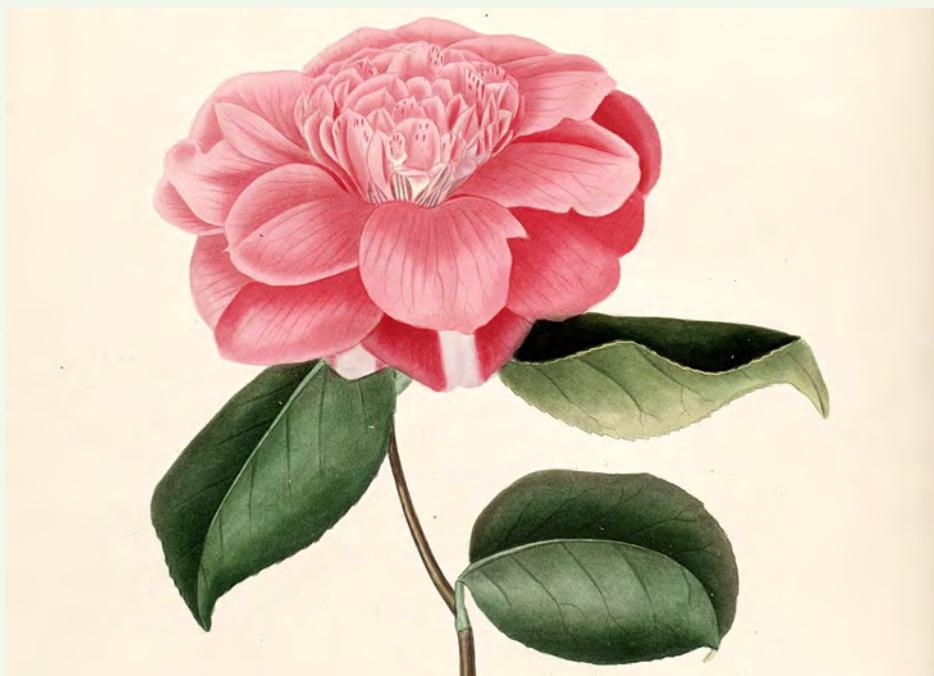


# Bulletin

MEMBERSHIP NEWSLETTER OF THE RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA &amp; MAGNOLIA GROUP

AUTUMN/WINTER 2024 | ISSUE 146

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


▲ *Camellia japonica 'Anemoneflora Rosea de Low'* from Berlèse's *Iconographie* (see page 5)

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

This is the time of year when the plants in our genera tend not to be noticeable. True, I have camellias in flower here every day of the year, not hard if one selects carefully and has room for a number of them.

Of course the Sasanquas are definitely stating their case, and scenting the air to emphasise it. But overall, our plants are shutting down for the winter.

Looking from my terrace I can see that the magnolias have a good set of buds – the term ‘pickled with buds’ is used here in Cornwall – so another good flowering next season in prospect.

For me this has been a typical year for a Cornish garden: rain followed by drought and now more rain, albeit light so far. Even so, I hear people locally asking what happened to summer! A couple of storms last winter brought down trees but our genera root strongly. They just have to duck when a nearby eucalyptus falls!

## VOLUNTEERS

We still seek a Yearbook Lead Editor but thankfully, there will be a Seed List in 2025 as Tim Atkinson has agreed to continue for one more year. On our

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▲ *Camellia sasanqua 'Isoli'* in the Editor's garden

website you will notice individuals who perform more than one role and I am sure they would like to relinquish some of them.

If you could give some of your time, it would help the Group to continue to serve its members. It need not be very time-consuming so if you'd like an initial chat, please make contact with me. 

GRAHAM MILLS  
 chairman@rhodogroup-rhs.org

## EDITORIAL

After a very wet and gloomy October, the sun is at last shining here in Herefordshire for Remembrance Day.

Several rhododendrons appear to think spring has arrived: hybrid *Rhododendron 'Elizabeth'* and the wonderful *Glaucum* species *R. luteiflorum* are giving a fine but early display. We are also enjoying the early Sasanquas. The earliest was *Camellia sasanqua 'Isoli'* (illustrated), whose flowers are still a delight, and 'Rainbow' is also blooming prodigiously, as other gardeners are reporting.

Although the Spring 2025 *Bulletin* seems a long way off, time goes by quickly, more so as I get older, but please make time to write a piece for inclusion and send it along to me before January 31st.

Walk round your garden with this in mind and ideas may also come to you when looking at the photos you've stored in your mobile phone's gallery this year.

Remember to send your draft 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 text; it's much easier for you and saves us lots of time and emails later! 

PETER FURNEAUX  
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# RCMG 'Celebrating our Genera in Art' Competition, in collaboration with the Society of Botanical Artists

Many of you may already know of my long-standing love for art and especially botanical and floral art. This year I have attended several exhibitions where I have seen quite a few examples of artworks of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias, and this has sparked an idea for an RCMG Art Competition, just for our genera.

Having introduced the idea to Shevaun Doherty, President of the Society of Botanical Artists (SBA) and Claire Ward, Co-President – I am pleased to confirm that they agreed this was an excellent idea and are fully supporting our RCMG Botanical Art Competition.

The SBA will hold their annual botanical artists exhibition and competition in 2025 over two weeks next May, at the Mall Galleries in London, in the week following the Chelsea Flower Show from Wednesday 28th May to Sunday 8th June.

