

THE RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA AND MAGNOLIA GROUP

Registered Charity Number 1161254



MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 10 MAY 2016 AT 11.30am IN THE GREAT HALL AT RAMSTER, PETWORTH ROAD, CHIDDINGFOLD

PRESENT:

David Millais (Chairman), Alastair Stevenson (Treasurer), Rupert Eley (Membership Secretary), Sally Hayward (Secretary), Lyn Aldridge, Franca Bartolini, Mario Bartolini, Russell Beeson, Anne Boscawen, Sarah Bray, Pat Bucknell, Peter Bucknell, Christopher Carnaghan, Christopher Chaplin, Mary Chaplin, John David, Christopher Eley, Andy Fly, Jenny Fly, Richard Fulcher, Lorna Fulcher, Peter Furneaux, Jim Gardiner, Peter Goldsmith, Miranda Gunn, Carol Gurney, Andy Hallett, Judy Hallett, Steve Harding, Barry Haseltine, Robert Hatcher, Alex Hill, The Marquess of Lansdowne, Christopher Loder, Judy Lodge, Brian Long, Rama Lopez-Rivera, John Mann, Gillian Mann, Neil Maybury, Rose Marie Punch, Ros Rawling, Georgina Ray, Alexander Shepherd, Keith Sprague, John Talbot, Michael Warren

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Marie-Louise Agius, Alexandre Anagnostides, Paul Anderson, Mary Ashworth, Caroline Bell, Ted Brabin, Koen Camelbeke, Richard Carew-Pole, David Coombes, Sam Copnell, Nikki Crawford, Elizabeth Edward, Nigel Edwards, Philip Evans, Elizabeth Fleming, Martin Gates, Vanessa George, Richard Gilbert, John Greenall, Ingegerd Grönberg, Margaret Hall, Pam Hayward, Robin Herbert, Rosemary Howell, David Ledsham, Rosemary Legrand, Steve Lyus, Nicola Manisty, John Marston, Peter Roberts, Ray and Aileen Rosendale, John Sanders, Ivor Stokes, Mike Timberlake

The Chairman opened the meeting by giving thanks to Miranda Gunn for arranging to host the meeting at Ramster.

The Chairman announced to the meeting the sad news that Malcolm Nash, a long-standing Wessex Branch member had died on 8 May 2016. He was a well-respected authority on deciduous azaleas and known worldwide for his expertise and dedication to naming and rescuing lost varieties.

1. **The Minutes** of the Annual General Meeting held on 27 May 2015 at Bodnant, and published on the Group website were agreed to be a true record and were signed by the Chairman

2. **Matters Arising.** There were no matters arising.

3. **Chairman' Report**

In our Centenary year, we have completed a number of initiatives which should point us in the right direction in the future. Most important was gaining our charitable status in April last year. In practice this meant keeping the old Group going until the end of our financial year on 31st October, and then transferring all assets and liabilities to the new Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) as from 1st November 2015. Our new status has given us a whole new focus on conservation and education. It is simple really, but it encompasses so many of our activities from our Shows, to specialist propagation of rare varieties, to encouraging young gardeners, (and those not so young!) At the heart of our Group should be plants, and I am delighted that we have initiated a new Plants Committee, chaired by Ivor Stokes, consisting of knowledgeable plants-people to advise on matters such as conservation, selecting choice varieties for propagation and dissemination of them to worthy collections around the country. We also have a sub-committee of the most knowledgeable Deciduous Azalea experts in the country reviewing their RHS Award of Garden Merits which should be ratified by the RHS Woody Plants Committee by the end of the summer.

The Centenary Appeal has got off to a cracking start, and as I write the fund currently stands at about £4000. Now that we are a charity we can claim an additional 25% Gift Aid from UK tax-payers in due course. Thank you to everyone who has contributed sums both large and small. The funds are ring-fenced for plant conservation, and will enable us to commission specialist micro-propagation of rare and endangered plants to preserve them for the future before they are lost forever. Vital conservation work indeed!

