

# The Royal Horticultural Society

## The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group



**Bulletin No. 64 - April 1997**

### Forthcoming Events

April 19 South East Branch Show, Handcross Park School  
 April 24-27 Harrogate Spring Flower Show, Gt. Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate.  
 April 29 General Committee Meeting, 2.00  
 Annual General Meeting, RHS New Hall 4.30pm

May 7-12 Spring Tour  
 May 9-11 Malvern Show  
 May 30 -  
 June 1 Scotland's Nat. Gardening Show, Strathclyde Country Park.  
 June 11-15 Gardener's World Live, NEC Birmingham.

### Chairman's Notes

This is the last time that I shall be writing notes for the Bulletin and I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved with its production over the past ten years. Generally speaking (and I speak from experience!) it has always been difficult for the Editor to persuade members to contribute but I am delighted to note from this latest issue that this seems to be changing. It is important that members do exchange their experiences - failures are just as important as successes - otherwise how do we learn? The article on Vireyas reminded me that I am hoping to persuade Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh to repeat their excellent display at Vincent Square and to back it up with a lecture. Some years ago John Bodenham gave me a plant of Vireya which I promptly killed by either over-watering it or changing the compost into one which was not fast-draining enough. Wisely he has now given two plants to my wife and these are flourishing!!

I shall not continue as a member of the Group's Executive Committee and I must say that there are very few people to whom I would so happily hand over as to John Bond. In his turn I hope that he appreciates what an excellent team he inherits! I think that the Group now faces a period when new ideas will take it forward much as is happening in the rest of the RHS. A famous gardener once said that once a garden ceases to develop it dies and I am sure that this is the case with the Group.

I shall be writing a full report of the Group's doings over the past year for the AGM and this will be circulated to all members but for now I wish you all farewell and a successful future for the Group.

B.A.

### Secretary's Notes

#### Election of Members to the Executive Committee for a 3-year term of office.

For the first time since I became Hon. Secretary there will be a ballot; there are two places on the Executive Committee and there are four candidates.

I have received nominations for Maurice Foster, who joined the Committee in 1994; Robbie Jack who joined the Committee in 1986 and was Vice-Chairman for two years; and Cicely Perring, who joined the Committee in 1985. Their three year terms of office are over, and they all seek re-election.

I have also received a nomination for Peter Haworth who is Chairman of the Lakeland Branch.

The new Constitution, agreed in April last year after much deliberation, limits the Executive Committee to 14 people, 8 of whom are Officers:

Chairman - . . . . . Bruce Archibold, resigning at this AGM,  
 new Chairman will be John Bond.  
 Vice-Chairman . . . . . Alan Hardy

Hon. Treasurer . . . . . Alastair Stevenson  
 Hon. Secretary . . . . . Joey Warren  
 Hon. Membership Secretary . . . . . Tony Weston  
 Hon. Yearbook Editor . . . . . Lady Cynthia Postan,  
 resigning at this AGM, new Editor will be Philip  
 Evans

Hon. Bulletin Editor . . . . . Eileen Wheeler  
 Hon. Tours Organiser . . . . . Valerie Archibold  
 and 6 Committee members: 4 of whom, Clive Collins,  
 David Farnes, Tom Spring-Smyth and Ivor Stokes,  
 are in the middle of their terms of office.

There are two co-opted Committee members, Rosemary Foster (Publishing) and Brian Wright (Publicity), who are appointed for a year, reviewed annually.

Voting is at the AGM - there is no postal vote. We all hope you will come to the AGM and cast your vote.

J.W.

### Editor's Notes

The Bulletin this time contains two articles on the most tender of Rhododendrons the Vireyas and one from a member in the Liverpool area making life difficult (but obviously satisfying) for himself by collecting and eventually hoping to grow outside Rhododendrons from the *Maddenia* section. I too live in the West but much further South very close to Fishguard and the few *Maddenias* I have so far chanced outside live in the most sheltered parts of my garden where I rush out to fling fleece over them at the merest hint of a winter starlit night. So I await with much interest a sequel in a few season's time telling us how John Harsant's plants survive. Do we all insist on gardening at the very limits of our garden's climate I wonder? It would be nice to hear from members with plants thriving outside that have no right to be doing so well - like the Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum raddianum*) that I very nearly killed indoors but is now into its third year under the low wall in my North-facing front garden and going great guns even keeping its fronds all through last winter.

