The Rhododendron & Camellia Group



BULLETIN No. 39 - December 1988

Forthcoming Events 1989 14-15 March

11-12 April 18 April 3-4 May

Early Camellia and Rhododendron Magnolia Competitions Main Camellia Show Visit to Broadleas, Devizes Main Rhododendron Show

6-7 May 6-13 May 23-26 May 20-21 June

Cornwall Garden Society Show Spring Tour, Cornwall Chelsea Show Flower Show with Classes for Rhododendrons

Rhododendron and Camellia Group List of Officers and Members of Committee 1988

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Vice-Chairman: vacancy

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Branch Organisers
East Anglia: C. E. Grainger Ireland: Miss M. Forrest

South West: Major R. A. W. Reynolds South West Wales: Mr G. H. Taylor Wessex: Lady Adam Gordon

Midlands: Temporary vacancy South East: J. A. Fox

Chairman's Notes

I am pleased to announce that a new Branch is in process of formation. It will be known as the South West Wales Branch. The organiser is Mr G. H. Taylor, Pant-yr-Holiad Garden, Rhydlewis, Llandyssul, Dyfed SA44 5ST, tel. Rhydlewis (023 975) 493.

Will all members interested in joining the South West Wales

Branch please ring or write to Mr Taylor?

Mr Alistair Stevenson was co-opted to the Committee at the Executive Committee meeting on 1st November 1988, to assist the Hon. Membership Secretary with recruiting.

The Group has been invited by the Cornwall Garden Society to stage a display of rhododendrons at the Society's annual show at

Carlyon Bay in May next year.

The Tours Organiser advises that the spring tour in Cornwall next May is rapidly becoming booked, and those wishing to take part are advised to write as soon as possible to Mrs Valerie Archibold, Starveacre, Dalwood, nr Axminster, E. Devon, EX13

At the Executive Committee mentioned above, Dr R. H. L. Jack tendered his resignation as Vice Chairman, which was most reluctantly accepted. Dr Jack has had to shoulder entirely unforeseen business commitments which will tell heavily on his time. He will, happily, remain a member of the Committee. In this circumstance the Committee agreed that the term of office of the existing Chairman, Bruce Archibold, should be extended for a further year.

An apology to Sir Ilay

An open letter was published in the August issue of the Bulletin, under the heading 'Crarae, nr Inveraray, Argyll'. It has, of course, been written by Sir Ilay M. Campbell, Bt., Trustee of the Crarae Gardens Charitable Trust, and the hon. editor wishes to apologise to him for misreading his signature as 'Mrs May Campbell', a figment whose name has not yet even been applied to a rhododendron hybrid. Sir Ilay, writing in mid-October, pointed out that the autumn colour was then good in the glen, and, more remarkably, Rhododendron concinnum was just going over, several 'Yellowhammer' were in full flower, and 'Creeping Jenny' was alight with red flares here and there, too.

Disappearance of 'Additions to the International Rhododendron Register, 1987-8'

A contretemps whose details still remain unexplained to the hon. editor has affected distribution of copies of the most recent 'Additions', which should have been disseminated with 'Rhododendrons 1988-9 with Magnolias and Camellias'. He understands that copies are being repeated and should follow the year-books in due course.

Appeal for slides of Exbury

Mr Edmund de Rothschild, one of our members, is giving the keynote address at the American Rhododendron Society's Annual Convention in Vancouver, British Columbia, in April

1989. He asks whether any of our members have choice slides showing either views of the gardens at Exbury or of individual plants there, which they could lend him to illustrate his lecture? Those members who would like their best Exbury slides to be shown on the West Coast might send them to him, Edmund de Rothschild, Esq., The Estate Office, Exbury, nr. Southampton, Hants., SO4 1AZ.

