

Bulletin

MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA & MAGNOLIA GROUP

SUMMER 2024 | ISSUE 145

GROWING | SHARING | LEARNING
*news, views and activities
from around the Group*


▲ *Rhododendron genestierianum* at Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens (see page 10)

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

As those of you who attended the AGM will know, I was not personally present. I'd looked forward to being at Trewithen in my home county of Cornwall since we organised the event.

Unfortunately, medical problems mean that I am unable to drive or walk long distances. So even if I could have some-how got to the AGM, I would not have been able to join the garden walks with you.

My wish in the last *Bulletin* for a good flowering season came true, although since I am no longer able to walk around my garden I saw only some of the display from my terrace. Fortunately there are a number of magnolias within view from the terrace including my favourite 'Princess Margaret', which did not disappoint, putting on its normal great show. Apart from that, I particularly noticed a large display of white flowers visible over the roof. It was the *Magnolia doltsopa* 'Silver Cloud' which featured on the cover of our 2022 Yearbook; I had not realised that it had grown to such a size.

Talking of large trees, I was recently visited by Owen Johnson, Registrar of

© Peter Furneaux



▲ *Rhododendron glanduliferum* in the Editor's garden

the Tree Register, who spent several hours in my garden and at the end informed me that I had four trees of UK Champion status. Two of these are actually champions in UK & Ireland. One is an *Agathis australis*, just visible from the terrace. My two *Magnolia insignis* got a mention but, impressive as that is, I would just like one of them to flower, 29 years and still waiting!

(continued overleaf)

EDITORIAL

Through the window beside my desk there is no 'Capability Brown' view but a panorama of trees: a large ash, wild cherries, a liquidambar festooned with a vigorous rose of unknown name, the deep red leaves of *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood' along with the regrowing shoots and their large leaves on a mulberry which suffered storm damage last year. Beneath them, hydrangeas are in flower, beautifully setting off *Rhododendron glanduliferum* with its large trusses of sweetly scented white flowers.

(There are also a lot of weeds which I am ignoring while I assist Pam in putting together the *Bulletin*.)

While reading this, I hope you might consider writing a Member's Note for the forthcoming autumn edition. The fantastic season we are enjoying should surely inspire some contributions. The copy date is 30th September. Please don't feel inhibited!

Send your drafts in a Word file or within an email but do please attach the images (as high resolution/large files) separately rather than embedded in the texts; it's much easier for you and saves us lots of time and bothersome emails later! 🌸

PETER FURNEAUX
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CONTENTS

NEW EVENT COORDINATOR'S WELCOME NOTES	2
SHOW REPORTS	2
MEMBERS' NOTES	6
BRANCH REPORTS	12
PLANT NEWS	13
MEMBERSHIP	14
EVENTS	16
CONTACT DETAILS	16

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES (continued)

There are a number of camellias visible from the terrace and these have flowered well and continue to do so. Unfortunately, there are only a few rhododendrons visible but they have added their colour. I particularly noted a favourite evergreen azalea, *Rhododendron 'Truus'*, which at one stage seemed to have been the only specimen worldwide, although I have now propagated it and spread those young plants around. If you know of any others in cultivation please let me know.

VOLUNTEERS

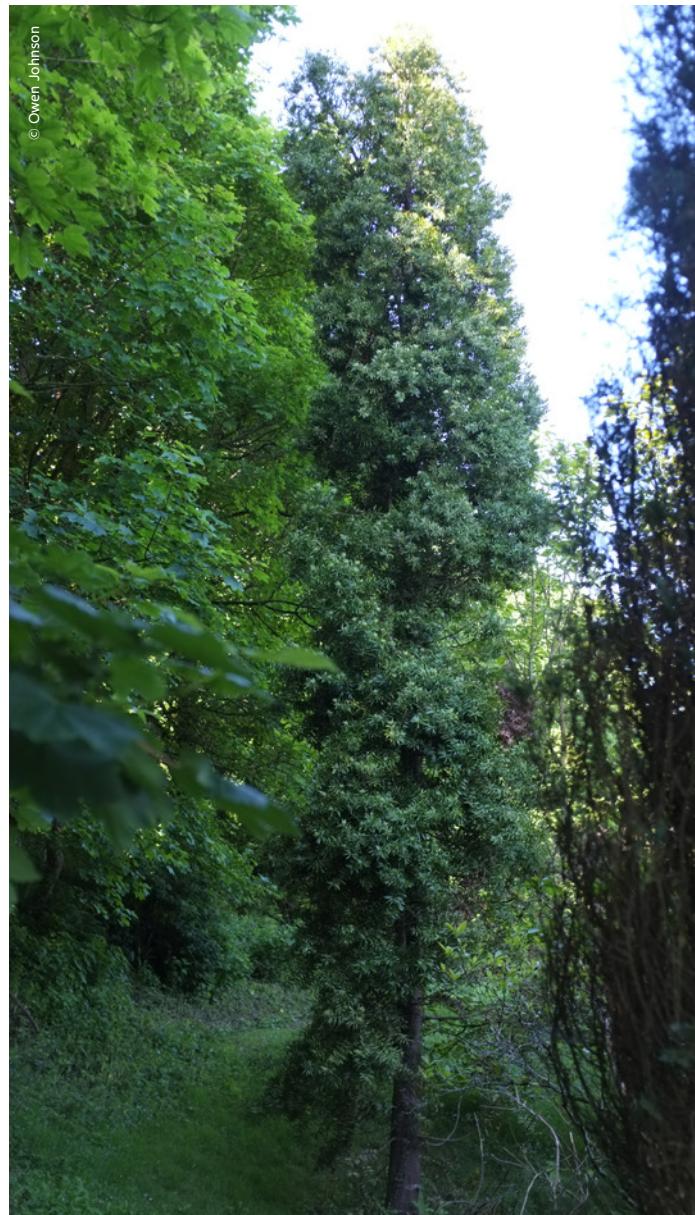
I am very pleased to announce that we have a new Events Coordinator in the form of Alan Robertson whose face now graces our web site. You will undoubtedly hear from him in the months ahead. Please feel free to pro-actively contact him if you have any ideas or thoughts about events. Sadly, we still have a vacancy for Yearbook Lead Editor.