The SBA are very kindly offering the RCMG wall space for our RCMG winning artworks, at the Mall Galleries. Our competition will comprise the following categories:

- Rhododendron & Azalea
  - Winning Entry & Runner-Up
- Camellia – Winning Entry & Runner-Up
- Magnolia – Winning Entry & Runner-Up
- Overall Winner

SBA existing rules will apply, primarily focused on all art submitted being 'Botanically Correct and Accurate', with a maximum size of 60cm x 90cm.

In this first year, only members and fellows of the SBA will be invited to submit entries.

There will be prizes and certificates for all 7 winning entries.

Our Judges for the competition, many of whom will already be well known to you are as follows:

**Jim Gardiner – Head Judge**  
**Sarah Bray**  
**Leigh-Ann Gale**  
**Deborah Lambkin**  
**Rosemary Legrand**  
**Lionel de Rothschild**  
**John Sanders**

© Sian Ellis Tillott



▲ *Magnolia Canopy at Kew* by Sian Ellis Tillott

We are very grateful to the Society for Botanical Artists for hosting our competition, which we hope will become a regular event. Our genera have been a regular choice for botanical artists, and we will be highlighting some of these artists and their wonderful paintings and drawings in future bulletins.

The accompanying drawing with this article, was exhibited by SBA fellow Sian Ellis Tillott at this year's Rising Star exhibition, held at the Royal Overseas League Club in London. The competition was organised by the Royal Society of British Artists. Her drawing in graphite is titled *Magnolia Canopy at Kew*.

If you would like to know more about the Society of Botanical Artists, please visit their website at: [www.soc-botanical-artists.org](http://www.soc-botanical-artists.org)

PHILIP EASTELL

# Members' Notes

## *Rhododendron 'Moser's Maroon'* and the development of Hardy Hybrid Rhododendrons

My love of the straggly but, to my mind, beautiful *Rhododendron 'Moser's Maroon'* got me thinking about Hardy Hybrid Rhododendrons in general.

I will start with an attempt at a definition:

They can be loosely defined as 'nursery-bred' rhododendrons in a wide range of colours, many generations removed from their wild parents and which are very hardy, flower mostly in late May or June and tolerate full exposure.

### History

In the early days of rhododendron hybridisation in the UK – the early 1800s – the aim had been to produce rhododendrons that flowered after the end of May, the flowers thereby avoiding the frosts. These were the Hardy Hybrids and there were only really three species available at the beginning (discounting the 'Hairy Alpen Rose' *Rhododendron hirsutum* (17th Century) whose performance proved disappointing in this country). These were *R. maximum* (1736) USA, *R. ponticum* (1763) Caucasus/Turkey/Spain and *R. catawbiense* (1809) Southern USA, all of which are hardy.

*Rhododendron caucasicum*, a scrubby plant from the Caucasus mountains, was a gift made in 1803 to Sir Joseph Banks from the plant collector Count Apollo Pushkin's 1802 expedition. It is very hardy and tough and so was an excellent shrub to cope with industrial pollution in Victorian cities when used for hybridisation. For example, crossed with *R. ponticum* it produced the very hardy and tough *R. 'Cunningham's White'*. Boring perhaps now with so many others about, one must not forget that in those early days it must have been a very welcome addition to the large Victorian shrubberies.

*Rhododendron arboreum* was introduced in 1810 and flowered for the first time in 1825 in Britain. This however was not very hardy but, surprisingly, the lack of hardiness is not passed on to its hybrids, and it was used to introduce red colour in the progeny. Its tree-like form often tended to produce rather straggly hybrids. *Rhododendron 'Nobleanum'* (*caucasicum* × *arboreum*) was the first of these, bred by Anthony Waterer of Knaphill but named for Charles Noble of Standish & Noble in Sunningdale.

Ironically, it is very early to flower, a trait presumably inherited from its *Rhododendron arboreum* parent, and is very hardy. It received the RHS Award of Merit in 1926.

*Rhododendron griffithianum* was introduced by Joseph Hooker in 1849; not entirely hardy either, tall growing and again tending to produce rather straggly hybrids, but found its way into the famous and ubiquitous Waterer hybrid 'Pink Pearl' in 1897.

Not all these hybrids were late-flowering, however, but all were exceptionally tough as plants.

The production of the Hardy Hybrids had more or less run its course by the early 1900s as more and more rhododendrons were being introduced. In 1894, records show that Waterer had sold over 13,000 rhododendrons, and in J. G. Millais' *Rhododendrons* Vol. 1 of 1917, he lists 484 hardy hybrids raised in Europe and available at that time; of which 292 had originated from Waterer's Nursery. It is testament to their ease of cultivation and toughness, that many are still grown to this day.

Which brings me to the hardy hybrid 'Moser's Maroon' which set off my train of thought.



▲ The dark crimson-red truss of *Rhododendron 'Moser's Maroon'* with its contrasting anthers is lovely in its own right...

### *Rhododendron 'Moser's Maroon'*

This hybrid has a complex parentage with *Rhododendron ponticum* × others and a mutation similar to that which produced 'Elizabeth Lockhart', the dark leaved sport from 'Humming Bird'. 'Moser's Maroon' was bred by the eminent French nurseryman Marcel Moser of Versailles, who is better known by many gardeners for *Clematis 'Nelly Moser'* which he bred and named for his wife in 1897. Lionel de Rothschild obtained a plant of this rhododendron for Exbury and named it 'Moser's Maroon' for which he obtained the RHS Award of Merit in 1932. It formed the basis of many Exbury hybrids such as *R. 'Bibiani'* in 1934 ('Moser's Maroon' × *arboreum*) and 'Queen of Hearts' in 1949 (*meddianum* × 'Moser's Maroon').



