

# The Royal Horticultural Society

## The Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group



Bulletin 71 - August 1999

### Forthcoming Events

22-25 October Group Autumn Weekend, Harrogate

3 November Executive Committee Meeting, 2.00 pm  
New Hall Westminster

### Chairman's Notes

I have visited three historical rhododendron gardens during this past spring and as you would expect I was confronted with seemingly acres of *Rhododendron ponticum*. In one case these really were acres.

Whilst observing these great plantings I allowed my thoughts to return to the time before *R. ponticum* was in cultivation and I considered the excitement that must have occurred when it did arrive in, we are reliably informed, 1763. Until that date the two Alpen Roses and one or two deciduous azalea species from Eastern North America were in cultivation so our "friend" would have been the first rhododendron with a large truss. No doubt the nurserymen of the day soon discovered how easy it was to propagate from seed and many thousands would have been produced comparatively quickly for ornamental use and for hedging, screening and shelterbelts. The use for shelter explains why *R. ponticum* is frequently found in remote areas away from gardens. There is, however, another use which caused landowners to plant it away from garden areas, this is for game cover, and there is no doubt that the species provides the pheasant with a warm and safe haven.

*Rhododendron ponticum* grows wild in the harsh exposed mountains of Asia Minor and that is why it has found such a happy home here and why it has become such a problem here for the landowner, particularly in the western milder wetter third of the British Isles where it seeds so prolifically. It also advances at a remarkable rate by layers when it makes use of hardwood leaf which it traps in its lower branches; when this rots to good leaf mould a perfect medium is provided for a built-in layer bed.

In horticultural history there is one more sad story to tell concerning *R. ponticum*. From 1820 onwards when the Himalayan species, *R. griffithianum*, *R. arboreum* and others joined *R. ponticum* and *R. catawbiense* in our gardens, nurserymen soon realised how easy it was to produce hybrids from these few species. So the legions of lovely old hardy hybrids took the stage but in the main they would not root from cuttings and layering was too slow so grafting had to be resorted to. So where did the grower look for a stock? To our good friend *R. ponticum* of course. Why, it had vigour from its excellent root system, and most of all it was easy to raise by the thousands (if not millions) required, in addition it was compatible with everything.

A really "good egg", well no, for it was prone to suckering and those suckers soon took over if not removed. Sadly, even the professional gardener seemed unable to deal with this matter and then of course there

were wars and recessions which caused many gardens to fail and the result is that many plantings became a sea of *R. ponticum* instead of those lovely hybrids.

Altogether a sad tale of woe but please make the situation clear to your knowledgeable friends for the media only get as far as rhododendron when reporting this matter which is bad news for the thousands of lovely members of our beloved genus.

On a happier note I consider the woodland garden has had a good spring and early summer, although as I write (12 July) rhododendrons are almost over, with the exception of the huge *R. "Polar Bear"* in the Savill and the Valley Gardens which are now in full flower.

John Bond

### Editor's Notes

To my great pleasure I have several contributions for this issue from members around the country. From the achievements of a seed raiser (impressive), thoughts on the classification of rhododendrons, and reflections on an early hybrid, they all have something they wish to share. I would love to have more, so try putting down your hoe for a while and pick up a pen and write to me! Also please read the International Branch notes and let us have comments on the idea of an overseas tour.

Most of you will have seen the notice in "The Garden" telling of the closure and move whilst the new Library at Vincent Square is constructed. For the benefit of those members who did not see this, it appears in the June issue on page 406.

E. Wheeler

### Obituary - Gerald Pinkney

The rhododendron world has lost another stalwart, Gerald Pinkney, who died in early May aged 94. Gerald was Managing Director of Waterer Sons & Crisp of Bagshot from 1933 until the company was acquired by Notcutts in the late 1970's.

Waterers were always at the helm of the rhododendron field, particularly hardy hybrids and under Gerald's leadership produced the first *R. yakushmanum* hybrids such as 'Dopey', 'Doc', 'Golden Torch', 'Percy Wiseman' and many more. He was a member of the Royal Horticultural Society's Rhododendron Committee from 1933 until 1985.