The Photographic Competition - 1989

For the second year in succession we are running a photographic competition was so successful and produced such a high standard yearbook and the winner will receive a prize of £10.00. Our first competitionw as so successful and produced such a high standard of photography that the Editorial Board realised what a wealth of talent exists within the membership, so please go through your albums, negative envelopes or slide boxes, select your favourites and send them to us. Remember that, by and large, close-ups are more effective when reproduced but the appeal of more general views will also be assessed. The curious charm of rhododendron scales seen through the microscope or macro lens shows that beauty does not reside solely in flowers: what about buds, new shoots, seed pods, exfoliating bark, or the Ribena-red bristles of the Barbatas or Crinigeras?

Transparencies, or prints plus their negatives, should be sent to the hon. yearbook editor, Lady Cynthia Postan, 84 Barton Road, Cambridge CB3 9LH, with a short descriptive note on subject and provenance. Please send a stamped addressed envelope if you

wish the photographic material to be returned.

C.P.

Two new titles for '89

Many members will be eager to see, early next year, two new books from B. T. Batsford Limited, publishers, namely Rhododendrons of China and Yunnan Camellias of China, and it is hoped that a pre-publication discount will be available to Group members. Walter Magor has recommended both of these books.

The 1988 Autumn Weekend

On 28 October twenty-two members gathered at the sixteenthcentury Manor House Hotel, Moreton-in-Marsh, for the autumn weekend. The frustration caused by heavy traffic on the way was soon dispelled on arrival at the hotel by the warm welcome and the

pleasure of meeting old and new friends.

The morning revealed a sharp frost, and the day remained bright and clear. It began with a visit to the arboretum of Batsford Park, less than two miles from the hotel. Our tour was unguided so that we were able to examine the trees at leisure and at random while savouring their parkland setting. Mr Alan Mitchell, in his entry for Gloucestershire in 'Collections of trees open to the public' at the end of his 'A field guide to the trees of Britain and Northern Europe', succinctly notes, 'Batsford Park, Moreton-in-Marsh (NGS). Large and varied collection; some very big trees; new collection of rare oaks'. The oaks are disposed across the steep east-facing slope above the drive to the house: not all are trees, some are scrub oaks, slow-growing, and including such interesting evergreen species as Quercus semecarpifolia and Q. wislizenii.. There are maples, hickories and walnuts, including the rare Juglans cinerea, and such eyebrow-raisers as Phellodendron amurense and Torreya californica. The autumn colour was good, especially in a planting of Acer palmatum 'Senkaki', a foil for the fruit of Sorbus hupehensis behind.

We were fortunate to meet the owner, Lord Dulverton, whose past efforts have produced this representative and well-displayed collection. It was good to see that young trees are still being planted, so that the arboretum will continue to improve. Soon we were due at the hotel, but our departure was slowed by the

attractions of the adjacent nursery and garden shop.

The afternoon was free and some of us examined the contents of the many antique shops in Moreton before returning for tea, followed by an excellent quiz to identify rhododendron species from leaves, photographs of the relevant flowers, and a short written description. The quiz was most ably arranged by John Bodenham, who also supplied the rhododendron prizes, some of them Vireyas! Our thanks and congratulations, John!

After the quiz, Tom Spring-Smyth showed his 16mm film of Nepal twenty years ago. 16mm is an old size, so it is interesting to note that our Tours Organiser had borrowed a suitable projector

from Dr Severne Mackenna in Scotland, and we are grateful to him for its loan. Tom showed us the terrain and the rigours of travel in Nepal, the people and an insight into their way of life. The ritual sacrifice of a goat, beheaded by kukri, made some of our ladies blench. When Tom had been thanked for his film and perspicacious commentary, we proceeded to the plant sale, which raised funds for the Group from plants kindly donated by members.

Next morning, the suggested trip was to Westonbirt Arboretum. Few members took this up, however, and that was fortuitous because the grounds were crowded and much of the autumn colour had been destroyed by two hard frosts. Those who returned to Batsford made the right choice! Thus ended another successful weekend for which Valerie Archibold is very much to be congratulated.

B.A.

Virevas

In the August issue Mr John Bodenham wrote about the culture of Vireyas at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, here he describes his own experience of them at his home near Plymouth, Devon.