All the evidence from other societies is that the lack of volunteers is a familiar situation, common to all, and one which will get worse in the future; this is very concerning. Without volunteers we will probably have to start sourcing these services outside the membership, either paying for certain functions or just cutting back on some of them.

You will be aware that the 2024 yearbook is going to be late and at the current time, with no one coming forward, the only way that we feel that we can produce a yearbook in 2025 is by outsourcing more of the pre-production and paying for further professional help.

So can I make my regular plea that if you do have any time that you could offer to the Group and would like to help shape its progress in the years to come, please make contact with me. In particular, with regard to the yearbook, you would not have to take on the whole process but even helping with some of the task could help mitigate our costs and therefore your subscription fees. 

GRAHAM MILLS
chairman@rhodogroup-rhs.org



▲ The recently classified National Champion *Agathis australis* at Tregoning Mill

Introducing our new Events Coordinator



The Group is delighted to welcome Alan Robertson as our new Events Coordinator.

Alan tells us:

I am a Scot with my place of birth being Glasgow of which I am super proud, although mostly my accent has disappeared and returns only after a couple of drams or in a free and frank discussion with other Glaswegians!

I was born in 1957 and having had my education in Harwich, Clacton and Cambridge, I joined a shipping company and remained in that industry from then until now(ish). My interests are a bit eclectic and gardening is key among them although one where I am very much an amateur but always keen to learn. I do very much enjoy the genera in our group, in part no doubt because they thrive in rain like me!

I am also interested in all manner of rail travel and I have inherited my grandfather's trip planning 'gene'. I have led small groups to Scotland as well as organising events and presentations for work.

I am excited to take on the role of Events Coordinator for our group – there's a lot to have a look at! So, watch your inbox and our website for news about forthcoming events and trips being planned for later this year and 2025. 

events@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Show Reports

RHS Spring Ornamental Plant Competitions RHS Wisley April 6th 2024

The RHS Main Camellia, Early Rhododendron and Spring Ornamental Plant competitions all took place in the RHS Hilltop building and were wrapped around by the magnificent and 'in bloom' gardens at Wisley. Competitors gathered from the Friday afternoon to start the process of staging their prized entries with anticipation of what was to be a fantastic show of spring plants the next day. Beside the show, Wisley was looking fantastic with mesmerising plants in flower; a welcome change from the intensity of staging. The haze of purple/blue Paulownia flowers up on Battleston Hill was simply superb.

Once all staged, the difficult task of judging took place, with a wait that seemed to drag on, but then the doors flew open to an array of colour and a mass observation exercise to check for prize winnings. The standard, like many spring shows, was extremely high and I was very impressed not only for the individual varieties but of the show as a whole: the camellias perfectly and delicately placed showing the blooms with a few select leaves for maximum impact; the many different ornamental plants showing a vast variety of colour, and also the sometimes overlooked but here celebrated, foliage. The rhododendrons in so many different shapes, sizes, textures, colours, varieties, multi-stemmed (spray), single stem (one truss) and the many different categories were



▲ A spray of the ever reliable *Rhododendron 'Alison Johnstone'* sets off the glorious colour mix down the Hybrid Rhododendron bench at the Early Rhododendron Competition at RHS Wisley

a real treat for anyone seeking to appreciate these plants and also to learn more about them. A few personal favourites to mention include *Rhododendron hodgsonii* with its great colour, form and foliage; a full spray of *R. 'Alison Johnstone'* exhibited



▲ A perfect bloom of *Camellia 'Dr Clifford Parks'* is always a show-stopper

by Leonardslee Gardens, showing a mass of colour variation; the large bloom of *Camellia 'Dr Clifford Parks'* from Russell Beeson and of course I didn't mind Minterne Gardens' entry of *Rhododendron 'Colonel Rogers'*! 🌸



▲ The splendid *Rhododendron hodgsonii* COHU 581 entered by the Crown Estate



▲ Exbury's amazing display of young *Rhododendron nuttallii* foliage demonstrates how the colour and texture of leaves can add an extra dimension of appreciation



▲ Magnolia 'Lemon Star' is proving to be a regular winner on the show bench

Main Rhododendron and SW Branch Competitions RHS Rosemoor April 20th 2024

Climatic conditions leading up to the shows are always a challenge for all the exhibitors with sometimes hail blemishing blooms, rain flattening trusses and frost destroying your choice of what to exhibit but we all had seemed to have had a good run leading up this time.

The show was absolutely bursting with colourful blooms and after staging had stopped for judging, presented an atmosphere of pure delight. The standard and artistry of the exhibits together with the more unusual varieties on show, made for a sensational display.

Some of my favourites included the foliage of *Rhododendron nuttallii* exhibited by Exbury Gardens, full displays of *Magnolia 'Lemon Star'* by Caerhays Castle Gardens and *Rhododendron johnstoneanum* entered by Dick Fulcher, and my own personal show winner and recipient of the Loder Cup, *Rhododendron fortunei* × *macabeanum* from Botallick, Looe.

A really big well done to everyone that entered, organised and came along to make a sensational show. 

MARK BOBIN

Photos © Mark Bobin

Centenary Cup Competition & Group AGM Trewithen, June 1st 2024

We had an enjoyable weekend in Cornwall for the Group AGM on Saturday 1st June hosted by the South West Branch at Trewithen, near Truro, where we were made most welcome; all the staff



▲ *Rhododendron fortunei* × *macabeanum* was a worthy Loder Cup winner



▲ *Magnolia rostrata* wins the 2024 Centenary Cup for Caerhays in style; remarkable for retaining such perfection after travelling to the show and so impressive on the bench

and gardeners so pleasant and accommodating. Some new faces were evident, as members of other branches had made their way to attend, which was good to see. There were a lovely lot of entries for the Centenary Cup Competition and the winner of the Centenary Cup was Caerhays with a remarkable display of a pristine bloom of *Magnolia rostrata* set perfectly among its huge leaves.

We admired the wonderful display of entries in the marquee and were free to wander the gardens at will. After lunch, the AGM was held in the Court Room where after some worrying moments, we got the technology working thanks to Head Gardener Gary Long.