At the end of this Bulletin you will find a short description of Kenwyn Clapp's "little notebook". One of the perks of being Bulletin Editor is that I got to buy one of the first! Many, many times have I gone running to Kenwyn demanding to know the name of some beautiful specimen and he has got out his notebook with its neat precise hints to arriving at the correct name, the result of many years of informed rhododendron study. I missed you Kenwyn when you were not there, but now at least I have your notes in a fine durable little book to help me along. I can thoroughly recommend this to carry around in the pocket. It is not a comprehensive guide, rather one man's aide-memoir, so some species will not be there - but you will most certainly find lots of interest and value. I wouldn't be without it now.

E.W.



## Photographic Competition

The new Hon. Editor of the Yearbook would like to confirm that it is the intention to maintain the Photographic Competition in the 1998 Yearbook. Members are therefore invited to submit photographs of Rhododendrons, Camellias or Magnolias taken in members' or other private gardens, or in larger more public collections. A small prize is awarded to the winner and the photograph published in the Yearbook. It is requested that a short description of the species or cultivar and the location of the photograph is enclosed, and any other relevant details. Slides or prints are acceptable. Closing date is June 30, 1997.

Please send to: Philip Evans, Painswold, Broad Street, Cuckfield, West Sussex RH17 5LL

## Membership Secretary's Notes

### Alterations to Membership List

At the foot of the changes of address distributed with Bulletin No. 63 (December 1996) an entry appeared in respect of Miss S.J. Sparrow. I am unable to explain how this occurred but in any case it is totally incorrect. Miss Sparrow's address etc is still as shown in the Membership List of July 1996. I cannot blame the computer for there is great truth in the saying "Garbage in, garbage out". My apologies too to the member whose address was wrongly attributed to Miss Sparrow - his wife must have been wondering "What next?"!

We are pleased to welcome the following new members since the last up-date of the membership list:

Mr. John Bourke, Marino Institute of Education,  
Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9, Eire.

Mr. Cyril E. Hall, The Hermitage, Rushbrooke, COBH,  
Co. Cork Eire

Mr. T.C. Jones, 4, Eastwood Mews, Old Catton, Norwich

Mrs. Rose-Marie Punch, Kilroan, Glanmire, Co. Cork, Eire

Mr. Charles MacG. M. Scott, Woburn Lodge, Millisle,

Newtownards, N. Ireland

In particular it is gratifying to note that three out of the five new members are from the Republic of Ireland, thanks to the efforts of the new Branch Chairman (elect), Fritz Vogel. I am told that there are two or three more in the pipeline.

The seed exchange scheme has proved very popular, orders having been received from 121 members who between them have received over 2600 packets of seed. This represents 75% of the packets ordered which goes to show that if more members sent in seed the scheme would be even more attractive to the membership and incidentally more profitable to the Group. Particular credit for the success of the scheme must undoubtedly go to Alan Clark who as a result of his stupendous efforts not only in collecting all this seed from the remote mountains of Yunnan in China but for the hours spent in extracting and cleaning seed and sending it to me ready to be broken down into small packets. I would like to assure those members who did not receive all the seed they wanted that the orders were date-stamped on receipt and dealt with in strict rotation. The only exception was where more than one collection number of a given species was ordered and where I felt that there would be insufficient to meet the final demand.

## News and Forthcoming Events from the Branches

### Wessex Branch

After 11 years as Branch Chairman, Lady Adam Gordon retired at the end of 1996 although she will remain on the Branch Committee. Our new Chairman is Mrs. Miranda Gunn. At our meeting on 29 November, Mrs. Gunn reminded us of Lady Adam's work and achievements in the world of Rhododendrons and, on behalf of the Branch, presented her with a framed illuminated inscription, a *Liquidambar* tree and a cheque. Lady Adam has used the cheque to purchase a new garden seat and is having it suitably engraved. She has expressed her gratitude to us all.

The Scottish Rhododendron Society will be visiting gardens in the South of England in April. They will visit Lady Adam Gordon's garden at Hethersett on Sunday, 27 April at 9.30a.m. Any Wessex Branch Members who are *not* members of the SRS and who would like to come that morning will be *most* welcome.

Please let Lady Adam know if you plan to attend. (Tel. 01252 782054)

Saturday, 12 April, 1997, 2p.m. By kind invitation of Mr. & Mrs. Maurice Foster, the Branch will visit the garden at White House Farm, Ivy Hatch, Sevenoaks. This is a veritable plantsman's paradise with something for all members. Please notify the Branch Hon Treasurer at least one week in advance if you wish to attend.