Growing Vireyas is for some unclear reason not common anywhere, and it seems to be even less common in the United Kingdom than in other parts of the world. This is strange because they can extend the 'season' to time when ericaceous interest begins to flag. The current major centres of interest in the cult seem to be California and Australia, probably logical in that these regions boast climates where some varieties will survive outside. However, at the turn of the century, the English nurseryman Veitch was the major collection sponsor, grower and hybridiser. Most of his 'babies' have now sadly been lost to cultivation. Vireya material is now far easier to obtain than it was in his day, thanks to ease of access and rapid return of collected specimens. You may well ask, 'Where from?'.

There is a slowly-growing fraternity of Vireya 'buffs' (devotees), and there is a sporadically-published loose-leaf document that occasionally appears on my doormat, called 'Vireya Vine', which keeps everybody in touch: through this, worldwide contacts can be made, and they are one source. (NB/ 'VV' is published by the Rhododendron Species Foundation, PO Box 3798, Federal Way, Washington 98063, USA., and a one-time subscription of \$10.00 US has so far been sufficient for 16

issues which began in 1982).

The American Rhododendron Society and its Seed Exchange Programme is another source. It opens the door not only to Vireyas, but to all other contributed rhododendron seed types, from deciduous and evergreen azaleas to new crosses, open- and self-pollinated species and surplus seed garnered in the wild. The 1988 seed list contained more than 1700 different entries. Your next thought might be, 'I don't have any success with seed anyway'. RUBBISH! If I can grow them, so can you! I will offer my present method to tempt you to try. All rhododendron seed is very fine indeed, and some more so than others. Vireya seed is distinguished by the long tails at both ends, and that tends to make it cling together: care in the actual sowing is therefore the watchword.

I start all my rhododendron seed off in the same way, in clean empty old margarine tubs on a broad north east-facing window sill. First make a hole in each corner of the tub for drainage and ensure that there are two lids for each tub, one for a lid, one for a saucer. The tub is filled to one half-inch below the final lid position with saturated peat moss only lightly compressed, and the tub stood on the sink drainer to drain only the initial surplus moisture. The pack of seed is next opened and a pinch of rooting hormone shaken in with the contents. Next comes the seed sowing, on top of the wet peat moss, and a pencil point is used to redistribute any large clumps that came out stuck together. The seed is not covered with any other soil, sand or anything else. Settle the sown seed by hand-misting it with water. Apply a sticky label to the outside of the tub with details of what has been planted. Close the lid tightly and leave to germinate: this usually takes about two weeks, more or less.

It is advisable to examine the contents from time to time, say every other day or so, and hand-mist again before replacing the lid. My eyesight is failing and I resort to my late dear Father's watchmaker's eye-glass to see whether germination or fungal

growth has occurred. The hand-misting seems to some extent to keep fungi at bay. As germination takes place leave the cover lid loose and as time goes by, begin to rotate the lid relative to the tub to permit entry of more light, and air for ventilation. The lid can be remvoed when the seeds have dropped their sheaths, but keep it by for use as a sunshade if necessary. No heat additional to the room temperature is necessary. This is the point when I begin the 'alfalfa treatment'! What on earth is the 'alfalfa treatment'? I will explain. Buy a bottle of Healthcraft alfalfa tablets from the health food shop and crush two tablets to a powder: put the powder into a half-gallon watering can with a small spout, and stir vigorously to dissolve. The tablets contain an insoluble ingredient which remains as a sediment at the bottom, hence the reason for the spout and the impracticality of application as a spray. Stir before each watering.

What is the reason for this treatment? I can only say that rhododendron seed, and that of Vireyas especially, is slow to produce a plant of any size. I have grown many a batch of seedlings that have still not exceeded an inch in height after three years. I mentioned this problem to a friend in Australia, and he offered the alfalfa treatment as a solution. I can personally vouch that it works for Vireyas. Some sown in 1986 are now a good two inches high and a healthy green. I am told that it works for normal rhododendron seed, too, but my observations suggest that for the best results, the treatment should begin at the tiny cotyledon stage, using the solution every time, and water misting overhead.