## Autumn Weekend

Following the success of our Spring Tour, your Committee has again invited **BOXWOOD TOURS**, Rhiw, Llanbedr, Gwynedd LL45 2NT. Tel. 01341 241 717, Fax 01341 2411 7122. e-mail boxwood@clara.net to organise our Autumn tour, which will be based in Harrogate from 22-25 October. All enquiries to Boxwood please.

We shall travel to Harrogate on the 22nd, spend the whole day at Castle Howard on the 23rd, and on the 24th a half-day at Harlow Carr Gardens, and the other half-day at Thorp Perrow Arboretum; we leave Harrogate on the 25th.

The extensive rhododendron woodland at Castle Howard, Ray Wood, is quite outstanding, in fact I rate it as the finest rhododendron woodland planting in Britain, if not the temperate regions of the world. I made a return visit during late Summer 1998 and was enthralled by the content, and the condition of the plants. Most of the rhododendron species, of which there are many, are from authentic wild collectings, as are most of the great range of companion plants.

If we have time and strength we can visit the new and again very extensive arboretum later, or others may be happy to visit the Castle and the gardens near the Castle, and also enjoy the outstanding views of the Yorkshire landscape.

Harlow Carr is the garden of the Northern Horticultural Society, where a wide range of horticulture is practised and yes, there are some rhododendrons.

Thorp Perrow Arboretum lies a short distance north of Harrogate near Ripon and is privately owned. This has been planted and developed over the past 70 years from stock supplied mainly by Hilliers, and now contains an extensive range of good, choice and rare trees.

I do hope you will decide to join us, I shall look forward to meeting you and leading you on the various forays described above.

Any members living locally who would like to join on a daily basis will be very welcome, but please register your intention to come so we will know how many to expect.

*John Bond, Chairman*

**P.S. —There are numerous through trains from all corners of Britain to York, and there is a frequent sprinter service for the short journey from York to Harrogate.**

## Thoughts whilst chopping wood...

A few months ago I sent out with the Bulletin my representation of the latest "Rhododendron Family Tree" in chart form, as derived from the RHS Publication "The Rhododendron Handbook, 1998". Apart from one or two members who did not receive a copy there has subsequently been a deafening silence. The technical content seems to have been accepted without question. Are you, the membership, therefore willing to accept this as your current "bible"? Surely somebody out there has something to say? For example, where did the word "Azalea" go? In the 1980 Handbook we were informed that Azalea Series had not yet been revised. Are you happy that it has now been "revised" out of existence? I, for one, am not.

I think of "genus rhododendron" principally in terms of elepidotes and lepidotes, but then in the general terms of "non-scaley rhododendrons", "azaleas", "lepidotes", and "vireyas", all of which subdivisions are more or less difficult to inter-cross, and must therefore be significantly genetically dissimilar. The idea of *lutea* being a "Pentanthera", *molle* being a "Sinensia", *vaseyi* being a "Rhodora", etc. hardly bears thinking about, unless they can overall be classified "Azaleas" Surely they should, and if not, then some erudite explanation should be forthcoming, and in these pages where the Membership can see?

My personal logic would expect the genus Rhododendron to more closely follow my above thoughts, i.e. that the Sub-Genera names should perhaps be "Rhododendra" (for elepidotes now classified Sub-Genus "Hymenanthus") "Azalea", "Rhododendron" and "Vireya":

Under Sub-Genus "Rhododendra" the major Section name would logically then be "Hymenanthus".

Under Sub-Genus "Azalea" the Section names would I suppose be "Pentanthera", "Rhodora", "Sciadorhodon", "Sinensia", "Viscidula", "Brachycalyx" and "Tsutsusi".

Under Sub-Genus "Rhododendron" the Section names would be "Pogonanthum" and "Rhododendron" and

Under Sub-Genus "Vireya" would be Section "Vireya" alone, (if any specific Section was actually necessary). The more unusual candidates would, as usual, be argued about by the knowledgeable and eventually found homes, but the major part of the tree would thus be, horticulturally at least, more acceptable/logical. Is this idea too radical? At least the names of the major Sub-Genera would more easily stick in the mind.

