

# RCMG SW Branch News

February 2020

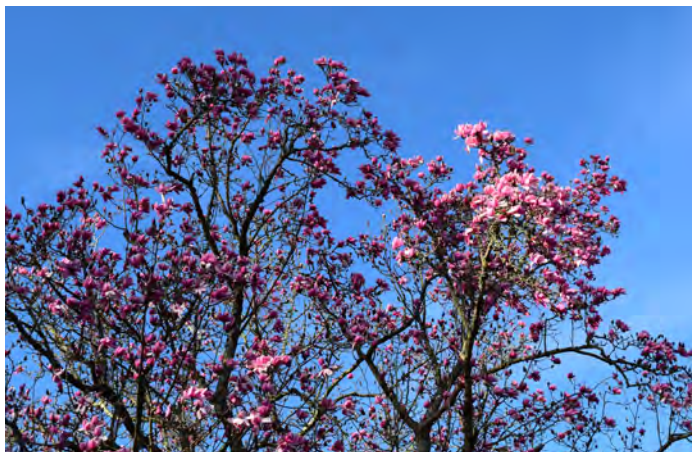
## Welcome - Notes from a Devon Garden

Welcome to the first edition of the new members' newsletter for the SW Branch of the RCM Group. In this edition you'll get an insight into what the newsletter is all about and find out how you as a member can get involved.

As I write this, I am currently just over 6 months into my new job as Senior Gardener at Greenway near Brixham. Having spent five years working with the team at Killerton, I was delighted to be offered the role of heading up the team at Greenway within the National Trust's English Riviera portfolio.

A lot of work has been done in the past 20 years to restore Greenway and I am looking forward to working with the garden manager Giles Palmer, formerly Curator at Paignton Zoo, to restore and develop the gardens even further.

One of the biggest changes I have noticed is the difference that moving a few miles further south makes. Admittedly a mild winter will have helped but plants are growing, bursting bud and coming into bloom weeks earlier than I am used to or had even anticipated. In the past two days *Magnolia campbellii* (left) has suddenly come into full bloom. It has withstood the onslaught of Storm Ciara and will hopefully withstand Storm Dennis as well.



There are currently around 90 cultivars of camellia in flower and the rhododendrons are coming into bloom too. With snowdrops, hellebores, primula and daffodils in the mix, a real tapestry is starting to unfold and I'm getting rather excited about spring!

We are open again on 15 February so do come along and see us.

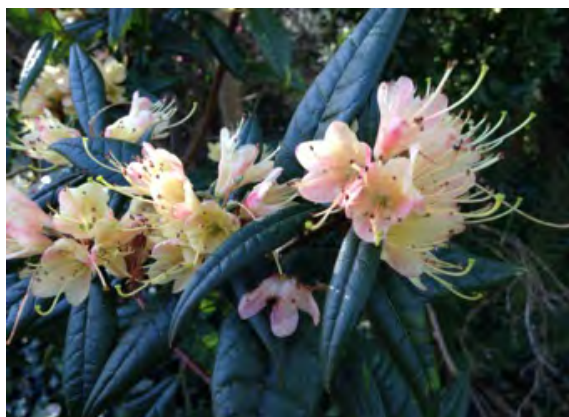
*Ashley Brent*

## Notes from the Branch Chairman

I write this as a proposed regular item in our new South West Branch Newsletter, which we hope to send out three times a year. We welcome contributions on any topic from our three genera from members with photos to accompany the text. News and views also welcome.

Please send all submissions to our newsletter editor, Ashley Brent who is now Senior Gardener at the wonderful Greenway House, Galmpton. His email is [ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk).

It is with great sadness that we record the recent death of our most valued member, Philip Evans. Philip was instrumental in the working group guiding the RCM Group into becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation with Trustees who oversee the Group. Philip also had a wonderful garden in Cornwall where he could indulge his passion for rhododendrons and bring contributions to our shows & competitions over the years. He contributed with quiet, well thought out common sense to our Branch Committee's deliberations which will be sadly missed. We extend our sympathies to his widow, Elaine.



*Rhododendron 'Crossbill'*

As I write this at the end of January, here in Barnstaple we have not had any temperatures low enough to cause any damage (we still have February to negotiate) and the bud set on all our genera in the garden is amazing; with many buds swelling even now. We do have regularly early flowering camellias and rhododendrons starting from Christmas onwards, namely, *Camellia tunganica* (syn. *C. pitardii* 'Alba') collected by Maurice Foster in 2009 with its sweet (slightly sickly sweet?) scent, and a large scrambling shrub of *Rhododendron* 'Crossbill' which has climbed into a *Berberis valdiviana* and is about 2.5m tall after about 15 years.

All looks set for a fabulous Spring season, and I hope to see you at our Shows & Competitions at Rosemoor and also at the events which we have arranged for your enjoyment through the year.

*John Marston*

## Controversy at the National Trust SW gardeners' conference!

Gardeners from National Trust gardens across the South West recently gathered for a conference in a hotel in sunny Torquay. We try to gather once every two years to build links between gardens, attend workshops, share ideas and celebrate the fantastic work which goes on at all our properties, from the tiniest garden to the largest historic estate. One workshop which I helped to run this year was designed to encourage gardeners who have perhaps never entered a flower show and to give them some pointers so that they can give it a go. As a bit of fun (but obviously taken seriously) we also proposed setting up our own show. Not an easy undertaking in mid-January! Entries were invited for three classes; a single flowering species; foliage from a single species and pot plants.