So there it is. If I can do it so can you, as I said before. The satisfaction derived from the discovery that it is not as hard as you thought is yours for the trying. Have a go!

John Bodenham

A letter from Trebartha

An entry for Trebartha, a garden near Launceston, in north Cornwall, appears in 'Gardens Open To-day', published in 1987 'to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the National Gardens Scheme'. Mr and Mrs Michael Latham, the owners, wish to diversify the rhododendrons at Trebartha with more representation of species and modern hybrids. They came, at Major Magor's suggestion, on last May's tour of Scottish gardens, to extend their horticultural horizon and to assess the effect in gardens of the species in particular, in the gardens of Dunbarton and Argyll. The Lathams have also responded, in the form of an open letter, to mild persuasion from the editor to describe the history of the estate and its woodland, which share the same characteristics as neighbouring Lanhydrock, Penheale and Werrington Park.

> Trebartha Lodge, North Hill, Launceston, Cornwall PL15 7PD 7th November, 1988

'Dear Patrick.

It is with more than a little perhaps, according to Joan, uncharacteristic diffidence that I respond to your invitation to submit some account of the woodland garden here at Trebartha.

Let me begin by explaining for readers' elucidation that, while Trebartha does not enjoy the climatic advantages of celebrated south Cornwall gardens, the topography and natural landscape do seem to strike visitors as exceptional.

Kathleen Mackenzie, the author and longstanding local resident, summed up the situation as, '. . . a landscape dropping away from the splendid craggy tors of Bodmin Moor through woodlands, cut by a brook falling in boulder-strewn cascades to

rolling, pastoral, well-timbered country'.

The woodlands to which she refers were planted at the beginning of the last century by two landowners with land on either side of the cascades. By all accounts both owners prospered, notably from the mid-century boom in the Cornish mining industry. The plantations, both broadleaved and coniferous, grew quickly in the moist air. The sporting possibilities afforded by the steeply wooded slopes were soon perceived by the now enriched 'big shots', and from the 1820s onwards ponticum was densely planted at the bottom of the woods to provide cover for game.

The River Lynher winds past undulating parkland which had been planted with scattered oak and sweet chestnut as far back as the 1690s. Serious landscape gardening was not under way here until well into the nineteenth century. Gardening always seemed to be subordinate to shooting and, in any event, only profited from

barely a generation of effort. The mining industry in East Cornwall withered in a very short space in the 1880s, which also saw the onset of the long and devastating agricultural depression which was to endure until the Second World War. The whole financial structure of the two adjacent demesnes, merged in 1907, was thus threatened and eroded. Fortunately this was not before a stunning lake, 7000 square yards in extent, had been excavated and riverside walks created in the late Victorian manner. Pathways led from arbour to glade amidst a profusion of rhododendrons and azaleas. Choice American conifers soared. In the years 1918-1939 it seems that little further planting was done, although by all accounts efforts were made to keep the place tidy, within the capabilities of a reduced and unmechanised workforce. In the meantime the owners' interest had switched from downing the edible to chasing the inedible, and professional gardening was restricted to trying to cope with the output of a walled kitchen garden whose dimensions would have sufficed Peter Rabbit.

My family purchased the property in 1940, immediately concentrating on the agricultural and forestry aspects, and compelled to abandon the house, gardens and park to the military. The house, already in a neglected state, was at length done for by the press of British, Italian, German and American enlisted men and in 1947, after protracted arguments over compen-sation had been settled, my father and his brothers realised that they had little choice but to pull the main residence down, while leaving some useable outbuildings in situ. My parents moved into a cottage in the grounds and began to take stock. They were then able to spend only short periods at Trebartha. The financial stringency of the late 1940s determined that priority went to renovating and modernising the dilapidated farm holdings. My father, a rose and blackcurrant man brought up on the heavy clays of Hertfordshire and Essex, was astonished by the unaccustomed spread in June of bright colour round the edges of the lake and up the wooded slopes. Yes, you have guessed correctly! After thirty years of undisturbed growth, the ponticum had well and truly taken over. Many of the Victorian hybrids had reverted but some remained to be rediscovered later. The ponticum had formed vast banks of blossom supported by tangled, sinuous limbs extending for up to sixty feet into the treetops. Seeds had even been borne by the wind up on to Bodmin Moor to form massive and dense thickets there, which, when flowering, provide a purple vista of papal scale visible for several miles.