As you know, last year we conducted a member survey initiated by Graham Mills, and we have published a summary of this in the bulletin, with a much larger analysis available on the website. We received some excellent feedback from more than half the membership, which is an outstanding response rate. The answers were diverse, but contained some common themes, some of which have already been addressed by our activities this year. Once our Centenary Celebrations are over, it is our intention to further review the survey and see what other actions we can take to improve the Group for all associated with it.

We know that the seed list is appreciated by many members, especially those living overseas. Unfortunately the distribution of wild-collected seed has become almost impossible due to the prohibition of collecting seed in many countries which regard collecting as bio-piracy and theft. To avoid adverse publicity in January this year we had no option but to remove all wild-collected seed from our list, and show that we are keen to work within the laws of the land. The Nagoya protocol requires the correct paperwork to enable access, benefit and sharing agreements to be put in place, but currently these arrangements are not available to small scale collectors interested in conservation. I am delighted that Sally Hayward is on the RHS Nagoya working party trying to arrange pathways through the red-tape and fighting for conservation and non-profit seed exchanges such as ours. In the meantime, I would urge everyone to have a go at hand pollinating within their own garden this spring, especially with rare species, and to donate seed to the Group this autumn so that we can continue to offer useful seed to others.

I am really pleased that the RCMG and rhododendrons have been getting a little more of the publicity that we have been seeking, and I hope that we can capitalise on this by continuing to gain new members. I have little doubt that we need to be more outward looking in our activities, and to show the public more of our plants and explain what we do. Shows and events such as those at Rosemoor, Wisley and Harlow Carr, and our Chelsea exhibit are all a great way to engage with the public and our membership at large, but they do not happen without a great deal of work in the background by a small core of members. We should all be greatly indebted to those who have given more than their fair share of time and effort to make these events work, and I feel hugely embarrassed about the amount of work that some of the Committee have undertaken on our behalf during this busy spring, in particular Pam Hayward who has just finished producing our largest Yearbook ever, and has helped with the superb posters at Wisley. Her sister Sally Hayward instigated the wonderful Top 100 Rhododendron survey which has created so much interest within the Group, and has given a real focus to our Centenary celebrations. She has also arranged and manned 2 the Shows at Wisley this year, as well as managing our Chelsea Flower Show exhibit. Judy Hallett has arranged our tours and celebration bookings in one of the most complex arrangements ever. In Devon and Cornwall, John Marston curated a great poster display at Rosemoor to mark the Centenary, and Charles Williams hosted an exclusive and fascinating viewing of the Caerhays archives including unpublished letters and photographs from the plant-hunters Wilson and Forrest.

So I really *do* need to appeal to more of our membership to get involved and support our activities, and to take some pressure of the few hard-working souls that keep this Group together. The expression 'many hands make light work' is especially true for all the Shows and events when help is needed with staging, and clearing up at the end. A few more hands to clear away the hundreds of vases really does make all the difference. But there's also plenty of administration within the Group that we need more help with. This year we say a fond farewell to 3 people on the Committee who have jointly served for more than 40 years! Alastair Stevenson has fulfilled various roles for more than 20 years, most recently as our Treasurer. Judy Hallett has organised memorable trips and events for more than 10 years, and our host today, Miranda Gunn, has been International Branch Chairman for more than 10 years, looking after the interests of a good proportion of our overall membership. And now we also need to find a

new Yearbook Editor to work with Pam for this year, and so relieve her in 2017 when she will have produced 10 superb editions.

I am very grateful to those who have volunteered to come forward to serve on our Committee, but it is *essential* that others offer their time to fulfil the vital roles of Events Co-ordinator and Yearbook Editor so that the Group can continue to produce a good yearbook and arrange events and tours as part of our membership package. The present Committee cannot take on this extra work unaided, and there is a great danger that we will be unable to offer the yearbook or produce events in the future. We need members to think about how they can volunteer to serve the Group, and not just pay a subscription for member benefits.