I suspect the definitive answer will eventually lie in DNA testing, and I hope such research happens soon and is published within my lifetime. Will we then discover whether the ordered Sleumer classifications of Genus, Sub-Genus, Section, Sub-Section, Species, Sub-Species, and Variety are eventually sufficiently versatile to cover all the genetic connections found? Will we learn whether the scales on vireyas are truly related to other lepidote scales or might they turn out to be modified hairs from a distant elepidote ancestry? Only time will tell.

Might I lastly suggest that none of the new sub-genus/section names has any pzazz. They simply will not catch on in the trade. Come on, Membership, what do you think?

One crumb of comfort remains in all this; when faced with the knotty problem of rhododendron identification, any prize *sinogrande*, *fortunei*, *rex*, s.sp. *fictolactum* or *falconeri* could be called by its authentic Section name, "Ponticum", but keep it to yourself. You just might get lynched.

*J. Bodenham.*





## A Very Early Rhododendron Hybrid

Writing in 1878, J. H. Mangles bemoaned the fact that the more desirable Himalayan rhododendrons were too tender for cultivation out of doors in his garden at Haslemere in Surrey.

In one winter Mangles apparently lost *R. dalhousiae*, *R. maddenii* and no less than ten *R. nuttallii*, besides *R. griffithianum* (which he knew under the Hooker name of *R. aucklandii*).

Whilst those of us gardening in kinder UK climates would hesitate to plant out any of the first three, *R. griffithianum* survives and flowers well in western gardens, but most of the great gardens in such areas stem from early this century, with the exception of some in Cornwall, one at Lanovan cultivating *R. griffithianum* outdoors.

Blaming the effects of late frost on early growth, Mangles suggested trying the rather unusual and labour intensive practice of lifting and thus checking the plants in early spring. Personally I hate to think of the overall detrimental effect, especially if one is gardening with a meagre top soil and dry springs are the order of the day.

Mangles concludes his article with a plea for hardier hybrids from *R. griffithianum*, mentioning crosses with *R. arboreum* and *R. thomsonii* as possibilities for the future.

Shortly after his death, Messrs. Veitch registered and showed *R. catawbiense* x *griffithianum* which gained the coveted F.C.C., naming it *R. "Manglesii"* in honour of J.H. Mangles but where is that rhododendron now? Not to be found in trade lists, it does not feature in the excellent "Encyclopaedia of Rhododendron Hybrids" by Peter and Kenneth Cox and we are left to ponder the garden value of this tribute to an outstanding horticulturist of yesteryear.

Geoffrey Taylor

## Rhododendrons from Seed

Year 2000 Seed Distribution. The list which comes to you in January will not include seed received by me before 1 December (and this includes seed collected in the wild in the autumn of 1999 unless I receive notification that I may expect it by 31st January). This will not only enable me to prepare the Seed List in time for it to go out with the Yearbook but I shall also be able to deal with orders as they come in instead of having to wait for the 1999 seed to be cleaned.

This will, of course, mean that the next list will be roughly along the lines of the last with a few additions and a number of deletions, but the bulk of the 1999 seed will be kept refrigerated and included in the 2001 list.

I still have ample stocks of the seed which was included in the last list and I feel sure that there are many species which you will still wish to order. Whilst the 1996 seed should still be viable, having been kept refrigerated, I shall be offering this at 50p. a packet, provided you order £10 worth of seed from later years.

Orders will be dealt with in strict order of receipt but must be received by me before 31 March. (This year I was still receiving orders in July!)

I recently received some seed from a friend of a member living in South Africa which may be of interest to some of you living in warmer climes than ours in Europe. If so, I

will gladly send a packet on hearing from you. They are: *Streptocarpus cyaneus*, from E. Transvaal and *Streptocarpus gardenii*, from Natal. They are both open pollinated from wild-collected plants. They could of course, be grown on your window ledge.