After this, I presented the Centenary Cup and we gave Gary a large specimen of *Magnolia 'Felix Jury'* on behalf of the Group as a way of thanking him and Sam Galsworthy for hosting us.

We set off into the garden with Gary and apprentice Millie and saw so many excellent plants and not only from our three genera. I noticed a red-flowered evergreen magnolia which could have been a good form of *Magnolia insignis*, or something similar.

The famous *Rhododendron macabeanum* KW7724 had died, but layers and cuttings had been taken and a large plant of its offspring was a magnificent sight. There were other unusual trees such as a large *Idesia*, *Gevuina* and a very rare *Aextoxicon punctatum*.

We had a go at tasting the lantern flowers of a *Crinodendron hookerianum* at the instigation of Garden Apprentice Millie; more interesting than tasty.

Some of us stayed behind for an excellent buffet supper, prepared for 22 people (we were 12) so there was a lot left over for doggy bags and for the staff at Trewithen when they were back on duty.

After this, Gary gave us an illustrated talk on the history of the gardens, now amounting to 92 acres being gardened; astonishing. Gary is only the third Head Gardener since the gardens were developed in earnest from about 1903.

The next day was a very hot Sunday, and several of us went to Tregrehan Gardens near Par where owner and amazing plantsman

Tom Hudson hosts an annual Rare Plant Fair. It was packed both with people and plant stalls! This was no surprise, as the plants on offer are rarely seen otherwise. Bags of treasures were being carried away and I was fairly loaded down myself. A walk around the most magical and interesting garden that is Tregrehan provided a happy ending to a most enjoyable weekend.

Many thanks must go to several people including Pam & Sally Hayward for organising the Centenary Cup Competition, to Robbie and Barbara Sampson who did so much to ensure everything ran smoothly on the day and of course, owner Sam Galsworthy, Head Gardener Gary Long and his team, and all the staff at Trewithen who could not have been more helpful. 🌸

JOHN MARSTON



▲ Head Gardener Gary Long is always keen to describe the glories of Trewithen

Members' Notes

The Gardiner Magnolia Grove at Borde Hill

I was interested to read Barry Haseltine's comments about the Gardiner Magnolia Grove he made following a visit to Borde Hill by the SE Branch last November (2023). From his observations he comments:

'the new plants are beginning to make an impact, but there is a long way to go, as the intention is to cut back growth at certain stages to give an unusual effect, in a ring...'

Members will have read my article about the Gardiner Magnolia Grove in the RCMG yearbook of 2023 where I described the Grove having been planted in 2018 for horticultural, educational and scientific objectives.

Each of the closely-planted circles have plants that are closely related thus enabling the visitor to assess at close quarters the floristic differences between them. By pruning you will be able to see flowers at close quarters so that similarities and differences can be observed...without the need for binoculars!

Readers will be interested in knowing that magnolias flower freely following pruning.

I have attached pictures of the magnolia stock beds at Cherry Tree Arboretum in Shropshire from where the Grove's specimens were originally sourced. Each individual is pruned every year for scion material with plants producing an abundance of flowers. This is the intention of the Gardiner Magnolia Grove.

The picture is taken by Peter Williams who has photographed all plants at Cherry Tree Arboretum since its inception. 

JIM GARDINER VMH

▼ The stock beds at Cherry Tree Arboretum demonstrate how magnolias flower profusely after annual pruning. This practice is being employed at the Gardiner Magnolia Grove to enable visitors to assess the different varieties easily.

© Peter Williams



New Horizons at High Beeches

I am very fortunate to have recently been taken on at High Beeches as senior gardener; it is an exciting role in a superb garden and one that showcases the Group's three genera well.

Much thought needs to be given to how we grow these three groups of plants in a changing world, in the South East particularly. Camellias seem quite robust in the face of drought, but I have seen a lot of dieback in rhododendrons and some magnolias after recent dry years. It is by no means the end of the road, but it is increasingly important to select tough varieties and really think very carefully about where to site plants and give them as much aftercare as is practicable.

As I write this, in July, the highlight of the garden here is the meadow. Common knapweed is the main component now, with trefoils and clovers interspersed, and all the swaying grasses are alive with grasshoppers, crickets, butterflies, bees as well as spiders and beetles. It is a pleasure to work in a garden where nature has equal footing with the ornamental planting. It is my belief that working with nature is the only sustainable way to garden.

At High Beeches we need to balance future-proofing the garden for the changing climate with maintaining a special collection of rare and unusual plants and also providing crowd-pleasing colour and scent for our visitors. So I am always on the lookout for plants that are going to thrive in challenging conditions, plants that have year-round interest and those that are unusual enough that our visitors won't have seen the same one in every garden in the area.

The problem is sourcing good plants; vanishingly little is wild-collected anymore, so gardens need to collaborate. Sharing plants, ideas and knowledge is essential for the future and the benefit of everyone, not least the plants. 

ELLIO CHANDLER



▲ *Magnolia × thomsoniana* flowering in John Marston's garden

Archibald Thomson's magnolia and other 19th century-inspired musings . . .

Among the late flowering magnolias in my garden is one that has been in flower sporadically over two months. It has reached about 18 feet (5.5 metres) tall after 30+ years and is semi-evergreen and of a somewhat spreading habit.

This is what was until very recently known as *Magnolia × thompsoniana* [now corrected to *M. × thomsoniana* to properly reflect its origin*]. It is reputedly the first hybrid magnolia and was selected from a batch of seedlings of *M. virginiana* in the nursery of Archibald Thomson (note spelling) in the Mile End Road in London in 1808. Amongst the batch of seedlings was a plant of greater vigour, larger in leaf and flower, and it was initially given the name *Magnolia virginiana* var. *major*. However, a tree of another American 'exotic', *Magnolia tripetala*, was growing nearby and this could possibly have introduced its genes into the vigorous seedling. So the seeds of doubt were sown; was this actually a hybrid?

Although predating *Magnolia × soulangeana* (1820) by some 12 years, it was a chance seedling, so I feel that *M. × soulangeana* should take the title of earliest (deliberately created) hybrid.