▲ ...but when blended with the lovely copper-brown young foliage on non-flowering shoots, the combined effect is dramatic and excuses the lax habit

I have found rather conflicting descriptions of 'Moser's Maroon' from the various nurseries selling it – from strongly upright (No!) to sprawling (Yes!). My plant is certainly an untidy grower and sprawls about, unwilling to make more than a couple of feet in height. However, the substance of the flowers and foliage, and the lovely varnished brown new growth with intriguing, almost cobweb-like white streaking, means I forgive it its waywardness, and luckily I have planted it where it can spread about at will. In time it could make 10ft around. It flowers in June here and the flowers of a deep red blend and contrast well with the new foliage on non-flowering branches. I find it characterful and would not be without it. ♡

JOHN MARSTON

Photos © JOHN MARSTON



▲ *Camellia japonica 'Anemoniflora'* from the 1814 edition of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*

### *Camellia japonica 'Anemoniflora'* or 'Dianthiflora' or 'Insignis'?

Due to an application for an historic camellia award for *Camellia japonica 'Anemoniflora'* from Australia which resulted in emails criss-crossing the globe about what constituted a correct plant, I realised that we in the UK do not always exhibit the true plant at camellia shows and may be unwittingly growing something else under the name of 'Anemoniflora'. In fact what we grow may be very different, as we are not used to seeing the true plant as they are in Italy, where their research into antique cultivars is of long-standing over many years. We may have wrongly-named, but genuine, 19th century introductions which are seedlings from 'Anemoniflora' such as 'Dianthiflora' or 'Insignis': this is what I seem to have in my garden but I purchased it unlabelled.

'Anemoniflora' originates as an import from China in 1806 to Kew, and was famous as the prototype of the anemone form in camellias. Many seedlings of 'Anemoniflora' appeared quickly after 1811 when it was featured in Andrews's *Botanical Repository*, but to demonstrate what is the correct plant and put us truly in accord with our camellia history, there is the much better illustration from *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* of 1814, plate number 1654.

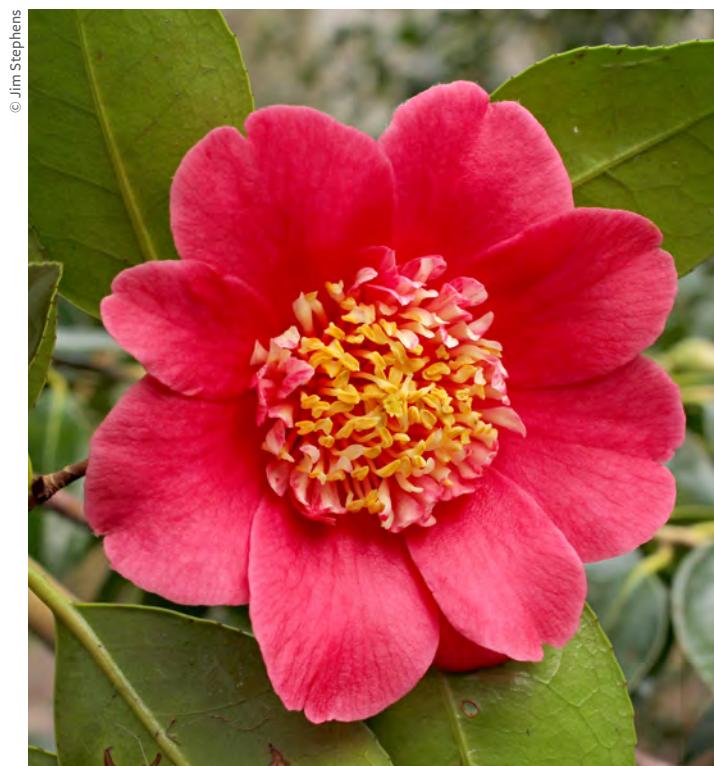
*Curtis's* describes it as 'beautiful, singular and rare' with which it is hard to disagree 210 years later! You will see that in the centre of its very distinctive flower the pistil very visibly protrudes which, I am told by my Italian correspondents, is an identifying

feature in correct plants. Around its wholly red, anemone centre are only 5 to 6 petals and this is the style of plants to be found in Spain, Italy and Australia and on the RHS website, so perhaps it is grown at Wisley? Tom Durrant (recipient of the Veitch Memorial Medal) in his famous book *The Camellia Story* (1982, NZ) at page 41 includes the *Curtis's* illustration, and Australian Stirling Macoboy's *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Camellias* (1998, Timber Press) has a photo in line with *Curtis's*. Australia are said to have received their first shipment of 'Anemoniflora' in 1831.

The Camellia Register gives further detail: the 'anemone form with 5-6 large, outer guard petals with emarginate apices and a central cushion of ligulate petaloids, 7.5-8cm across. Colour turkey red, becoming very dark in some conditions. Buds, round, developing dark brown, leathery edges to the scales. Leaves, dark green, glossy, broadly-elliptic to very broadly-ovate margins shallowly serrate, apices short acuminate. Habit is open, vigorous and spreading.' A further rare feature is that its old Chinese name is actually recorded, which is 'Po Chu Cha', written as 'Baozhu Cha' in the Pinyin transliteration system, translating as 'Precious Pearl Camellia', so it was also highly valued by the Chinese.