Our working relationship with the RHS is at an all-time high, with an excellent spirit of co-operation on both sides. The RHS have grasped our Centenary and are helping us celebrate in style with our hugely popular and successful show in the marquee at Wisley, and our exhibit at Chelsea. Jim Gardiner has been key achieving this, aided by Vanessa Penn at Wisley who has managed to build bridges through several different departments. Also worthy of note are Dr John David, who is at the forefront of trying to make sense of Nagoya, and Tim Upson, Director of Horticulture, who has shown a personal interest in our shows and activities. And of course, Georgina Barter continues to run our competitions efficiently, and Dr Alan Leslie, recipient of the Loder Cup this year, has continued to handle all Rhododendron Registrations on a worldwide basis.

In the coming year, it will be time to rebalance our plant emphasis away from the Centenary bias of Rhododendrons, and to focus on Camellias and Magnolias. Logically that means Devon and Cornwall, and also earlier in the season, so I hope we can arrange our AGM and some garden visits around the time of the Rosemoor Show at the end of April, and at a price that everyone including students can afford. But that does need someone to make these arrangements for us.....!

The Chairman then made presentations to Miranda Gunn and Judy Hallett, both retiring from the Committee, to Alastair Stevenson, the retiring Group Treasurer, to Barry Haseltine, retiring as a Trustee of the Group and to Sally Hayward as a thank you for arranging the recent Wisley event.

4. Treasurer's Report

a) Income and Expenditure Account

Overall for the current year there has been a deficit of £893.

Membership income remains fairly static, though £300 below the previous year. In future years we will be able to benefit from Gift Aid, which could be in the region of £1000 if membership numbers remain stable and the majority of those eligible sign up for it.

Seed sales have declined and are likely to continue to do so now that we are restricted to seed from gardens rather than wild collected seed. Publication sales are also low, though this is primarily due to the availability of publications the previous year and Pam Hayward's initiative in making them available to the membership. The AGM tour made a helpful contribution due to the high numbers that attended and the raffle that was organised as part of it.

Our largest costs (Year Book and Bulletin) are largely in line with previous years. We have supported less projects than previous years, with only a single bursary of £500.

Our charitable status may need to be supported in future by an increase in expenditure in this area. The amount of £762 for publicity and shows includes membership leaflets and new promotional banners.

Our costs are contained as far as we are able to but we do need to maintain tight control if our reserves are not to be eroded in the coming years.

b) Balance Sheet

We transferred the majority of our cash into the Business Reserve Account which previously had a higher interest rate, but, along with all others, this now gives us no material income.

Current Liabilities are above the previous year because of a substantial increase in subs paid in advance.

Reserves at the end of the year are £31,300. I would not consider it necessary (nor advisable in the interest of maintaining membership numbers) to increase subscription levels in the short term. However recent years have seen a slow erosion of reserves and we must be careful not to allow these to go much lower.

c) Charity Status

Members will be aware that the Group registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) on 13th April 2015. The Trustees of the charity are David Millais, Philip Evans, Barry Haseltine and Alastair Stevenson. The Group's activities, assets and liabilities were transferred to the CIO with effect from 1st November 2015, so the year ending 31st October 2016 will be the first year of operation as a charity. A separate report will be submitted for the Charity Commission covering the period 13 April 2015 to 31 October 2015. The benefits of operating with charitable status include the limitation of liability of the Group's officers and the facility to reclaim Gift Aid on our membership subscriptions.

The Treasurer recorded his thanks to Martin Gates for helping with the preparation of the accounts at the year end. The accounts have been independently audited by Russell Beeson.

The four Trustees will now produce a document to confirm the transfer of the former Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group to the newly formed Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

On a proposal from Barry Haseltine, with Lord Lansdowne as seconder, the accounts were approved unanimously.

5. Membership Report

The Membership Secretary reported that there are thirteen more members than one year ago, and membership numbers overall have stabilised. He recorded his thanks to Marie Pertwee and to Pam Hayward for their help and support and for their continued efforts to resolve the previous standing order issues.