As if inter-property rivalry was not enough incentive to enter, a member of the RCMG, who wishes to remain anonymous, very generously provided prize money for the three classes, to whom I would like to extend my sincere thanks on behalf of the National Trust. By the time the judges arrived at lunchtime, a fine array of entries were on display and awarding prizes was no easy feat. Trengwainton took the honours in both the best potted plant class for a fine *Echinocactus* and best flowering entry for a beautiful arrangement of aloes, whilst Glendurgan took the best



foliage display for a vase of *Elegia*. There was uproar as Saltram's hellebores claimed a second prize, apparently looking stunning at the time of judging and yet sadly collapsed by the time exhibitors were readmitted. Most controversially perhaps though, Glendurgan was awarded best in show and the impartiality of one of the judges, Glendurgan's head gardener, John Lanyon, was called into doubt by some. As always however, the judge's decision is final!

In all, fifteen properties entered our little show and everyone enjoyed it thoroughly. For some it was a first taste of flower showing and, given the entertainment it caused, I'm sure it won't be their last. Let's hope for a few new faces at the upcoming RCMG shows this spring!

Ned Lomax

## Notes from a Cornish Garden

Few gardens within the National Trust still close to visitors over the winter months. Glendurgan Garden, I'm pleased to say, from the point of view of one of the team who works to maintain it, is however one of them. We close the gates to our visitors at the end of October and look forward to a long winter in which huge amounts can be achieved and numerous projects completed. Of course the reality is that Christmas passes in the blink of an eye and before we know it, we're rushing to get everything ready to reopen in mid-February (a week away as I write!) Regardless of whether it's open or closed, the garden continues to offer interest throughout and there's plenty to see and enjoy, and so in many ways it seems a shame not to share it more widely. A fallow period, however, benefits the garden enormously, allows the donor family, who still call Glendurgan their home, some privacy and of course gives us, the gardeners, a chance to carry out necessary tree and infrastructure work.

As the National Trust's most southerly garden, Glendurgan is naturally very mild and therefore the spring flowering season starts early with us. The snowdrops and native daffodils are currently out in force and on 11 Feb we'll be conducting our annual Valentine's Day flower count, by which time well in excess of one hundred species of plant are expected to be in bloom. Amongst rhododendrons, *Rhododendron irroratum* is always one of the first to flower for us, closely followed by *R. barbatum* and *R. 'Cornish Red'*.

Elsewhere I've been enjoying the odd *R. macabeaenum* truss, opening sporadically on one particular plant over the last couple of months. A rather poor and small flowered form of *Magnolia campbellii* ssp. *mollicomata* is always the first of our magnolias to bloom, enjoying the limelight for a few days before larger and more impressive neighbours overshadow it. A pair of *M. denudata* and the *M. sprengeri* var. *diva* next to them, however, seem to have a very few flower buds - a result of the recent dry springs perhaps? The stars of the show at the moment, though, are the camellias. Old plants of *C. x williamsii* 'Cornish Snow', 'Winton' and 'Cornish Spring' are going all guns, and the reticulatas, slightly early for us, are opening en masse, 'Buddha' and 'Shot Silk' being two of my particular favourites.



The camellias which are giving me the most pleasure though are a number of species which have been planted in recent years and are now starting to make an impact. The simple, single flowers of *C. forrestii* (above), *C. yunnanensis* and *C. transnokoensis* are understated and yet, in my opinion, easily hold their own against their more flamboyant neighbours.

Please do drop in and enjoy them with us when Glendurgan opens on the 15th February!

*Ned Lomax*

## A Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia left behind

When we sold the front of our house and moved into the back, there were three plants I had to leave behind in the bit of garden I reluctantly allowed to be sold off with the house. These three plants were *Magnolia x veitchii*, *Rhododendron* 'Nobleanum' and a deep pink single camellia given to me by Jimmy Smart at Marwood Hill about 20 years ago.

The magnolia came from Veitch's nursery in Alphington, Exeter in about 1978 just before it closed; I thought this rather appropriate. Coincidentally, it was sold to me as *Magnolia obovata*!

The rhododendron was given to me in the 1980s by my father-in-law who was a very keen rhododendron enthusiast. I see over the fence that it has been flowering since Christmas, and especially well this year. At least I can glimpse it from next door.



The large *Magnolia x veitchii* is a pink-flowered form and full of buds, having almost died a few years ago with somerol in the main trunk which seems to be recovering.

The camellia is interesting as it has a very long flowering period of over two months, being in a sheltered position facing west partially under the stone verandah. It had been among many seedlings raised presumably from *C. saluenensis* and Jimmy said that he noticed that it had dark tips to the stamens, and so he called it (unofficially) 'Red Stamens'. It is a lovely floriferous bush to 2.5m tall.

I can also enjoy it from over the fence.

*John Marston*

*Camellia* 'Red Stamens'

## Dates for your diary

- ◆ Saturday and Sunday 14-15 March - The Early Camellia Show, The Daffodil Show and SW Branch Rhododendron, Magnolia and Spring Ornamentals shows at RHS Rosemoor.
- ◆ Wednesday 15 April - Group visit to The Lodge, near Bodmin and Moyclare, Liskeard.
- ◆ Saturday and Sunday 25-26 April - The Main Rhododendron Show and SW Branch Camellia and Magnolia shows at RHS Rosemoor.
- ◆ Tuesday 5 May - Group visit to The Old Vicarage, West Anstey and Chevithorne Barton, near Tiverton.
- ◆ Saturday 25 July - Group awayday at Upper Gorwell House, Barnstaple.

Visit and awayday details are almost finalised. Full details will be sent out as soon as they are available.

## Plant swap shop

Do you have a particular plant that you are looking for? Do you have a spare cutting, seedling or plant that you are happy to offer to other group members?

This section of the newsletter is dedicated to facilitating the sharing of plants of our three genera or plants that would make ideal companions.

Send your the details of your plant to me at [ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:ashley.brent@nationaltrust.org.uk) and I will add them here. Your personal details will not be shared on the newsletter.