Its many, sometimes descriptive synonyms include: 'Waratah', 'Anemoniflora Waratah', 'Mrs Sol Runyon', 'Honey Comb', 'Waratah Ancien', 'Waratah Purpurea', 'Waratah Sinensis', and erroneously 'Red Waratah' and there are orthographic variants and errors which you may have seen such as 'Anemonae Flora', 'Anemonaeflora' and others.

The correct plant is not found at Mount Edgcumbe in our important National Collection there, as can be seen in the photograph of their plant. Many plants at Mt Edgcumbe were donations, often received with little or no labelling and sometimes even with wrong labelling! In Jennifer Trehane's wonderful work *Camellias, the Gardener's Encyclopaedia* (2007, Timber Press) at page 116 the photograph shows a yellow central mass of petaloids, which is not mentioned in her description. These visibly yellow stamens and possibly white petaloids resemble 'Dianthiflora' or 'Insignis'.



▲ The camellia labelled 'Anemoniflora' in the National Collection at Mount Edgcumbe

'Dianthiflora', appearing before 1826, was often initially called 'Carnation Watarah' to distinguish it from 'Anemoniflora', but was also known as 'Knightii' or 'Anemoniflora Knightii' after the nursery of Joseph Knight who introduced it; translated from the Latin this last synonym could simply mean Knight's form of 'Anemoniflora' which might have helped to confuse naming in the UK! Apparently, naming has also been confused in France and I have been told 'Dianthiflora' may have leaves which are a wide elliptical shape, slightly incurved of 8–9.5 × 5–6cm with flowers of 8–9.5cm diameter.

The Register quotes a good description from Berlèse's 1837 *Monographie* ed.1, p.72, 117, 127: 'Shrub very vigorous, not very graceful, expanded branches; leaves of ordinary size, a little inclined, elongate-oval, strongly veined; bud with blackish scales, elongate, acute; flower broad, sometimes double and often single, cherry-red; petals of the circumference subcordiform, broad, 7 in number; those of the centre, erect, numerous, striated with white and forming an arched centre. Late flowers are single and the centre full of stamens.'

But a picture speaks far more, as can be seen from the clear illustration from Loddiges' 1828 *Botanical Cabinet* of 'Dianthiflora'. One of its synonyms is 'Warratah Striata' and you can see why it was given that name from the illustration.



▲ *Camellia japonica* 'Dianthiflora' (as *C. japonica knightii*) from Loddiges' *Botanical Cabinet* Volume 15 of 1828

'Insignis' is listed in the 1830 edition of Loddiges' Nursery catalogue, and it was raised by Chandler at the Vauxhall Nursery about eleven years before his *Illustrations and descriptions* of 1831 where both are provided for this camellia.

The Register uses contemporary sources to distinguish 'Insignis' from 'Dianthiflora' as the difference is subtle. So, I quote 'Buckingham & Chandler, 1825, *Camellia Britannica*, p.15, pl.6: This approaches somewhat to a camellia lately raised by Mr Knight, Kings Road, called 'Carnation Warratah'. The guard petals of our plant are bright red while his are a soft rose colour. ... The flowers are at first bell-shaped like the single red ('Rubra Simplex'), but unfold the



▲ *Camellia japonica* 'Insignis' from Chandler's 1831 *Illustrations and descriptions*

large, outer petals, 6–8 in number, to exhibit a dense, globular mass of small wedge-shaped petals, more or less variegated with white like a carnation, and incurved towards the style, prominent in the centre. The flower measures 7.5cm across fully opened. The large petals exceed 2.5cm, indented at the apex, flat and round, of a deep rose colour with darker veins. The inner petals are small and ranged over one another. In the centre it is common for many to be partly transformed, one half of the anther being dilated and coloured the other half perfect and yellow.'

Finally, amongst other seedlings of 'Anemoniflora' we should note the wholly dark pink anemone centre of 'Anemonaeiflora Rosea de Low' which is beautifully illustrated in Berlèse's 1843 *Iconographie* Vol III, plate 216. His description, translated in the Register includes 'Flower 9–10cm across, irregular, full, of a spherical form, pure cherry-red carmine, sometimes tinted. The outside petals in 2 rows, are ample, long, obtusely notched, horizontally imbricated and veined; those of the interior are in keeping, but smaller, innumerable, serried and in a spherical cluster.' Hugh Low was another famous nurseryman of the period and his introduction was also in Loddiges' 1830 catalogue.

Even amongst our antique historic plants it is interesting to note that Number C6 in the Heritage Collection of Camellias at Heligan, which is an old plant from perhaps the 1850s, shows a change from the pukka style of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* of 1814. Bee Robson who had written about Heligan's camellias in 2010, later came to doubt its naming as 'Anemoniflora'. Another plant, recorded as C2, Bee called confusingly 'Dianthiflora' and 'Insignis'!

We may fairly conclude that if you do not grow the true plant of 'Anemoniflora' as seen in the early illustrations, you may find you grow another historic 19th-century cultivar. 🌸

CAROLINE BELL

## Barry Starling – a trilogy of tributes + a ‘bit more’

Several events have occurred in ericaceous circles since Barry sadly died. To first inform that a small number of his plants have been moved successfully to two public gardens; hopefully to be enjoyed by others.

A silver trophy has been initiated as a continuum to his name and horticultural expertise, to be awarded annually at the Main Rhododendron Competition to a rhododendron in bloom in a container, with size restrictions (currently Class 67) and in consequence, a dwarf species and/or hybrid. Additionally, and importantly, two new major plant introductions – one a species rhododendron and the other a hybrid – both bearing the epithet ‘Starling’ in one form or another.