Various further similar crosses were made in the 1960s with hardier parents and back crossed with *M. × thomsoniana* to impart even more hardiness. They were given clonal names such as 'Urbana' and 'Cairn Croft', with very large flowers and leaves, but sterile. Discovered in a garden in Belgium, 'Olmenhof' has a long flowering period and even larger flowers and leaves. My tree is, I think a straightforward *M. × thomsoniana*, with a long flowering period.

This then made me think about the craze for 'exotic' introductions of plants from the Americas, which were causing quite a stir in the larger gardens of the Victorian era. Many large areas or arboreta were being planted out as American Gardens in estates to keep with the latest fashion. From the early years of the nineteenth century, the nursery trade had undergone considerable changes to accommodate these American exotics for which there was a great demand. The more readily available American shrubs and trees were taken up by provincial nurseries to supply local demand and so the metropolitan nurseries in London and Edinburgh had to up their game and continually concentrate on the latest introductions both of seeds and plants to satisfy demand for the newest plants.

Interestingly, nurseries were in communication with plant hunters and botanical gardens, sharing expertise and often sponsoring expeditions and Thomson's nursery was one of the largest in London, supplying exotic plants to the developing affluent suburbs of west London and the Thames Valley. A great many smaller nurseries were set up concentrated on the fertile flood plains of Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham which was also close to major roads out west. It is estimated that the revenues generated by the nursery trade at the turn of the nineteenth century was approximately £123 million a year in today's money.

Looking at a flower in the garden can stimulate interesting thoughts and stories, and *Magnolia × thomsoniana* certainly led me down another garden path. There is nothing new; the desire for exotics and new plants has remained with us since those pioneering nurseries introduced them to us all those years ago. 🌸

JOHN MARSTON
Reference:

Keith Alcorn 'From specimens to commodities'
Historical Research Volume 93 Issue 262 November 2020

* . . . and a near two century-old naming muddle finally corrected!

When I first read John's article, as I set about laying out this edition, I became intrigued with this magnolia's history. Thank goodness, after realising how much misinformation there is online, I discovered that John Grimshaw and David Mabberley had been similarly caught up with the story. Their article in *The Plant Review*, from 2022, explained what had been going on with the taxonomists and botanists of the day for many decades after the seedling came to their attention, and the eventual decision which led to the persistence of the misspelling of Mr Thomson's name for much more than another century.

Archibald Thomson's surname should sport no 'p' in the middle. However, both his and his magnolia's name attract/do not attract a 'p' in equal measure across the 19th century. From the start, nurserymen such as Loddiges and Mackie are in the 'no p' camp whereas Colvill and in America, William Prince, introduce the 'p' early on. Sweet is another early 'p' fan, calling it *Thompsoniana* in his *Hortus Britannicus* of 1826. Loudon in his 1838 *Arboretum et fruticetum Britannicum* description is firmly in favour of the 'p' eleven years after an article in his *Gardener's Magazine* reported it as *Thomsoniana*! And so it goes on.

As to its status: Sweet described it as a hybrid in 1826 and Loudon a 'supposed hybrid' twelve years later but it had already appeared in the esteemed *Botanical Magazine* of 1820 as a variety of *Magnolia virginiana* (then *glaucia*) and that view persisted until 1879 when Cornelis de Vos finally formalised it as a hybrid stating: ' . . . we remain convinced that it is an accidental hybrid of *M. glauca* and *M. tripetala*. In the shape of the leaves and flowers, as well as in the colour of the flowers . . . it more or less keeps the middle between father and mother, as is usually the case with hybrids.'

Sadly, he employs the 'p' in its name and so the fate of '*Magnolia thompsoniana*' is decided until Messrs Grimshaw & Mabberley set the matter straight in 2022. The name has now been officially corrected. Growers and authors take note!

— ×*Thompsoniana*. (*M. glauca* × *M. umbrella*). — J. Linden, Exp. Bruxelles, 26 avril 1868.

Incidentally, the first use I can find of the × to define its hybrid status is from the 1887 *Index Bibliographique de l'Hortus Belgicus* where there is an intriguing reference to 'Linden' and 1868 for which I can find nothing further . . . yet! 🌸

PAM HAYWARD



▲ Looking down the amazingly well-preserved Camellia Corridor it is easy to imagine it both in its hey-day and when fully restored in the future with suitable contemporary camellias

Worth Park and its historical Camellia Corridor

One of our more recent Garden Members has joined our Group perchance following an introduction to Worth Park in Sussex, by one of my daughter's work colleagues, Kev Gravenor, who is Vice Chair of the Worth Park History Society. He invited me to visit the gardens and meet their Head Gardener and Curator, Steve Peters, to come and see this historical park and their intriguing Camellia Corridor.

Worth Park was originally laid out back in the 1850s by Joseph Mayer Montefiore, a wealthy London banker and philanthropist. The original house was destroyed by fire in 1853 and he built a larger mansion in its place. On his death in 1880, the estate was inherited by his widow and their son, Sir Francis Abraham Montefiore who invested greatly in the park and formal gardens.



▲ *Camellia japonica 'Baronne Leguay'*, a historic survivor at Worth Park

The Camellia Corridor is believed to have been built in the early 1880s and we think might be the only example still in existence – unless you know otherwise? The Corridor looks wonderful in spring, although there are some gaps since the restoration of the gardens between 2012 and 2016, and we are helping to facilitate replacement of up to 12 missing camellias that would have been contemporary at the time of the Montefiores and possibly planted there and now lost.

One of the camellias in the collection is *Camellia japonica 'Baronne Leguay'*, first listed in 1873–1874, introduced by Mons. Cachet of Angers (France) and believed to have been in the Corridor since around 1887. This camellia was also one of the plants nominated by Plant Heritage this year in their Threatened Plants in Cultivation Competition.