Sunday, 4 May, 1997 - Annual Competition. By kind invitation of Mr. & Mrs. Michael Jurgens, this will be held at The Old House, Silchester, Reading. Mr. John Bond MVO, VMH has kindly agreed to judge our competition again. Mr. & Mrs. Jurgens have invited members to bring their picnic lunches so that they may wander round their beautiful garden or visit the Roman town next door before the show.

### South East Branch

I am happy to say that we shall be able to repeat last year's highly successful Show; it will take place at Handcross Park School on 19 April. and we do hope that it will prove as enjoyable as last year and that as many members as possible will take part or attend. Members from other Branches will be most welcome.

Although the show will be run along the same lines as last year, we must first of all say how pleased we are to have attracted Phostrogen (who were recently acquired by Solaris, the gardening arm of the American multi-national Monsanto) as sponsors.

The show also has the support of the Royal Horticultural Society's Shows Department who, as well as kindly loaning various show items, will also provide an engraved Banksian medal which will be awarded for the show's best Rhododendron.

Special awards will also be made by the ICS and Phostrogen for the best Camellia and the best Magnolia and prizes will be presented to all 22 class winners.

Entry is free and anyone wishing to take part or visit the show should contact Brian Wright on 01892 653207 as early as possible.

Many of you will remember a memorable visit to Sandling Park quite a few years ago. I am delighted to say that Alan Hardy has kindly agreed to have us once again on Saturday 24 May. Sandling Park is shown on most maps and is just off Junction 11 of the M20.

### Scottish Branch

Scotland's National Gardening Show - the Group will have an Exhibit and Sales area in the Floral Marquee 4. If anyone can help, for however small a time on the stand, or would like to have their exhibits on the Stand, will they please call Tessa, Fax and telephone 01581 400222 I am looking forward to meeting many members of the Group and hope to enroll new members. Seeds and plants will be for sale.

### Norfolk Branch

The new Norfolk Branch will have its opening meeting on Saturday 17 May. A visit is planned to Sheringham Park, owned by the National Trust, and reckoned to be one of their top ten Rhododendron gardens. Sheringham Park, on the North Norfolk coast, is remarkable for its situation, (there is nothing between it and the North Pole!) - and its low rainfall, averaging only about 22 inches a year.

Planting at Sheringham probably started in the 1840s. There are some large *Rhododendron arboreum* which probably date from then. For many years the garden belonged to the Upcher family. Writing in the Yearbook for 1951-2 Thomas Upcher reckoned there were over 60 species in the garden, some grown from seed from Wilson's Veichian expeditions in the early years of this century. Since the National Trust took over in 1987 some 50 or so of these species have been identified. Dr. James Cullen of the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust, and Archie Skinner, along with others, are working to establish a complete list. There are many fine hybrids, as well as some unusual Camellias and Magnolias which are enjoyed by thousands of visitors in the season, who come to see what this outpost of the Rhododendron empire can offer.

### Peak District Branch

Garden visits and events for 1997 have been arranged, in accordance with the wishes of members at last year's inaugural



meeting, when it was decided to visit different parts of the region to give everyone the chance of attending events near to their homes. It is hoped that all Branch members will join their colleagues on at least one occasion this Spring. However any member of the Group will be most welcome to join us from anywhere in the country - please contact the Branch Chairman, David Farnes beforehand. (01246 272105)

April 15/16 The Branch is sponsoring and assisting with a display and exhibition in conjunction with the RHS Show at Westminster, probably in the Old Hall. This will provide publicity for the Group as a whole and it is hoped that members will find time to visit; please introduce yourselves if you do.

May 4, Sunday. Two garden visits have been arranged in the Leicester Loughborough area - both of which feature all three genera which make up our title. This will be an all-day event.

May 18, Sunday Morning visit to Dunge Valley Gardens, nr. Whaley Bridge in the High Peak. This garden and especially the nurseries have expanded considerably since the visit of the Group in 1995.

May 21, Wednesday A mid-week visit to suit those who find a weekend event difficult to attend and also by popular request to see plants in flower at Wentworth Castle Gardens where an Autumn meeting was held last October, jointly with the Friends of Wentworth Castle.

All Branch members will have received detailed arrangements of the above listed events - others please request them as above by 'phone. As usual, the spouses of members will be most welcome at all events.

## Vireya Rhododendrons

It's surprising that more rhododendron fanciers in the U.K. have not been seduced by Vireyas. I manage the Vireya section of the seed exchange of the American Rhododendron Society and each year fill very few U.K. requests. This is unfortunate as we have always been able to produce quite a diverse list and there has always been excess seed available for the asking. The purpose of this article is to call attention to members of the Group, to the availability of such seed.