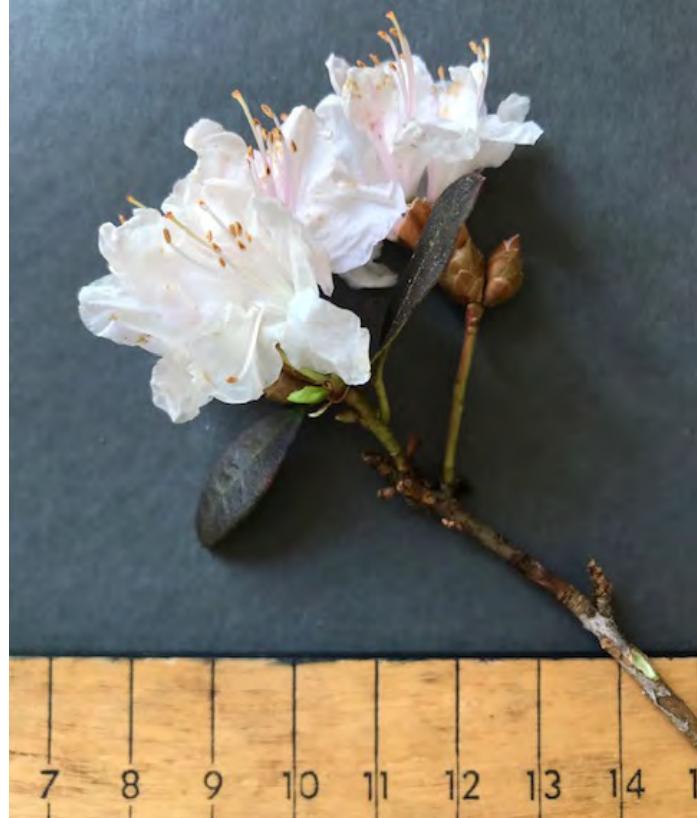
First on the scene was *Rhododendron starlingii*, a comparatively recent discovery, named in his honour by his contemporaries. To remind readers again that they can read a comprehensive account of this new species alongside an illustration, either in *Curtis’s Botanical Magazine* for the full version or as a shortened extract in our own 2023 RCMG Yearbook.

Secondly, a couple of his near friends felt that an appropriate rhododendron with suitable pedigree, should be selected from The Chine (Barry’s Devon garden) to record his memory. To this end it was felt that it should preferably be ‘dwarf’ (a relative term); should if possible be one of his own lepidote hybrids; should embody the parentage of one or more of his own favourites and additionally, to be garden-worthy, whilst finally being a typical ‘Barry type plant’. Careful observation



▲ *Rhododendron ‘Barry Starling’*

and searching the garden throughout a couple of seasons for possible worthy contenders resulted in the selection of a plant that was one of his very earliest crosses, embodying a marriage with his own much loved introduction – namely *Rhododendron keiskei* (var. *ozawae*) ‘Yaku Fairy’ – importantly, the original Award of Merit plant. The other parent was a particularly good form of *Rhododendron racemosum*, forging the cross which resulted successfully some fifty years ago as the then *R. keiskei* ‘Yaku Fairy’ AM × *R. racemosum* F19404. It was officially registered as *Rhododendron ‘Barry Starling’* in April 2024. It flowers profusely, so pays deference to its garden-worthiness and for the record it was born in Barry’s previous garden in Essex, at Little Marles Cottage and so stands the test of time! The original plant moved successfully to its new home and is currently approximately 1.5



▲ A truss of *Rhododendron ‘Barry Starling’* shown with a centimetre rule for scale

metres × 1.5 metres, so very obviously compact and slow growing. It was successfully propagated prior to removal and progeny have so far been passed to a small number of other gardens and hopefully in the passage of time it will become more generally available. 🌸

### Further Reading

*Curtis’s Botanical Magazine* 39 (3): 463–469

*Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias* Vol. 74 (2023) pp.151 & 167

JOHN SANDERS

Photos © JOHN SANDERS



▲ *Rhododendron ‘Starling’s Firebird’*

## *Rhododendron ‘Starling’s Firebird’*

A third rhododendron now takes Barry’s name and celebrates his love for ballet.

*Rhododendron ‘Starling’s Firebird’* is the superb selection Barry made from seedlings raised from John Weagle’s cross of ‘Henry’s Red’ × *strigillosum*. Now it is formally registered it will be properly introduced to commerce in mainland Europe and the UK. 🌸

PAM HAYWARD

## Fertility restored in a sterile *Magnolia* hybrid

More than seven decades after they were released, the group of magnolias known by the collective name 'Eight Little Girls' is still popular in gardens. The name came about when geneticists Kosar and deVos released eight hybrids in 1954–55 intended for the smaller gardens of post-World War II America. The group name is retained even though there are now more than eight and the word 'girls' might not be used nowadays. The 'girls' were the assistants who did most of the work and their individual names are applied to the original eight cultivars.

The fact that these plants produce neither seed nor pollen is irrelevant to a gardener but it irks a geneticist since it prevents further breeding from them. All that can be done is repeat the original cross between *Magnolia liliiflora* and *M. stellata* (Kobus Group) and obtain yet another F1 (first generation) hybrid.

This got me thinking that if I knew the cause of the infertility there might be a work-around. The 'Little Girls' are hybrids between species with different chromosome numbers. *Magnolia stellata* is a diploid (2x) with two sets of chromosomes and contributes one of these sets to the hybrid while *M. liliiflora*, a tetraploid (4x) donates two. This results in hybrids with three unmatched sets. Here may be the cause of the sterility since chromosomes require matching partners to pair with, leading to egg and pollen production.