6. Election of Trustee

Following the retirement of Barry Haseltine, in accordance with the Constitution, Clause 13, Graham Mills has volunteered to take the vacant Trustee post. Graham was proposed by Ros Rawling and seconded by Miranda Gunn and his appointment was approved unanimously.

7. Election of Officers

Following the retirement of Alastair Stevenson as Group Treasurer, the Chairman introduced Jenny Fly who has agreed to take over the role. Her acceptance as Treasurer was proposed by John Talbot and seconded by Rod Wild and her appointment was approved unanimously.

Following the retirement of Miranda Gunn as International Branch Chairman, the Chairman introduced Rama Lopez-Rivera who has agreed to take over the role.

The Chairman paid tribute to John Harsant who has acted as independent auditor of the Group's finances for some years. Russell Beeson was introduced as the new Independent Examiner. Russell was proposed for the position of Independent Examiner by Chris Loder and seconded by Judy Hallett and his appointment was approved unanimously.

The remaining existing officers of the Committee who have all agreed to continue in their roles for the year 2016/17:

Chairman:	David Millais
Vice Chairman:	Ivor Stokes
Secretary:	Sally Hayward
Membership Secretary:	Rupert Eley
Yearbook Editor and Archivist:	Pam Hayward
Bulletin Editor:	Peter Furneaux
Webmaster:	Graham Mills
Conservation Officer:	Stephen Harding

were proposed by Chris Loder and seconded by Ros Rawling and approved unanimously.

8. Conservation Report

Stephen Harding, the Conservation Officer read out the following report:

'Since becoming your conservation officer a year ago, I have been busy locating Rhododendron Hybrids deemed "critical" by Plant Heritage. Of the 1440 listed on our website we have found 451 and at the moment the plant committee are deciding which plants are worth propagating and dispersing within the group.

Of the wider list assessed by Plant Heritage, we have located 2074 out of 3745 classed as endangered, vulnerable and critical. We only posted the critical list on our website as these are the most important to find.

All of these plants have been found in just 49 gardens and websites where the members have taken the time to submit their lists. Imagine what we could find if every member was to send a list of plants in their gardens. We are not only concerned with the previously mentioned lists, but would like information on all of our three genera. Plants raised from the groups seed list have never been listed on a database. Plants with collectors' numbers in our great gardens and stately homes could be lost forever if we do not know where they are. "Best Forms" may go the same way, again we need to know their whereabouts. The RHS and Hillier Arboretum have supplied full lists of all their plants. We could do with our other great gardens doing the same please.

One large public garden has agreed to home a collection of plants raised by this project and I will be approaching several others in the near future.

I am currently gathering Magnolia lists as well and would appreciate your help please.

We, as a group can help in naming any plants in your gardens. There is a wealth of expertise within this room and in the wider membership. Let's make use of it before it is too late. Plant naming visits are already happening with various visits to gardens where members have asked for help. We cannot get round to everybody this spring due to our Centenary celebrations, but we will do our best.

Please do keep looking at the group website and bulletins for updates and I look forward to working with you all.'

9. Any Other Business

a) Replacement Yearbook Editor

A discussion took place regarding finding a replacement for Pam Hayward as Yearbook Editor. A suggestion was made that the Group could employ an editor, and pay for this by increasing subscriptions. It was reported that Roy Lancaster had commented that the

current Yearbooks under Pam's editorship are the best Society Yearbooks in the world. It was generally agreed that it will be very difficult to find a replacement for Pam.

b) RHS and Group Membership

Anne Boscawen enquired whether you have to be a member of the RHS before you can join the RCM Group. It was confirmed that RHS membership is not a requirement to join the Group.

10. Date and venue of the next Annual General Meeting in 2017

It was proposed that the next AGM would be held at RHS Rosemoor during the weekend of the Main Rhododendron Competition, 22/23 April 2017.

Barry Haseltine thanked the Chairman for his hard work and dedication to the Group over the last year.

The meeting closed at 12.45pm.