The Vireya collections at Edinburgh, Kew, the late Maurice Mason's collection at Fincham in Norfolk, Savill Gardens and the newly installed collection at Glasnevin, all display the diversity and beauty of these plants to the public thus bringing them closer to horticultural recognition. Further impetus has been given by recent collections from Borneo, New Guinea, Viet Nam and the Philippines, and by articles appearing in various publications - not the least the contribution by George Argent, taxonomist at RBG Edinburgh, in 'The Rhododendron Story'. Interest seems to be growing.

Outside of the U.K. interest has been more widespread, particularly in Australia and New Zealand, and increasingly in the United States. In Australia John Rouse has long been the focus of Vireya activity and the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust in New Zealand under the leadership of Graham Smith maintains a major collection. Both of them for many years have been important contributors to the Vireya seed exchange.

In the United States the Rhododendron Species Foundation located near Seattle has increased its distribution of documented species and several cities in California are developing public Vireya displays. There is also a fine collection under glass in Bremen, Germany. A German member of the RCM Group, Erhard Moser, regularly receives seed and has written a comprehensive article with excellent colour appearing in the December 1995 issue of 'Garten Praxis'.

In support of this apparent renaissance in Vireya culture I would like to invite members of the Group to try a few Vireyas from seed. Because of the difficulties in exporting and importing living plant material, seed is often the only way to build a collection. Although in theory one should belong to the American Rhododendron Society in order to receive our seed I will assemble a special list for non-ARS members. Species seed especially wild collected is always in short supply but hybrid crosses are generally available. The bonus is that hybrid seed is often more vigorous and thus grows to a more useful stature (and blooms) in a shorter time.

Vireya seed has a reputation for being 'difficult'; perhaps a better word might be 'challenging'. It has nominally a short shelf life, but all seed is stored in the freezer and two and three

year old seed is regularly germinated. Of course there can be no guarantees, but seed is free! Why not have a go?

We do ask for a couple of International Reply Coupons to cover postage and a couple more will get you (if you wish) a four-page guide to growing Vireyas from seed produced as a result of many years of practice. Write or e-mail me for a list of what's available. It may be a short list, but there is always something nice to try. I should say that all of you are encouraged to join the American Rhododendron Society. It publishes a fine journal, and an extensive seed list covering the whole genus.

Of course Vireyas must be grown under protection from frost, but they adapt well to the cool winter greenhouse and as long as temperatures do not drop below freezing for long they will survive quite nicely. They adapt quite well to winter temperatures in the 30's and 40's.(F) You do not need a 'tropical' greenhouse.

All requests for the list and seed should come direct to me. I will also try to answer questions regarding overseas collections.

Bill Moyles, 4243 Norton Avenue, Oakland, CA 94602, USA  
e-mail: wmoyles@surf.com

## Addendum from John Bodenham to the letter above:-

Bill Moyles is a newly joined member of the Group. He and I have had two or three goes to put an article together that we both find acceptable, however in this final version which he has sent to me (for passing on to the Bulletin Editor) I am afraid I do not yet have the courage to accept his stated temperature regime as regards the lower figure. He, though, is adamant yet it does not coincide with the regimes practised at either Kew or Edinburgh, or indeed by myself.

I try to keep a minimum of 45F for mature plants at which level all seems well. My feelings are that problems may well arise at lower temperatures than that, which, even if not quite fatal, may well give rise to a significant set-back. Not enough experience of the performance of Vireyas at temperatures close to freezing has yet been attained, due mainly to the lack of sufficient material in quantity to be able to take the chance of losing it.

It may also be possible that temperatures closer to 32F may be acceptable if the average temperatures are considerably higher on the same day, thus creating a reasonable average. Such may well be the case in Oakland where some Vireyas will indeed survive outside, thus giving rise to an impression which may not be applicable to this country where there is less winter light level in general, and cold days where the overnight temperature and daytime averages could be well below freezing.

Also we can have a very significant wind-chill effect which needs to be taken into account. I think that for beginners it would be very dangerous to assume any sort of hardiness, especially when starting with seed and its propagation. Vireya seed is quite difficult enough without expecting it to be hardy as well. I might be tempted to try Vireyas out of doors if I lived in the Scilly Isles, but not, I think elsewhere in the UK. Of course I would welcome being found to be wrong in this regard!