One way to achieve the above is to double the number of chromosomes in each cell then ipso facto each chromosome has an exact copy with which to pair and fertility should be restored. It so happens that the alkaloid colchicine (extracted from *Colchicum*, autumn crocus), can do this, something known since the 1920s.

Unfortunately, nothing about using colchicine is easy. Applying it to a growing shoot tip slows down growth and results in lower buds taking over. To get over this problem I considered using the one point in the germination of a seed in which there is only one shoot bud. This is the short time when the cotyledons unfurl from the seed. I reasoned that colchicine treatment then would have time to act.

This train of thought was brought about because my friend John Weagle had noticed an old plant of *Magnolia liliiflora* in a nearby garden. This is an unusual species at any time, especially in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada where I was at the time. The current owners knew nothing about it but willingly permitted me to pollinate it.

So during 1984–5 I pollinated flowers on this plant with pollen from a pink form of a hybrid *Magnolia stellata*, producing several dozen seeds, which were sown in pots and stratified over winter. When germination started in spring I put the pots in the greenhouse and put one drop of colchicine solution between the cotyledons as they emerged and allowed it to dry.

This was all seat-of-the-pants work. I found no published guidelines and just improvised. I had been given a gram of colchicine, left behind by a previous researcher, and used a 1% solution. Of the treated seedlings about a dozen were planted outside when they were big enough.

In 1990 I moved across the country for a milder climate and acreage in Sooke, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, taking only two of the seedlings in a crowded VW; the remainder were donated.

Of the two plants, one died of drought and the other grew slowly with distorted patchy leaves. This is actually a good sign, it is typical of colchicine treatment, the plant being a mosaic of cell types. After a few years this plant produced a shoot from the base with uniform leaves and a normal green colour. At this point I still had no idea whether my original plan had worked.



▲ Joe Harvey, finally able to show off the 'fruit' of his labours – seed from a 'sterile' *Magnolia* hybrid, shown in greater detail below

With no means of counting the chromosome number, I had to wait a few more years for flowers to be produced, at which point the flower shape and colour, and fertile or not pollen would decide.

The big reveal was not until nearly year 2000 when flowers were produced that were intermediate between the parents with fertile pollen and seeds. It had taken over 15 years, more including planning. I had my hexaploid!

A longer article (in the 2025 yearbook) will provide more details and tell the whole story. ■

M. J. (JOE) HARVEY

Photos © JOE HARVEY





▲ Left: The huge trunks of the historic *Camellia japonica* (single red form) at Osterley Park, in 2016. Right: Just to the right of the staircase, filling the space between the first floor windows but not completely obscuring the view out of them, is the neatly pruned camellia in August 2024

## Is this the oldest *Camellia japonica* in the UK?

A magnificent specimen of *Camellia japonica*, which could well be the oldest in the UK, was discovered by Pat and Herb Short of the International Camellia Society UK back in 2016. An architect friend had been researching the remodelling design work Robert Adam had carried out in the 1760s at Osterley Park, in Isleworth, Middlesex when he spotted the shrub and recognised it as a camellia. In fact there were, and still are, two camellias planted side-by-side between the ground floor windows of the rear elevation, but it is the one on the left, the classic single red form, we are concerned with here.

When seen in 2016, the camellia had scaled the wall, reaching almost to the top of the soldier course above the first floor windows and spread across both windows on both lower storeys, to the extent that light must have been seriously impaired!

Using established methodology, the huge trunks of the camellia were measured and a planting date of 1800 was estimated, meaning that this camellia had been established at least 28 years before those at Chiswick, some of which were previously considered to be the oldest surviving specimens, having been sourced from Chandler's 1828 catalogue.



▲ The tree-like proportions of the camellia in 2016 in terms of both height and depth can be appreciated from these two images

The earliest image known of the camellia is a postcard from 1885 from the Osterley archive and research has produced an almost contemporary illustration from Elizabeth Balch's 1890 *Glimpses of Old English Homes*, showing the camellia beautifully trimmed to the shape of the gap between the windows. The trunks were clearly already sizeable by this time.



▲ The 1890 illustration from *Glimpses of Old English Homes* shows the camellia neatly trimmed but already with sizeable trunks

Recent research has revealed that this camellia has been subject to periods of neat trimming, severe pruning and unrestrained growth over time. In images from the November 1926 edition of *Country Life*, neither of the camellias are to be seen above the lower window ledges, suggesting they had been pruned right down at that point. But by 1946, when the post-war future of Osterley Park was in debate, the *Illustrated London News*, reporting that Lord Jersey had offered it to the National Trust, published an image clearly showing the camellia way up the wall and across the windows, much as it was in 2016! It took until 1949 for the National Trust to take charge of Osterley and it remains in their care today.

The Head Gardener, Andy Eddy, has developed a very careful programme of pruning for the camellia; balancing the management of this historic specimen (some 7m tall in 2019) with the need to maintain a view from the windows! An effective compromise has been achieved, as you can see from the top image. ♦

PAM HAYWARD

# Branch Reports

## South West Branch Autumn Meeting and AGM October 26th 2024

Our Autumn meeting and AGM were held in the classrooms of the Peter Buckley Learning Centre at RHS Rosemoor. About 20 members attended which was fewer than in previous years, but they were treated to an excellent day.