Pressure on resources had eased by the 1960s, and aided by some knowledgeable friends and a part-time estate worker, my father initiated a programme of containment and tidying up. He liked azaleas for their autumn colour, and began to replant them as space was cleared. In 1968 my parents settled permanently at Trebartha and we took over the erstwhile gardener's lodge for weekend and holiday use: from then on the pace of renovation and replanting quickened. More man-hours became available, and the decision to open three times a year to the public spurred us forward. We had by now joined the Cornwall Garden Society, met some expert plantsmen, and had developed a very warm regard for, and friendship with Walter Magor! Walter proposed attendance on the tour of Argyll, and barely concealed his intention that we should widen our horizons beyond Cornwall and

learn from other Group members!

We returned from Scotland bemused and a little depressed by all that had to be absorbed of this seemingly vast branch of dendrology. Some of our Victorian hybrids were still in flower, while the ponticum discreetly bided its time. Our first and immediate thought was, 'Send for Kenwyn!' We had been impressed on the tour by his scholarly identification and by his tactful tuition. Betty and Kenwyn Clapp live about an hour's drive from Trebartha, and on their most valued visit Kenwyn identified 'Cunningham's White', 'Cynthia' 'Moser's Maroon' and some other aged shrubs. I have appended as a postscript the acquisitions of recent seasons: most have been obtained locally and from Ted Millais, a friend who has been helping my aunt with her personal garden on top of the foundations of the wartime military camp. I wish to emphasize that the present owners' collective wish is for Trebartha to remain essentially a woodland garden. We have cut enclaves in the masses of ponticum to create sheltered glades, now the homes of such specimen trees as Acer palmatum 'Osakazuki' and 'Senkaki', Ginkgo biloba, Liquidambar styraciflua, Liriodendron tulipifera, Pinus griffithii, Podocarpus salignus, Prunus 'Hally Jolivette', Quercus coccinea, Taxodium distichum, and various rowans. The next step is to plant some large-leaved

rhododendron species in the shade of the taller trees, to give contrast in the woods. In this context, the 'wild garden' of Baravalla, similar in terrain and climate, gave us hope and inspiration

May we take this opportunity of extending seasonal good wishes to Pauline and yourself, Mr Editor, and indeed to all members of the Group?

Joan and Michael Lathan PS/ Recent acquisitions: Rhododendrons augustinii campylogynum var. myrtilloides, impeditum, mucronatum, yakushimanum, Alison Johnstone, Baden Baden, Dora Amateis, Elizabeth, Ginny Gee, Gomer Waterer, Lord Roberts, Mrs A. TY. de la Mare, Patty Bee, Romy, Snipe, Tibet.

The tapetiforme tangle

In the summer of 1926 Captain Frank Kingdon Ward was in the valley of the Seinghku river, a remote tributary of the Irrawaddy in the far north of Burma. He collected seeds of dozens of exciting species, including Rhododendrons beanianum, cerasinum 'Cherry Brandy', exasperatum, pruniflorum, seinghkuense, uniflorum var. imperator, recurvoides and vesiculiferum. He describes this exploration in the marvellously readable 'Plant Hunting on the Edge of the World', published in 1930.

