Park. The work was completed with the stiring support of Robert Keir, for many years head gardener at Tower Court, and Stevenson’s plants now form the nucleus of the collection at Windsor. In the three decades since that notable operation the collection in the Valley Gardens has been regularly augmented. A glance down the list of *Rhododendron* species to which awards have been made, shows a goodly number presented from Windsor: *R. rex* and *R. diaprepes* the FCC in 1955 and 1974 respectively, and also to *R. soulei*. The list of AM awards to Windsor includes *R. thomsonii*, *R. lanigerum*, *R. argyrophyllum* and *R. hodgsonii*. A number of good cultivars have been produced at Windsor, such as the cross between *R. roxieanum* and *R. maculiferum* subsp. *anhweicense*, called *R. Blewbury*, a very attractive plant.

J J Crosfield, Embley Park, near Romsey, made a significant contribution in the cultivation of rhododendrons for a number of years before World War II and for some time after. His plant of *R. oreotrephes* received the AM. There appears to have been something akin to a ‘blue hybrid race’ between Bodnant with their entry *R. ‘Bluebird’*, J J Crosfield with *R. ‘Blue Diamond’* and the Cornish entry – almost certainly started by E J P Magor at Lamellen and further selected by Major General Harrison – to give us *R. ‘St. Tudy’* and *R. ‘St. Breward’*. Some of the collection of plants assembled by E J P Magor remained for his son Major E W M Magor, in his restoration, including the original plant of *R. ‘Damaris’*, which continues to thrive near the main drive.

Several estates in Sussex each in turn played a part in the progress of the genus in cultivation. G W E Loder, later Lord Wakehurst, established many fine plants at Wakehurst Place. This is now an annexe of the RBG Kew, thus giving them scope to cultivate plants which find conditions on the banks of the Thames unsuitable. Further inland is the Loder estate of Leonardslee with a paramount claim to fame. It was here at the dawn of the 20th century that
Sir Edmund Loder crossed *R. fortunei* with *R. griffithianum*, to give rise to *R. 'Loderi'*, one of the most celebrated of cultivars of all time. Those who admire the magnificent scented blossom of *R. griffithianum* but find it impossibly frost sensitive, can enjoy quite similar qualities in its progeny.

In the 1920s Colonel L C R Messel received batches of rhododendron seed collected by Kingdon-Ward and Rock and these were raised and planted at Nymans by his head gardener, J C Comber. Although originally catalogued under collectors’ numbers, many of the labels were lost and efforts to re-identify the plants were made in the late 1960s. The great gale of October 1987 struck Nymans with full force and one fears that many of the rhododendrons were flattened. Mr C G Nice must have spent the whole of his working life in the garden at Nymans, for many years as head gardener. The High Beeches is another Sussex estate associated with the Loder family. Colonel G H Loder resided there for 60 years, planting throughout the period. Edward and Anne Boscawen, who carried on his work, report that excellent forms of *R. griersonianum*, *R. campylocarpum* subsp. *caloxanthum* and many more species thrive there. They devised a modern maintenance programme with Eric Stockton, who cared for the woodland garden from 1927 until his retirement, and with Len Burren who moved to The High Beeches with the Boscawens (the garden is now a charitable trust). Mr H A Mangles’ garden at Littleworth Cross, established towards the end of the 19th century, was well known, but declined between 1939-45. The present owner, Lady Adam Gordon, has restored it, with periodic interruptions from gales. There are good mature plants of *R. barbatum* and *R. wightii*, as well as most of the hybrids raised by Mangles, which have now been successfully propagated. There is a striking selection of rhododendrons at Hergest Croft, Kington, Herefordshire, within a stones throw of Offa’s Dyke. The estate has been in the Banks family for a very long time, but the major work of laying out the garden was undertaken at the beginning of the 20th century. The area known as Parkwood is formed like an amphitheatre. Paths run along the contour lines and one walks along them between the vast array of species. There is an outstanding form of *R. mallowtum* and the plant *R. rex* subsp. *arizelum* has the most impressive indumentum I have ever seen on this species.

A group of inland gardens has a place in the history of the cultivation of the genus. Raymond Baldwin’s impressive collection is at Penn, Alderley Edge, Cheshire. The Hon. Michael Flower is planting an enthusiast’s selection in the Grove at Arley Hall in the same county: popular species such as *R. yakushimanum* and *R. pseudoecyaprimum* are supplemented by a range of cultivars. The University of Liverpool Botanic Garden at Ness has been associated with rhododendrons since its founder, A K Bulley,
launched George Forrest on his career as a plant collector. The plants were cared for by Mr J Hope, for many years head gardener, who often pointed to plants which were raised from Forrest's seed. The records and the labels were however lost through wartime neglect and without continuous documentation it is no longer possible to claim provenance for these plants. The winter of 1981-2 inflicted severe damage on many rhododendrons in gardens fringing the Irish Sea. It was therefore a pleasant surprise to see the thriving plantation in Ray Wood, Castle Howard (North Yorkshire) in 1982. Plants brought from the old Sunningdale Nursery by Jim Russell in 1975 had connections with Joseph Hooker (see Chapter 5).

The most representative selection of all today is in the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. It is also the most carefully and accurately labelled collection and all serious students of the genus should give it the attention it deserves. There are complete demonstrations of particular subsections, for example Lapponica and Saluenensis, and many others are widely represented. The whole range of species has been replanted in recent years so that all the species in one subsection are grouped together, thus making it easy to compare the characteristics of related plants.

A number of species in the Grandia and Falconera subsection are found in Edinburgh and, although flowering quite freely, they produce much more compact growth and less luxuriant foliage than their west-coast counterparts. The climate in this part of Scotland is distinctly on the dry side for rhododendrons and frosts are frequent, but the plants do adapt. The generally cool conditions in summer relieves one potential source of additional stress to the plants. For many years the plants brought back by the collectors were managed by Charles Lamont and he was succeeded by James Duncan who worked in collaboration with Dr J M Cowan and H H Davidian on the labelling of the collections. The more scientific classification, which has been openly explained, is the work of Drs James Cullen and David Chamberlain.

Many of the dwarfer growing species grow well in cooler conditions and the late R B Cooke demonstrated this in his garden, Kilbride, Corbridge. This garden was on the north slopes of the Tyne Valley in Northumberland, where he used to glance around at his amazing range of rarities and say, in essence: 'beware of those mild areas where plants are induced into early growth, only to suffer damage in subsequent frosts'. After his death a number of his valuable plants were transferred to other gardens for safe keeping; are there for instance plants in cultivation of *R. ponticum* other than those traceable to R B Cooke?

A successful rhododendron garden is to be found at Howick in Northumberland. Howick is near the coast of the North Sea and is regarded by many to be
in a veritable ‘banana belt’. Microclimate is very important in the cultivation of rhododendrons. The recent sequence of mild winters begins to raise the prospect of climate changes beginning to take place, and the scene is set to encourage all rhododendron growers to be more adventurous with the less hardy species.

**Kenneth Hulme** trained at RBG Edinburgh and was taken round the gardens of Argyll by H H Davidian and Dr MacQueen Cowan in 1949, since when he has had a special interest in rhododendrons. This interest continued during his subsequent 32 years as Director of the Liverpool University Botanic Garden at Ness.
Figure 8: the ravine at Crarae in Argyll is very similar to the Sino-Himalayan landscape and many large-leaved rhododendrons are at home there (see Chapter 6).
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