In the event, the winning plant of this year's competition was actually *Rhododendron 'Leonardslee Primrose'*, raised by Sir Edmund Loder from a cross between *R. campylocarpum* and *R. arboreum*. (See page 13) 

PHILIP EASTELL

Photos © Steve Peters

Azaleas at Munstead Wood

Munstead Wood was the Surrey home and garden of influential plantswoman, designer and author Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932). The house was designed for her by her friend, the equally influential and famous architect Edwin Lutyens. This unique piece of history and heritage has been secured for posterity through its recent purchase by the National Trust, who now own the house and 11 acres of the original 15-acre garden. About half of this is woodland, mostly filled with mature rhododendrons and azaleas dating back to Jekyll's planting.

We were honoured to be invited to help with identification of these and other plants in the garden by Clare, who is NT Senior Gardener there, and Annabel, Head Gardener, who has cared for, loved and cherished the gardens for many years.

We noted many of the old Hardy Hybrid rhododendrons of which an enormous clump of 'Sappho' and a tree-like 'Loder's White' stand out. Of species, *Rhododendron decorum* and *R. fortunei* ssp. *discolor* were in flower.

However, the azalea beds are of the greatest importance as they contain a goodly number of treasures. Several large plants of *R. Viscosepalum* were absolutely gorgeous, covered in their sweetly scented, pure-white flowers. Though registered by Waterer, this counts as one of the Ghent group of azaleas and we were able to identify a good number of these historic and significant varieties. More readily spotted were familiar varieties such as *R. 'Narcissiflora'*, *R. 'Pucella'* and *R. 'Daviesii'*

The property is now an RCMG Garden Member and we can look forward to being able to visit when all the much needed renovation and restoration work allows. For the time being, the property is not open to visitors. 

EVERARD DANIEL & PHILIP HOLMES

Thoughts on *Rhododendron 'Angelo'*

For me, *Rhododendron 'Angelo'* is one of the greatest, most glorious of all rhododendrons, comparable and similar to the famous Loderi Group and yet undeservedly much less well known. They are the same but different. The *R. 'Loderi'* cross is *R. fortunei* × *R. griffithianum*, first made at Kew and called *R. 'Kewense'* but made subsequently and much more successfully by the cooperation between Sir Edmund Loder (Leognardslee) and Col. Godman, (South Lodge), neighbours across the road from each other. Pollen was swapped both ways.

Rhododendron 'Angelo' is the reverse cross of the same two parent species, but with *R. fortunei* ssp. *discolor*, which makes '*Angelo*' usefully later into flower. The cross was first made at Caerhays Castle in Cornwall, UK and known first as *R. 'Cornish Loderi'* which is somewhat misleading. The cross has been made several times elsewhere and a number are registered. Best known perhaps are the ones raised at Exbury: '*Angelo FCC*' ('Exbury *Angelo*'), '*Solent Queen*', '*Solent Swan*', '*Solent Snow*'.

The identical cross was registered by Michael Haworth-Booth (famous for hydrangeas) as '*Angelo Diadem*'.

Another is registered as '*Sheffield Park Angelo*'. One of the greatest glories* of Sheffield Park in Sussex is the large number of '*Angelo*' planted along the path leading from the entrance to the lakes and also widely planted on the far side of the upper lakes. Indeed there are probably more '*Angelo*' at Sheffield Park than there are '*Loderi*' at Leognardslee. Presumably they planted many of the seedlings from the initial cross as they vary in colour, some being more pink, but mostly fading to white. The large scented

▼ Senior Gardener, Clare Silver, taking advantage of the fantastic display of deciduous azaleas to assist with accurate identification and curation of the collection at Munstead Wood

© Everard Daniel

▲ *Rhododendron 'Angelo'*

flowers are similar to '*Loderi*' but as previously mentioned, are later into flower, sometimes into June, and generally have more distinct greenish markings in the throat. Millais Nurseries propagate several different clones sourced from Sheffield Park and describe it as 'A very vigorous plant, with an open tree-like habit for sheltered woodland and shaded gardens.' 🌸

*The other stupendous plant is the *Pinus montezumae*, for me the most superb tree in all East Sussex.

EVERARD DANIEL

© Josie Cook



Branch Reports

New Forest Branch

Visit to Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens March 25th 2024

After a sodden, mostly grey start to the year it was a welcome respite for a group including members of the New Forest RCMG to visit Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens on a dry morning; these have been few and far between after all.

Situated to the west of Dorchester, Dorset's county town, these gardens are a world apart and indeed the whole estate surrounding the valley in which they nestle reflects this other-worldly feel. The history of Abbotsbury begins with the establishment of a monastery. Later in the mid-16th century the lands were leased to the Fox-Strangways family, the same family which is still very much a part of the garden today.

As you enter the gardens you immediately arrive in the charming Victorian Garden with impressive *Trachycarpus fortunei* introductions from the late 18th century. This part of the garden also houses some of the original outdoor planted camellia introductions, including the seldom seen 'Duchess of Buccleugh', at a time when camellias were considered only suitable for growing under glass.

Our guide for the morning was the newly appointed Curator of Abbotsbury, David Pearce, and after he gave us a short potted history of the genesis of the gardens we then proceeded into the main part of the arboretum, through the Jungle Glade and beyond. This is where many of the RCMG's favoured genera are to be found but also a wealth of other rare and special plants that thrive in this garden.



▲ Tender *Justicia floribunda* lights up Abbotsbury in the early months of the year

As well as the many and varied rhododendron species and cultivars, there were plenty of other shrubs and herbaceous delights including *Brassaiopsis hispida*, *Kalopanax septemlobus*, *Aucuba himalaica* var. *dolichophylla*, *Justicia floribunda*, *Musschia wollastonii* and *Viburnum furcatum* to name but a very few.

Towards the west, the gardens rise up and it is possible to walk to the top and look out along the impressive Jurassic Coast; the walk is beautifully flanked by banks of *Magnolia kobus* 'Wisley Star'.

From this point we then walked down towards the Sino-Himalayan Glade where the Group's John Bond Collection of large leaved rhododendrons are housed and where much work has been carried out recently. The collection is looking in good order and there was much to be admired including *Rhododendron protistum*, *R. suoienhense*, *R. sinogrande* and *R. sinofalconeri*.