Should any reader have any experience, please contact me. My guess is that success outdoors might be possible in locations where the most tender *Maddenii* will survive and indeed grow well with no protection at all. In my own case, although living within a mile or so of the coast, quite a few *Maddenias* survive but others die. I thus have little anticipation that Vireyas will be hardy here.

Should any members wish to try their hand at these fascinating plants, I will be very happy to try to answer cultural questions. Write, 'phone or arrange a personal visit to me when in my area.

John Bodenham, Hunters Lodge, Wembury Road, Wembury, Plymouth PL9 0DL, Tel. 01752 862584

## Subsection *Maddenia* in the North West

Over the last 25 years I have established as large a representation of Rhododendrons as my 3/4 acre garden would permit. Some five years ago the realisation came to me that I could never grow more than a representative sample of the genus and that the best I could manage would be to specialise on one or two sections. Having taken the advice of Ken Hulme,



I established a collection of *Maddenia*. This has largely been achieved by buying Cox's list, but seedlings from Ian Wilson have helped. Whilst it can still be improved I believe I have plants of all species within the sections known to cultivation.

Whilst this in itself is not particularly remarkable, it has attracted some welcome consequences. In 1994 Edmund Riding had seedlings of *crassum* and *nuttallii* in need of "bed and breakfast" which I supplied. These enabled me to distribute plants as a gift to all members of the North West Branch at a recent meeting. Whilst I know that they will have good homes the pleasure is in the giving. Bill Groves came to me with a branch from his *calophytum*. This resulted in ten more plants which are now, or will be in a year, available for distribution. If anyone reading this wants some, please ask me.

The focus of the North West Branch is Ness Gardens from where I have received much support. It was a surprise and delight to find Janet Cubey engaged in research into *Maddenia* and this is raising the profile of the Subsection at the Gardens considerably. Janet's research involves both the Subsections of *Maddenia* and *Saluenensia* and includes chromosome counts in an attempt to clarify the classification of these Subsections. I hope that one day we will learn more from her about her work.

At present my plants are young and I am able to overwinter them in my existing greenhouse, while planting their clay pots in peat beds in the summer. This will not last and I am looking for a more permanent arrangement. Whilst not yet specified, I am thinking of a frost free shelter in winter which can be taken down in summer. Perhaps the type of house built on a frame to take individual Dutch Lights might be the solution.

One objective is to confirm the hardiness of the individual species in our rather favoured climate. If I have any significant results I will report on them in due course.

The decision to specialise on a section of the genus, within a more general collection has proved most worthwhile and I have little doubt that further benefits will emerge. I am particularly pleased to find a way of "doing my thing" in a manner which attracts support from professionals at Ness. Support for which I am most grateful.

John Harsant

## Some Species Rhododendrons A Field Guide to Their Identification

Many group members who have joined the annual tour in recent years will remember Kenwyn Clapp referring to a note book he has compiled to help him in identifying some species of rhododendrons. Several members have expressed a wish to have a copy of these notes and our member, John Bodenham, has very kindly printed them on his computer and is willing to make a limited number of copies available for other group members. Neither Kenwyn nor John require payment for this other than reimbursement for the cost of materials, postage and packing. The price is £10 inclusive. If there should be a small balance over, they are quite content that it should be retained by the group.

The Field Guide is size 5 1/2" x 4" and 1" thick, handy pocket size for use in the field(garden), printed on stiff paper, subdivided by alphabetical dividers, cover colour red.

Copies may be obtained from the group secretary, Mrs. Joey Warren, Netherton, Buckland Monachorum, Yelverton, Devon PL20 7NL, phone 01822 854022, to whom cheques should be made payable.

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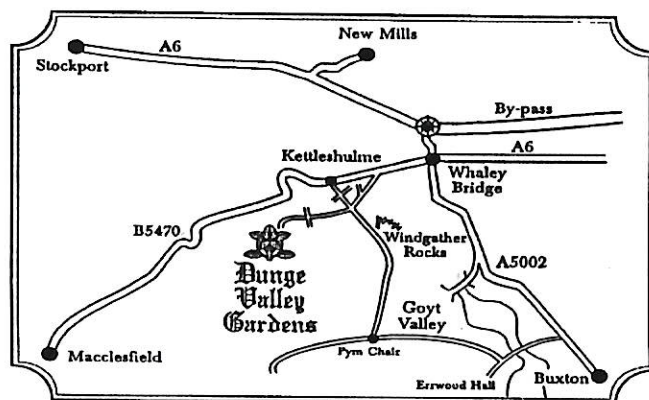
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