The plant sales did good business as did the raffle. New phytosanitary and security regulations meant managing the movement of plants in a different way and affected use of the Staff Car Park.

The Plant Quiz proved popular again and there were complaints that there were only 30 questions. Lively debate followed my giving out the answers, which proved (if proof were needed) that I am no botanist! Dick Fulcher came top with a full score!

The Bring and Tell session was as varied as ever, and ranged from spiky plants, through Wally's Wattle, Fiddlewood, superb piceas and *Dichroa/Hydrangea*. Our speaker, Rowan Griffiths, had brought sack loads of specimens to talk about for this session, which he managed to rattle through at pace. This included many samples of *Sorbus* representing the Aria types of which Keith Rushforth has just completed the revision, splitting it into various new genera. As it happens, Keith was present, so we had much lively to-ing and fro-ing between him and Rowan, with rather mind-boggling technical details, but excellent to have actual examples of the species in question. We were in the presence of experts.

Later on, after the AGM, Rowan gave us an overview of the 'Rhododendrons at Hergest Croft' after filling us in on the history of the garden and the illustrious gardening dynasty that is the Banks family. Hergest has a fine and extensive collection which continues to be catalogued and added to. Rowan has grown hundreds of rhododendrons from seed, and has had to commandeer extra space in his own garden for all the seedlings growing on. A vote of thanks for a most interesting talk concluded a successful day, and members went away happy and with a carload of plants.

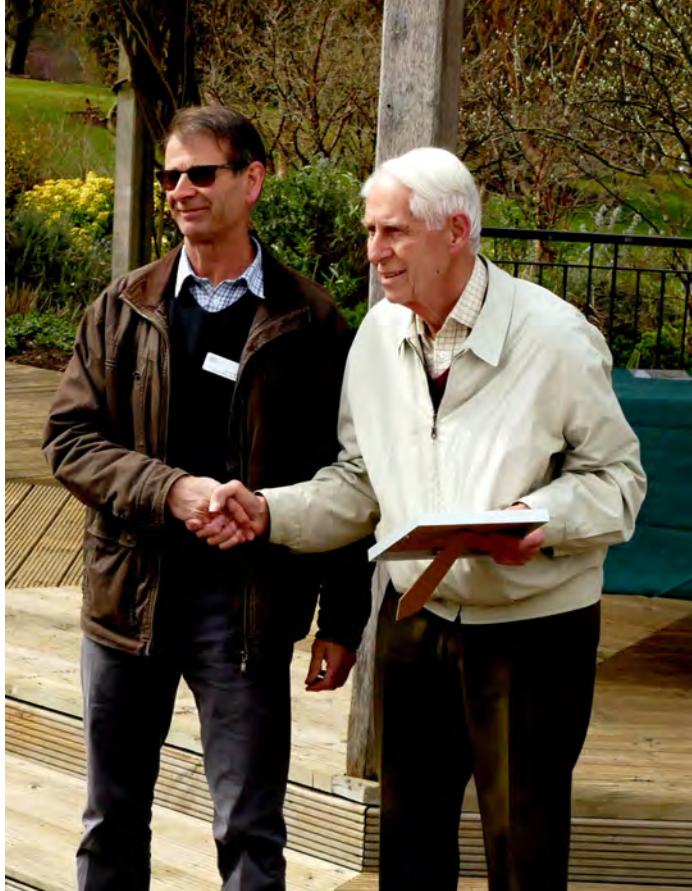
I wish to thank Rosemoor for hosting us and above all, the members present who generously contributed plants to the plant sales and as prizes. 🌸

JOHN MARSTON



▲ Rowan Griffiths holds the audience's attention at the Bring and Tell session

© Russel Beeson



▲ Martin Gates (right) is presented with the Chairman's Award by David Millais

## New Forest Branch News

### Retirement of Martin Gates as a volunteer at the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens

Martin Gates has been a member of our Group and the New Forest Branch for over 30 years, serving as an officer in several roles for both during that time. His service to the Group has been recognised during this year with Honorary Member status, following his receipt of the Chairman's Award in 2018.

What members may not be aware of beyond the New Forest Branch is that for a quarter of a century he has also been a regular volunteer at the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, working with their important rhododendron collection.

Curator David Jewell made the following statement in the Volunteers' Newsletter:

*'After nearly 25 years of dedicated service working as a volunteer in Bretry woodland, Martin Gates has decided to stand down. However, he is keen to continue to make the occasional guest appearance from time to time as and when he is able to do so. At 90 years of age, he thoroughly deserves to take life more quietly but he still intends to keep himself reasonably busy.'*

*Martin's contribution to Bretry, together with other members of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group has been exemplary over many years and should not be underestimated. As a small team and literally, whatever the weather, his small group have helped to manage, maintain and enrich the Bretry Rhododendron Collection. Every year an additional 10 or 12 species or cultivars have been added to the collection under his watchful eye and this steady flow of plants will continue to provide pleasure for future generations of visitors to come.'*

*Martin has been a star and both Gardens Director Clare Goddard and Curator David Jewell would like to thank him for his invaluable contribution.'*

The Branch joins in this thanks and wish Martin well in this next stage of his retirement. 🌸

RUSSELL BEESON

# Seed List

After a period of uncertainty, it is marvellous to report that the Seed List is safe for another year. This service was first offered to members over 25 years ago and although we are no longer able to offer wild-collected seed unless it has been gathered with permission, we have managed to keep the offerings going each year with garden-collected seed. We've also widened the range of seed we list, encouraging members to send donations from trees, shrubs and other genera which blend well with our own.