**This is an extract from a letter written to me by D. G. Morgans who gardens at Radyr, Cardiff:**

"This is my fourth year of ordering seeds and I have had very good results, some of which I will mention, just for the sake of interest.

*R. scabrifolium* var. *spiciferum*. Sown 17.2.96. First plant flowered April '98

*R. spinuliferum*. Sown 17.2.96. First plant flowered 19.3.98

*R. heliolepis* var. *fumidum*. Sown 17.2.96. First plant flowered June '98

*R. oreotrephes*. Sown 17.2.96 First plant (already over 3' tall) flowered 4.4.99

*R. augustinii*. Sown 1997. 152 plants raised, although I have now reduced them somewhat.

*R. irroratum* var. *ningyuense*. Sown 1996, has proved hardy despite what the various books say."

Tony Weston

## NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

Please note that Martin Gates, Committee Member, is now the Branch Organiser, a job which Tony Weston has done so well hitherto. Our Chairman was very pleased to accept this offer from Martin, who will be contacting Branch Chairmen in due course.

One new function envisaged is to list dates of all Branch meetings, etc., and those of other Societies, to enable joining-in with, and avoid clashing with, each others' events.

Joey Warren

## New Forest Branch

### The Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum

The Gardens were founded and planted by the late Sir Harold Hillier between 1953 and 1977 when they were given to Hampshire County Council. Since that date the Gardens have continued to develop, and now extend to over 160 acres.

The Gardens contain 42,000 plants, including a collection of over 2,000 rhododendrons, the majority of which grow in a separate area known as Brentry, which is a natural area of woodland, on a light, loamy and acidic Bagshot sand. There is an extensive collection of hybrid rhododendrons, together with a smaller number of species.

It is not surprising that in such an extensive collection a proportion of the plants are unnamed. A comprehensive catalogue of plants is maintained on a computer and referenced to localities on the ground. It was arranged that our chairman would pay a number of visits in the spring to attempt to identify plants which were not labelled. He was joined by various members of the New Forest Branch and we were fortunate to obtain the assistance of two former employees of Hillier Nurseries who had worked in the area when it belonged to the Nursery.



Three visits were made to the Gardens, one in April and two in May. We were accompanied by Allen Coombes, the botanist, who was invaluable for his knowledge of the localities and his ability to relate the plants on the ground to the computer list. We were able to identify a useful number of plants which were not labelled, but more work remains to be done, and it is planned to make more visits next year.

It was apparent that the Gardens contain a fine collection of hybrids, and the following plants were notable: Alice, Arthur Stevens, Cinnkeys, David, Decsoul, Hawk Crest, Leo, numerous Loderi, various Naomi, Seven Stars and Susan. It should not be inferred that species are neglected and we noted *argyrophyllum* ssp *nankingense*, *cinnabarinum*, *fortunei*, *griffithianum*, *mallotum*, *niveum*, *oreotrephes*, *pseudochrysanthum*, *rex* and *sherriffii*. It is also apparent that there is much work to be done to maintain the collection, and to this end the branch has agreed to provide volunteers to assist with light work on a regular basis.

The Gardens are situated three miles north-east of Romsey, and are sign posted from the A31 Romsey to Winchester road.

Martin Gates

## Norfolk Branch

Twenty of us visited Stody Lodge Garden, courtesy of Mrs A. MacNicol, on a sunny afternoon in mid-May, and were charmed by the beautiful display of rhododendrons and azaleas, in this immaculately kept private garden. There had been some frost damage in the Water Garden, but the overall effect of soft azalea colour, interspersed with some good Japanese maples, was quite delightful.