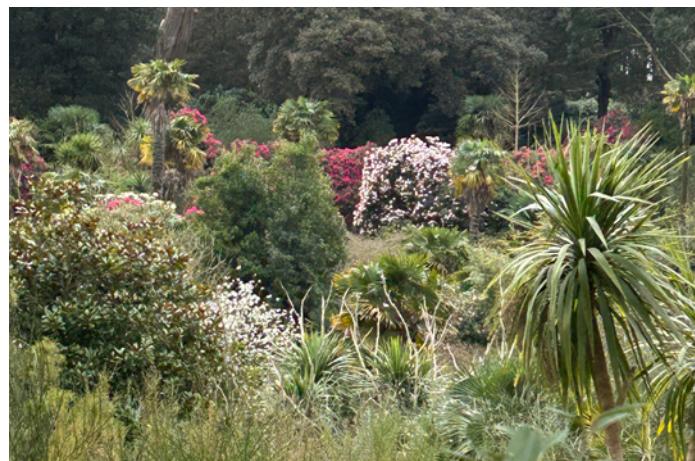


▲ New Forest Branch members admiring the impressive *Rhododendron protistum*

The range of plants in the garden was expanded during the 19th century under the auspices of William Fox-Strangways, 4th Earl of Ilchester. A diplomat, a leading botanist and an expert on the flora of Europe, he introduced many new species into cultivation, from a wide range of countries, including such plants as *Citronella mucronata* from Chile, *Picconia excelsa* (which is an endangered species from the Canary Isles) and the genus *Stranvaesia* which was named after him (now known as *Photinia*). Many of course found their way into the newly expanded gardens at Abbotsbury which included the sheltering woodland that allowed these newly acquired plants from the Himalayas, China and Japan to establish and thrive. The planting has continued over the years and newer areas such as the Australasian Garden, blending with its original planting of the Chilean *Luma apiculata* now offers an even more diverse range of plants. 🌸

MONIQUE GUDGEON

Photos © Monique Gudgeon



▲ Looking across part of Abbotsbury gives an idea of the exotic mix of planting



▲ The long view along the lovely buttressed wall at Riverhill gives an idea of the gently sloping site and its generous planting

South East Branch

Visit to Tilgate Park April 24th 2024

This spring we had three visits to gorgeous local gardens. For the first, on April 24th, when the weather was still rather cool with a strong east wind, we went to the public park in Crawley – Tilgate Park.

This garden is on the south and east side of Crawley on an old estate of the Nix family, dating back to 1865. There used to be a large mansion house within the gardens, but it was destroyed in about 1964, when Crawley Urban District Council purchased the land. Apparently, the original family's estate ran to about 2600 acres, but it had been largely sold in lots off after the Second World War.



▲ South East Branch members in discussion at Tilgate Park

We were shown around by a fellow member, Nick Hagon, who had, before retirement, been manager of Tilgate, but is still involved as advisor and volunteer.

The park is extremely mature, so there are many old trees, some dating back to the early nineteenth century, with examples of old hybrid and species rhododendrons that have unfortunately no longer got names. The Peace Garden makes a most attractive feature of varied planting and great plants.

Visit to Riverhill Himalayan Gardens May 1st 2024

The second garden we visited, on 1st May, was the Himalayan Gardens at Riverhill, Sevenoaks, an old country estate from the 1842 period, still owned by the Rogers family. Its claim to fame was the breeding of the rhododendron 'Colonel Rogers', but it has many famous hybrids of the Loderi Group era.

The head gardener, Misako Kasahara, was our guide and gave us a good tour of the undulating terrain. You can get some idea of that from the photograph of the house. Misako explained to us that the rock garden had been invisible when she came to the garden. Originally established as an alpine rock garden, the area was abandoned after the Second World War. The trees took over and the rocks were buried under leaves and debris, until Misako's predecessor Adam took on the project to redevelop the area and the new Rock Garden was opened in 2019 as a fernery, now proudly hosting more than 90 varieties of ferns, gaining attention from fern lovers and adding a lovely attraction for post-rhododendron season.

The full extent of the rise from the house to the top is highlighted by the arrival at the highest point, known as the Everest of Kent, where there is a maze, a recently formed addition to the garden when several projects were undertaken to improve the visitor experience.

Visit to Pinecroft May 8th 2024

Our third visit was to the home of members Andy Fly and his wife Jenny, and their wonderful garden at Storrington, West Sussex, actually in the Wessex Branch area, owing to the vagaries of our boundaries (the division is the A24).

Andy and Jenny are well known in the Group for their enthusiastic cultivation of examples of many of our genera in a slightly hilly part of Sussex, just north of the South Downs. They lie on the greensand, an acidic soil on which a number of great gardens are situated. Andy and Jenny have meticulously carved



▲ Andy & Jenny Fly's beautifully maintained garden is an exemplar of good planting



▲ South East Branch members and friends gather to celebrate Barry Haseltine's contribution to the Group at a special event to mark his retirement as Branch Chairman

the garden out of the heavily wooded land to make a cultivated paradise of our genera, be they rhododendrons, camellias or magnolias. We were fortunate in that the weather was particularly good and Jenny gave us a splendid tea whilst we were lazing on the terrace.

South East Branch 'Retirement Party' The High Beeches, 24th July 2024

Earlier this year I realised that it was time to give up my role as Chairman of the South East Branch. After so many years being involved, one goes on more or less on automatic, but finding places to visit and making the arrangements, becomes more and more of a challenge. Fortunately, for several seasons I have had help from Philip Eastell, to whom I had intended to hand over, eventually. This spring, we ended up with more visits than we had ever held in one season, which was very pleasing.

My first involvement with the South East Branch was in the late 1970s, when Edward Boscowen formed it. In time I took on the secretarial work and when our Branch Chairman, Mike Robinson, became Group Chairman that role passed to me.

The idea of a 'retirement party' became a reality when Sarah Bray offered to host us at The High Beeches. This was held on Wednesday 24th July, when the garden was closed to the public and we could enjoy it all to ourselves. In the event, 26 members came along on what was a pleasant summer's day, not too hot.

Sarah had made the garden freely available to us with the opportunity to walk around followed by tea and cakes in the Tea Garden. Sadly, my own mobility is currently limited and I couldn't join in the walk, but I sat in the garden and appreciated the flow of members and the buzz of very happy conversations.