It is always interesting to read Kingdon Ward's books with his Field Notes open at your side: the flow may be interrupted, but the dates, descriptions and comments found in the Field Notes are irresistible. Spotting inconsistencies is also fun: thus, the Field Note for KW6923 describes (cerasinum) 'Cherry Brandy', 'Corolla creamy white, with a broad cherry-red band round the summit, including the lobes', but on p.106 in the book the colouring is reversed: 'It had pendent bells of a bright cherry red,

with cream rim'.

When looking at the KW numbers listed in the 1967 Rhododendron Handbook my eye was drawn to KW6960, 'luridum, Ward Ms., 1 ft., violet'. The Field Note describes the flowers of this Lapponicum as being 'delightfully fragrant', and in his book, on p. 124, Kingdon Ward who here calls the plant R. suaveolens, tells how, 'I placed some (flowers) in a tin box, and carried them back to camp. When the box was opened I noticed a sweet perfume, which scented the whole hut.'

I developed a fixation about KW6960! Kingdon Ward discussed the plant, without giving it a specific name, when he addressed the Rhododendron Society in May 1927. In the 1931 Year Book of the Rhododendron Association there appeared for the first time a list of Forest, Rock and Kingdon Ward numbers of rhododendrons known to be in cultivation in the British Isles. The KW numbers were compiled by J. B. Stevenson and verified by Captain Kingdon Ward himself. The gardens known to be germinating KW seed were the RBG., Edinburgh, Bodnant, Caerhays, Exbury and Tower Court. In this list KW6960 has become R. rupicola aff., but the tantalising name 'R. luridum' is given in 1932. In 1933 the Rhododendron Association Year Book confines itself to articles, show reports, etc., and the lists of species, synonyms and collectors' numbers were published separately as a Supplement. Here KW6960 takes a step down to 'R. sp.' In all its grandeur 'R. luridum Ward Ms.' appears in the 1934 Supplement, and is thus reproduced in the Rhododendron Handbooks for 1967 and 1980. From 1934, KS7048 joins KW6960 as 'R. luridum Ward Ms.', though they had not been twinned previously.

In the Rhododendron Year Book of 1947, now in the hardback format so dear and familiar to us, Kingdon Ward refers to the few Lapponicums he found in far northern Burma, '. . . another with dusky purple corollas and bronze stamens - a notable contrast which $\hat{\mathbf{I}}$ called R. luridum, and one with tiny purple flowers which were unexpectedly fragrant' are one and the same plant, I think.

'Enough talk!', I hear you cry, 'Show us the plant!', and indeed, on 18 April 1977 I came across the label with the fabulous legend 'Rh. luridum KW 6960 Assam, Burma' in the dwarfs' enclosure of the Species Collection at Windsor. It stood in front of a plant which one might, in a moment of generosity, call modest. My own 'Field Note' does however record, 'Recent frosts have done a lot of damage', so perhaps it was not at its best. I mean to tackle Mr Bond about the current status of his treasure. It will surprise noone to hear that R. luridum has recently been sunk! Mr Davidian, in his 'Rhododendron Species, vol. 1 Lepidotes', records, 'luridum Ward, nomen nudum = russatum, while Dr Cullen bleakly states '6960 tapetiforme'.

Hugh Dingle

Mr Bond has since written to Hugh with the sad news that this plant is no longer in the Species Collection.

Rhododendron Scales as an aid to identification

by KENWYN CLAPP

(See page 8 of RHODODENDRONS 1988-9 WITH MAGNOLIAS AND CAMELLIAS)

The captions below the photographs of scales opposite page 52 should read as follows:

Top left to right A. tephropeplum B. zaleucum Centre left to right C. campylogynum D. searsiae Below left to right E. glaucophyllum F. fastigiatum

The consequent amendments to the text should be as follows:

Page 9 line 19 amend to Fig. 1C to Fig. 1F Page 9 line 26 amend Fig. 1E to Fig. 1C Page 10 line 2 amend Fig. 1F to Fig. 1E Page 10 line 5 amend Fig. 1F to Fig. 1E Page 10 line 11 amend Fig. 1E to Fig. 1C Page 10 line 27 amend Fig. 1E to Fig. 1C