At the end of the month a group of members looked round the Wild Garden at Sheringham Park, in the company of John Bond. It was warm and sunny, a good day on which to appreciate the splendid canopy of mainly oak and pine, which makes the cultivation of rhododendrons and associated plants possible on this cool, dry area of the North Norfolk coast. There were some surprises: some truly huge plants of *R. decorum*, which must date back to Wilson's time. (It is on record that seed was given to Mr H. M. Upcher, the then owner of the property, from Wilson's Veitchian expeditions in the early years of this century), and some hybrid pieris of an age and size that must predate the 1950 Sunningdale hybridisation. There are many varieties of magnolia to see, including *M. tripetala*, *hypoleuca*, *campbellii*, *soulangeana*, *wilsonii*, *salicifolia*, *sieboldii*, *sprengeri* and *globosa*. It was a pleasure to have John's knowledge and expertise at our disposal. "The most enjoyable and informative meeting we've had so far", was one member's verdict.

Jane Idiens

## Wessex Branch

We opened our Summer season with a May visit to Borde Hill in Sussex. This followed a talk in February by the ex-head gardener Brian Dow. The reality was well up to his splendid slides. Much of the garden was planted at the end of the last century so it was not surprising that it was the size and maturity of the rhododendrons and camellias that impressed. The collection is comprehensive, with a particular emphasis on species. But of course the Borde Hill raised Camellias "Donation" and "Salutation"

were wonderful. Perhaps surprisingly, in view of the age of the collection, was the way the yellows and flames were segregated from the pinks and reds, which you don't always get.

In spite of the magnificence of the rhododendrons, to many of us the stars of the collection were the summer flowering magnolias. These looked almost as big as mature beech trees. *Magnolia hypoleuca* was hugely impressive but the far less common *M. fraseri* caught the eye. Perhaps too shy flowering for general planting, its large star-shaped white flowers were beautiful nonetheless. From such a huge tree, the scent was almost overpowering, a touch of Germolene, some of us thought, but quite magical.

Now run by a trust, it has to be said that Borde Hill looks better than some years' ago, when it seemed to struggle. Things are better cared for and there is some innovative and attractive new planting by Robin Williams. Not least, there is a very good plant centre run by Bressinghams, although sadly rhododendrons and magnolias are not well represented.

The first flower has appeared in the Group hardy hybrid collection, on 'David' with 'Elspeth' and 'Unique' not far behind. Sadly they were all frosted, but lots more buds to come. Graham Rankin has moved to Wales, so I am acting as Secretary until we appoint a new Hon. Sec. in July.

Miranda Gunn

## Events planned for the autumn so far are:

8 October — Talk by David Farnes on  
Plant Hunting In China

20 November—Paul Martin on Exbury Gardens

## Report on Wessex Branch Show.

Once again we were privileged to be invited to hold our annual competition this year in the beautiful surroundings of Ramster. John Bond kindly judged our efforts and was most complimentary as to the standard of the exhibits. Although there were only nine exhibitors the number of entries in all the nine classes was in excess of ninety.

In the past hybrids seemed to rule the roost and even though this year, as usual, they formed the bulk of the exhibits, it was not to be their day this time when it came to the Best Exhibit in Show. It was a pleasant change to see the truss of *R. insigne* in Class 1 for elepidote species shown by Mr Clarke-Hall win the cup. The Kathleen Beadle Shield awarded to the exhibitor gaining most points in all classes was a close run contest. Miranda Gunn was a narrow winner over second placed Richard Barber - a just reward for all her efforts on our behalf.

Probably the most interesting exhibit was not a rhododendron at all but an entry in Class 9 for any other flowering tree or shrub. This was *Salix pentandra* shown by Rod Wild and collected by John Whitehead (seed) in Iceland.

Thanks were expressed to John Bond for once again giving up his valuable time, to Mr & Mrs Paul Gunn for their hospitality and to all who took part.

Richard Thornton



## South West Branch

We have held two separate days of garden visits. On March 21 we went to Cornwall. At Porthpean, St. Austell, we looked at Mrs Charlotte Petherick's garden of camellias. Earlier in the week she had done very well in the prize list at the Camellia Show at Vincent Square. We were able to confirm the high quality of her plants. The garden is on a cliff top and much use is made of windbreaks. In the afternoon we visited Trehane, near Truro. Jennifer Trehane enthusiastically showed us around the garden which is packed with plants, especially camellias.