I was given a card signed by all those present and others from Wessex and New Forest branches, together with one from our local members. I went home pleased and thoroughly laden!

Thanks to all who attended, for the kind gifts I received and to Sarah and Philip for making the arrangements.

Looking to the future, Philip intends to work with Everard Daniel, who we all know well, and Elliot Chandler – the new Senior Gardener at High Beeches – on arranging future Branch events, and I shall still hope to take part, hip permitting.

Good luck to the Group for the future and to Philip for running the Branch! 

BARRY HASELTINE

Special Event Report

During the second week of May, coinciding with a spell of unexpectedly (but welcome) good weather, 170 staff from National Trust gardens across the UK, along with delegates from National Trust for Scotland, English Heritage, the Royal Horticultural Society and Ness Botanic Gardens amongst other partner organisations, gathered in North Wales for the Rhododendron Monograph.

This conference was the third annual internal training event held by National Trust, aiming to focus on one genus – previous years have been the turn of *Narcissus* and *Rosa* – to help teams gain knowledge on their collections and improve identification skills.

The programme featured three days of talks from some of the greats of the *Rhododendron* world, alongside propagation and ID workshops, and tours of Bodnant Garden, which was in full spectacular bloom and looking absolutely incredible. And no, that's not just author bias; speakers and delegates unanimously agreed that Bodnant is the best example of a woodland garden!

Day one opened with a talk from our Head Gardener Ned Lomax on the history of Bodnant, followed by Michael & Beverley Lear on developing an understanding of unlabelled Rhododendron collections. The afternoon was then shared between workshops and exploring Bodnant, with everyone



▲ Surrounded by rhododendron experts, National Trust staff members had the opportunity to hone their identification skills at the event

returning together in the evening for a talk from Ken Cox on woodland planting and rhododendrons in the wild.

Day two began with Dr Hartwig Schepker from Rhododendron Park Bremen on German Rhododendron collections and hybridisation, followed by John Anderson VMM on Rhododendrons at Windsor Great Park and the recent work in replanting and restoration of the Punch Bowl, and David Millais on propagation, peat-free production and conservation of Rhododendrons. The afternoon was similarly shared between workshops and exploring Bodnant, with evening drinks on the Canal Terrace at Bodnant and a welcome speech by The Hon. Michael McLaren KC. We returned to the conference venue for an evening talk by Seamus O'Brien on The Moore's of Glasnevin and a history of Rhododendrons in Ireland.

Our final day started with Tom Clarke talking on climate change and its effects on management of the historic collections at Exbury Gardens, followed by Steve Hootman on new species introductions since 1980 and growing them at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in the USA State of Washington, and Pam Smith on the history of Rhododendron introductions to the UK within the context of National Trust collections.

Mike Buffin then shared the work he and the team at Mount Stewart Gardens are carrying out on the regeneration of their collection in challenging climatic conditions and change, followed by a session from Naomi Beddoe on the micropropagation work Duchy College carries out to help conserve Rhododendrons, then a video call in from Dr Alan Elliott at Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh on the importance and function of the Global Conservation Consortium for Rhododendron. Sharon McDonald rounded off the talks with a session on the purpose and inner workings of the RHS International Rhododendron Register, before a panel discussion to help us all review the information we had gained over the conference.

Colin Mugridge was on hand throughout the conference to share his experience in growing on limestone, a topic of great interest to some National Trust garden teams managing collections in more unusual conditions. Bodnant created a display at the garden to share the history of Rhododendron hybridising at Bodnant with visitors, and hosted RHS herbarium staff who diligently picked and processed 60+ new specimens to add to their records.

Delegates also had the opportunity to compare plants within the genus first hand through a large floral display created in the conference hall, along with competing in a friendly flower show, with categories featuring different classes of *Rhododendron* as well as more creative categories such as seasonal displays and images that capture a garden's spirit of place.

After a full on three days, the conference hall at Venue Cymru on Llandudno shorefront was certainly buzzing with excited teams eager to return to their gardens and see their rhododendron collections in a new light. With thanks to all involved in organising the conference, all that contributed their knowledge and experience of rhododendrons, and all who attended for their enthusiasm to learn! 🌸

LUCY BIDGOOD

Awards



John Gault was presented with the RHS A J Waley Medal at Mahee in April. He is seen here (on the left) with Paddy Mackie, a previous recipient of this prestigious award. 🌸

Plant News

Rhododendron 'Leonardslee Primrose'

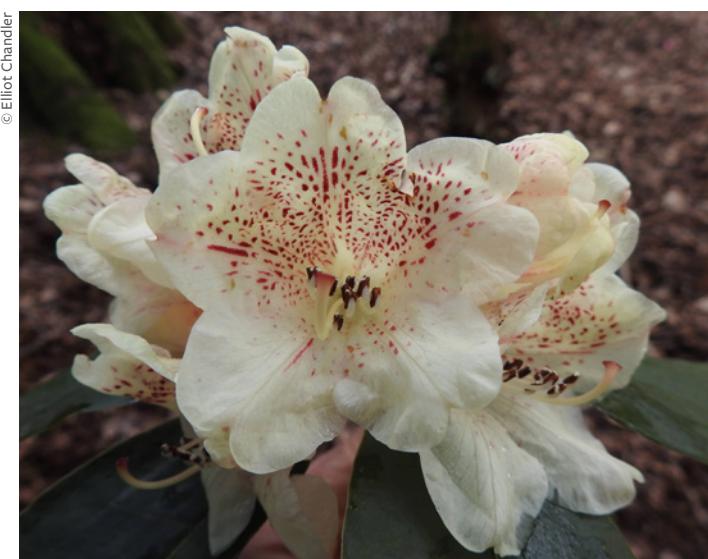
For the second time in succession, a Leonardslee rhododendron has won the People's Choice in the Plant Heritage Threatened Plant of the Year Competition.

It is a hybrid raised by Sir Edmund Loder before 1920 from a cross between *Rhododendron campylocarpum* and a white-flowered form of *R. arboreum*. Now classed as Endangered by Plant Heritage, it is rarely if ever found in cultivation outside of these gardens. When introduced by Lady Loder in 1933 it received an RHS AM (Award of Merit).