Tim Atkinson has managed our Seed List for some years now and although he would like to pass the baton on to another member, he has kindly offered to keep the service going for another twelve months as we continue the search for a successor.

The Bulletin Editor is, as you know from earlier editions of the *Bulletin*, an enthusiastic propagator of rhododendrons from seed, and clearly very talented at bringing them into flower at a young age and it is largely due to his support for the list and concern for its future that Tim has offered to continue.

Another of Peter's successes is *Rhododendron pumilum* which was sown in January 2023, it germinated in a month with bottom heat and given additional light, and flowered in June this year. Remarkable!

If you can help keep this member benefit going, either by donating seed or choosing seed from the list when it is published (we generally produce the list between Christmas and New Year), it will greatly support the effort.

Donations should be sent to Tim, named as accurately as possible and presented to him, ideally, as you yourself would choose to receive seed if you ordered from us. If you do have trouble cleaning your material, send it anyway but if the seed is ready to go, it just makes life a little easier for Tim who has a full time job as a landscape gardener. 

Send to:

Tim Atkinson  
143 Oldham Road, SOWERBY BRIDGE, Yorkshire HX6 4QG

and if you have any questions or need to get in contact do email [timothyatkinson@msn.com](mailto:timothyatkinson@msn.com)

PAM HAYWARD



▲ *Rhododendron pumilum* flowering in just eighteen months from seed

## 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
Philip Clements	Surrey
Pat Dobson	Surrey
Ed Greenall	Devon
Stephen Peters	Sussex
Richard Thompson	Sussex
Laura Williamson	Sussex
Millie Wykes	Cornwall

### GARDEN MEMBERS

Hotel Endsleigh	Devon
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Membership Enquiries to: [membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org](mailto:membership@rhodogroup-rhs.org)  
Renew your subscription at:

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

*The following publications are offered to Group Members exclusively and sold in support of the Group / Branch*

*Back issues of the yearbook from 1946, and previously advertised titles not featured here may still be available – please enquire.*



#### **The International Rhododendron Register & Checklist** SECOND EDITION

Edited by Alan Leslie  
Two volumes 1544pp RHS, 2004  
(One SECOND-HAND copy available in very good condition)  
Price: £75 inc. post  
UK only

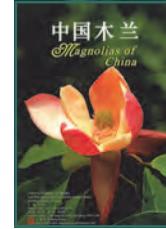


#### **John Lindley 1799-1865: Gardener - Botanist and Pioneer Orchidologist** BI-CENTENARY VOLUME

Edited by William Stearn 216pp ACC, 1998  
(One NEW copy available) £20 inc. post UK only

#### **Other second-hand titles:**

If you have are looking for a specific title that may be out-of-print, do let me know and if we don't have an available copy, we may be able to help you source one.



The Group and SW Branch have acquired a number of books to sell for funds. They include *Magnolias of China*, *Sichuan Rhododendron of China*, *Rhododendrons of China (3 Volume Set)*, *De Harde Gentse* and a host of plant-hunting titles.

Contact: Pam Hayward  
Email: [rcmgrouppublications@woodtown.net](mailto:rcmgrouppublications@woodtown.net)

PLEASE NOTE THAT SADLY WE ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO SEND BOOKS TO EU COUNTRIES.

## PUBLICATIONS

11/24

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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2025

MONTH	DATE/TIME	VENUE	WHAT'S ON?	CONTACT
<b>JANUARY</b>	Saturday 25 January	Ness Gardens	<b>Talk: Global Botanic Gardens Congress by Steve Lyus</b> AGM & Social Meeting	North West Branch
<b>MARCH</b>	Saturday 8 March & Sunday 9 March	RHS Garden Rosemoor	<b>RHS Early Camellia &amp; SW Branch Competitions</b>	RHS & South West Branch
	Tuesday 18 March	RHS Garden Wisley	<b>Guided Tour around the Magnolias at Wisley by Jack Aldridge</b>	South East Branch
	Saturday 22 March	Ness Gardens	<b>Talk: 'Woodland Gardening' by Ken Cox</b>	North West Branch
<b>APRIL</b>	Saturday 5 April	White House Farm	<b>Garden Visit</b>	South East Branch
	Saturday 12 April & Sunday 13 April	RHS Garden Wisley	<b>RHS Spring Ornamental Plant Competitions</b>	RHS
	Saturday 26 April & Sunday 27 April	RHS Garden Rosemoor	<b>RHS Main Rhododendron &amp; SW Branch Competitions</b>	RHS & South West Branch
<b>MAY</b>	Saturday 3 May & Sunday 4 May	Ness Gardens	<b>Annual Show</b>	North West Branch
	Thursday 15 May	Sandringham Estate	<b>Guided Tour of the Gardens &amp; wider estate by Jack Lindfield</b>	RCM Group
	Saturday 31 May	Leonardslee Gardens	<b>AGM &amp; Centenary Cup Competition</b>	RCM Group
	TBA	NT Sheffield Park	<b>Guided Tour of the Ghent Azaleas &amp; Rhododendrons by Jodie Hilton</b>	South East Branch

### CONTACT DETAILS

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events@rhodogroup-rhs.org

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RHS  
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South East Branch  
Philip Eastell  
southeast@rhodogroup-rhs.org

South West Branch  
John Marston  
southwest@rhodogroup-rhs.org

All RCM Group members will be very welcome to attend any events



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**Vice Chairman**  
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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!**

**Growing | Sharing | Learning**