

RHS Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group



WESSEX BRANCH NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2016

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Looking back at my August 2015 newsletter made me smile when I wrote about lack of rain during the summer months and trying to keep the plants alive. This Autumn and Winter it has done nothing but rain!

I hope your gardens have not become too water logged and you have not encountered any damage during the high winds we have had recently. I had to rescue our large metal gazebo from our pond which was ripped from the ground and sadly our clematis *Armandii* Apple Blossom went with it. It was just emerging into masses of flowers. Thankfully our pond liner was not punctured. It has been a real challenge this last year with the heavy rain followed by hard if not regular ground frosts.

Past Autumn Event

[Trip to Nymans, Handcross, West Sussex RH17 6EB -24th October 2015](#)

We were fortunate to be given a guided tour of the garden by Philip Holmes, an expert plantsman who has worked at Nymans for many years and thus has much first-hand knowledge to share.

Our walk commenced at the highest part of the garden, with dramatic distant views. Soon, Philip drew our attention to an enormous *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, the Dawn Redwood, towering above us. This specimen was one of the first to be planted in England and now has a bold buttressed trunk and was clothed with lovely salmon russet foliage. Group members will no doubt already be aware of the story and considerable merits of this tree.

We proceeded down through the interesting young pinetum, largely replanted after the great storm, then across open parkland towards the ruins of the main house we again had lovely views over the wooded valley within the Nymans estate. Despite the overcast day, the autumn colours were wonderful, especially the glowing red of *Acer rubrum* 'October Glory', butter yellow leaves of *Ginkgo biloba*, the bright deep russet of the *Taxodium distichum*, and the orange of a particularly nicely shaped *Nyssa sylvatica* growing in the valley.

The Messel family founded Nymans and were also responsible for breeding three different and famous plants that are still widely grown. Phillip showed us the original plants of each of these during our walk. Arguably the best, and in flower on the day, was *Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay'. The first tree is situated near the Dawn Redwood where we commenced our walk and other specimens in the woodland areas were pointed out later. In a sheltered situation numerous lovely white flowers are produced from August right through to the frosts. Combine that with glossy evergreen foliage and a well-behaved columnar habit and surely we have the perfect tree for companion planting.

The other two famous plants, a Camellia and a Magnolia, were both named after Leonard Messel. The Camellia grows adjacent to the wall at the entrance to the main house and had plenty of flower buds for next spring.

It was incredible to see the original parent trees of Magnolia 'Leonard Messel'- (*Magnolia kobus* x *Magnolia stellata* Rosea). The trunk of *Magnolia kobus* had become very large with many twists and curves and completely dwarfed the *stellata* that was now growing beneath its canopy.

The magnolia that really caught our eye was *Magnolia sargentiana robusta* and its huge seed heads that hung like grapes.



Pictures by David Millais

As you can see from the above picture, the pod has split to reveal masses of orange seeds inside. To maximise their ripening potential, these hang from the seed pods on thin white umbilicus strands. Quite an incredible sight!

As we continued through the garden, we eventually came through the intimate walled garden with the dovecote embedded in the wall. How lovely to see *Camellia sasanqua* Narumi-gata flowering against the outside wall as we passed through.



A surprise was the sight of the banana plants growing up against the walls in the ruins of the house. Philip told us that they have been growing there for three years without winter protection.

Close inspection revealed a great many choice plants of borderline hardiness growing in the shelter of the house. Particularly beautiful was a stand of *Nerine bowdenii* 'Stephanie' with large flowers in luscious salmon-pink; so much nicer than the usual rather stark pink of the species.

As Philip was explaining the new summer planting around the Loggia for their wedding venues, a plant with incredible autumn colour caught our eye and we all made a bee line for it. It was *Enkianthus Perulatus* which is an ericaceous plant and extremely hardy. This particular plant was growing in an island bed adjacent to the heather and rock gardens and was the best and most compact of three specimens planted at Nymans. Despite the cloudy day the bush seemed to glow like burning embers, with deep red colouring enhanced by hints of flame-red towards the tips. Everyone agreed that this was the bush of the day and we think a few orders were placed the next day!

Jim Inskip from our group has kindly sent us a link about [Enkianthus in Cultivation](http://arboretumwespelaar.be/userfiles/file/pdf/110600_EnkianthusInCultivation_KC.pdf). We are sure members will find this very interesting and informative:

http://arboretumwespelaar.be/userfiles/file/pdf/110600_EnkianthusInCultivation_KC.pdf



We were educated about so many trees and shrubs in the most pleasant and informative way on that day. We all agreed later in the café that such staff are priceless. We went home with our knowledge greatly improved!

Talk & Slide Show on Daffodils by Dr. John David – 21st November 2015

After a warming cup of coffee and a good chat we prepared for the anticipated talk and slide show. This proved to be an excellent meeting and the talk by John was extremely informative.

Group members that attended were surprised at how many different varieties there were - over 25,000 had been registered. All the 13 divisions were explained (Trumpet, Jonquilla, Tazetta etc) in great detail with slides. Some pots were bought so that we could smell the exquisite scent of daffodils that grow in warmer climates. I was interested to learn that daffodils were first introduced into gardens about 300BC.

We all decided that further talks and slide shows on other subjects should be included in our annual event planning.

After the show, we all gathered outside to present Miranda with plants that would give her an all year round display for her new bed she was developing. This was the committee's thank you for all the years that she has been at the helm of the Wessex Branch.

We selected a Mahonia, Hydrangeas, Kalmias, Rhododendrons and a *Enkianthus*.

I attach a photograph below to show a very happy lady!



Forthcoming Events

Frosbury Farmhouse, Gravetts Lane, Worplesdon, Guildford, Surrey GU3 3JW (10.30 am) & Sarum, Church Lane, Worplesdon, Guildford, Surrey GU3 3RU (2.30pm) – 10th April 2016

We are very privileged to be invited to see the above gardens. The arrangement is to meet Rod & Sheila Wild at Frosbury Farmhouse for coffee at 10.30am for 11.00 – 12.30 am walk. Their garden holds a large and interesting collection of Magnolias which we cannot wait to see as well as other shrubs and plants suited to their PH of soil. We can take packed lunches to eat at Frosbury Farmhouse or got to the local pub for lunch before visiting Sarum.

Rod & Mary White at Sarum are scheduled for 2.30pm. I am reliably informed that their garden is full of specialist and rare plants. This should prove to be a fantastic day and I do hope our branch members make it a special day out.

Centenary Celebrations

As you all know by now this year is our Society's Centenary and the celebrations have been planned over a long period by many members to make it a celebration to remember for us all.

I would love to see many of the Wessex Branch members bring their best blooms to Wisley to contribute to this great event. It does not matter if you do not know the names of your blooms you bring or whether they are species or hybrids. There will be someone there to help and guide you.

Also, after this awful winter, the leaves may have blemishes etc. that you do not think would be worthy of a showing but please bring this plant along as it may turn out to be extremely rare and there will be friendly people who will be more than happy to help you identify them!

When Jenny and I first started showing our blooms we were so nervous, but I remember Pam & Sally Hayward guiding us through each stage and giving us all the encouragement possible.

People we met at each show were so friendly and helped us in every way possible. So please for this special event join us all to make it special.

Best wishes

Andy Fly – Chairman

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