There are eight specimens in the garden, most notably along Cox's Walk and on the westside path near Clapper Pond.

Propagation of this rhododendron along with others of similar status is being undertaken to ensure its safety. 🌸

JAMIE HARRIS



▲ *Rhododendron 'Leonardslee Primrose'*

Chairman's Champions!

From the Chairman's Notes you will have gathered that Graham enjoyed a visit from the Tree Register's ever enthusiastic registrar and main recorder Owen Johnson – a man to be much admired for his dogged efforts to record every tree of interest, no matter how difficult accessing it might be!

Not many of our members will appreciate quite what an outstanding plant collection Graham has assembled at Tregoning Mill. Starting from scratch, with an eight-acre holding of bracken and brambles, over the last 35 years he has created an impressive garden and arboretum, benefiting greatly from its favoured position in the far reaches of southern Cornwall where frost is a foreign word.

So it's not surprising that Owen revealed that many of the taxa there are of wider interest and significance. Forty-two entries appear on Owen's 'special' list for Tregoning – not bad for eight acres! Among those, two have British & Irish Champion status: *Acacia retinodes* and the lovely *Hoheria 'Glory of Amlwch'* with a girth of 1.6m at 1m from the base – what a sight that must be when its 9m column is in flower. Two more taxa join those as National Champions: the 25 year-old *Agathis australis* mentioned and illustrated on page 2 and a *Leptospermum lanigerum*. County Champion status is gained by five more of Graham's trees: *Eucalyptus aggregata*, *E. crenulata*, *Magnolia 'Heaven Scent'* (a massive triple-trunked specimen), *Neolitsea sericea* and for both girth and height, *Zanthoxylum simulans*.

Although Graham's planting list includes 343 rhododendrons and azaleas, 82 camellias and 122 magnolias, the more than 600 different genera at Tregoning make it a fabulously exotic creation of so much more of interest.

To quote Owen: 'In terms of its trees, Tregoning Mill is a splendid testament to what an adventurous gardener can achieve in a lifetime.'

Chelsea Gold for Strete Gate Camellias!

Jeremy Wilson's medal-winning streak continued this year, ultimately securing him a well-deserved Gold Medal at Chelsea Flower Show in May, quite something for a group of plants not seen as a usual contender at that event. Good for Strete Gate, good for camellias and good for our Group in its quest to promote our three genera in any way we can!

RHS Awards to 'Plantspeople'

Three major RHS 'people' awards were made known back in the spring. Of course, they are really about plants as much as people and these three are very much associated with our genera.

So we congratulate and salute both John Lanyon and Jaimie Parsons, notable Cornish gardeners with long careers, John for the National Trust and before that the RHS, and Jaimie, head gardener at Caerhays. Both have become Associates of Honour, held by just 100 recipients at any one time.

Vance Hooper was awarded the Reginald Cory Cup for his outstanding work breeding magnolias celebrated all over the world. A marvellous achievement which we celebrate with him. 

PAM HAYWARD

Seed List

Despite our pleas, no one has come forward to take on the Seed List. . . yet. If you think you can help or have any other ideas about how we might keep it going, do please get in touch. 

PAM HAYWARD

Membership

PHILIP EASTELL



RHS

Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members and hope they will enjoy all the benefits of the Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group.

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

Nick Allison	Devon
Harvey Baker	Wales
Mathew Kilcourse	Cheshire
Chloe Knight	Berkshire
Kay Lyle	Cornwall
Dominic Marshall	Cornwall
Fiona Parrott	East Sussex
Max & Beata Parry	Hampshire
James Wade	Hampshire
David West	Hampshire
Sean Rafferty	Canada
Helga Oskarsdottir	Iceland
Nicoletta Cavenaghi	Italy
Gary Spock	USA

GARDEN MEMBERS

Munstead Wood	Surrey
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Membership Enquiries to: membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Renew your subscription at:

www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/membership/renewal

Rhodenza 2024

Geraldine & Timaru

'Rhododendron Odyssey'

29 October – 1 November 2024



Venue: Woodbury Hall

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- ◆ Garden visits Geraldine and Timaru
- ◆ Welcoming meal and Conference dinner
- ◆ Three NZ speakers
- ◆ NZRA AGM
- ◆ Art displays
- ◆ Sale of artworks by Marianna Kneller
- ◆ Campervan parking on site
- ◆ Farewell luncheon

Registration Information and Form online
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For more information contact:

Joy O'Keefe email: joybernie@gmail.com
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FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2024/2025

MONTH	DATE/TIME	VENUE	WHAT'S ON?	CONTACT
SEPTEMBER	Tuesday 17 September	Gravetye	Garden Visit	South East Branch
OCTOBER	Saturday 5 October	Ness Gardens	Talk: 'Plants in the Mountains of Myanmar' by Seamus O'Brien	North West Branch
	Saturday 19 October	Great Comp	Garden Visit	South East Branch
	Saturday 26 October	RHS Rosemoor	SW Branch Autumn Meeting & Branch AGM	South West Branch
NOVEMBER	Saturday 2 November	Ness Gardens	Talk: 'Rhododendrons in New Zealand' by David Millais	North West Branch
	Saturday 16 November	Sir Harold Hillier Garden	New Forest Branch AGM & Talk: 'Springtime in the Himalaya' by Mark Bobin	New Forest Branch
MARCH	Saturday 8 March & Sunday 9 March	RHS Garden Rosemoor	RHS Early Camellia & SW Branch Competitions	RHS & South West Branch
APRIL	Saturday 5 April	White House Farm	Garden Visit	South East Branch
	Saturday 12 April & Sunday 13 April	RHS Garden Wisley	RHS Spring Ornamental Plant Competitions	RHS
	Saturday 26 April & Sunday 27 April	RHS Garden Rosemoor	RHS Main Rhododendron & SW Branch Competitions	RHS & South West Branch

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South East Branch
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South West Branch
John Marston
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All RCM Group members will be very welcome to attend any events



Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group

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**Keep an eye on our
Events pages on the
website for news of
tours and talks!**

**Help the Group by
joining the Committee!**

**Email the Chairman
to volunteer!**