On 24 April, in the morning, we called at Greenways, Churston Ferrers, at the invitation of Mr and Mrs A Hicks. Roger Clark, the Head Gardener, took us around the extensive woodland garden. He is still finding space for more planting. After lunch, having crossed the Dart by ferry, we were shown round Fast Rabbit Farm, Ash Cross, Dartmouth, by Alan Mort. He is developing a large coombe with a big variety of genera especially with those plants that this Group encourages.

The Autumn meeting will be on November 6 at Rosemoor. Details will be sent to Branch members in late summer.

*Alun Edwards*

## Peak District Branch

A day of garden visits for Branch members and their friends/guests/relatives was held on Saturday May 8th in the Derby area. Four gardens were visited in somewhat uncertain weather conditions with rain really only spoiling our enjoyment towards the end of the day but most of us stayed the course and enjoyed the usual camaraderie that pertains on these occasions. We gathered at Kedleston Hall a National Trust property situated in magnificent parkland with a river and lakes. We were too early for the flowering of the great many hardy hybrid rhododendrons - planted in the earlier part of this century for flowering in late May and June in the days when winters and frosts were severe frequently enough to discourage the planting of the early varieties.

We were invited to enjoy packed lunches at Catchfrench, the home and garden of Group members Bob and Rosa Glanville who really made us very welcome - insisting on providing champagne for our arrival! The garden was looking very colourful with many shrubs, apart from rhododendrons, in full flower and we noticed how neat and tidy everything was. Our hosts had done much in preparation for our visit and we learned that Rosa had just celebrated her 91st birthday.

Our third garden was Highgates, the garden and nursery of Bob and Dorothy Straughan, well known in the alpine garden world but whose garden is planted with a great many trees and shrubs - some quite rare and certainly not expected to be found so far north in Britain. Their nursery is due to close at the end of this year, so many plants and bargains were purchased by members before we departed - always an essential and enjoyable part of any garden visit tour.

Finally we enjoyed a light tea before touring Lea Gardens near Matlock as guests of Group members Jonathan and Jennifer Tye, whose collection of azaleas and rhododendrons in an open woodland setting in a disused quarry was as colourful as always and we were pleased to see that it is being extended further with new plantings.

*David Farnes*

## International Branch

This last winter in the U.K. was wet, but not exceptionally cold and the result was an early spring only spoiled in parts of the country by severe frosts in early April.

We have had a lot of visitors from abroad this year highlighted by visits from Thijs Huisman, Chairman of the Netherlands Rhododendron Association with his wife, and Kathryn Millar, Secretary of the New Zealand Rhododendron Society. Both were touring English gardens.

As a result of Thijs Huisman's visit, we are now looking at the possibility of a tour in late spring 2001 to gardens and nurseries in Holland and North Germany giving us the chance of meeting members of local rhododendron groups as well as camellia and magnolia enthusiasts. Would anyone interested in such a tour please let me know. I promise you will not be bound later by your enthusiasm today, but we would like to know if our ideas are feasible.

One great plague of our gardens this year has been deer. This problem is not confined to the South of England as I have also heard complaints from, inter alia, Holland and U.S.A. And our rosarian friends complain even louder than we do. Short of erecting 10ft. (3m) chain-link fences round our gardens what do we do? Lions dung, human hair and creosote flags have all been tried and fail after the next rainfall. Electric fences are good and fairly inconspicuous but there will always be the one buck who finds a way round. Deerbusters of Maryland, U.S.A. recommend ultra-sonic loudspeakers and "Deer Pops" which attract them to the electric fence so they can feel its sting!

Please write to me with your experiences of such deterrents and give me your recommendations. I promise to acknowledge all letters and to publicise any good advice for excluding even coons and possums.

*Michael Jurgens*

**Editor's suggestion** - two dogs, one large to frighten off browsers, one small to wake up large dog when they arrive. Otherwise have you tried old or unwanted CD-Rom discs hung up as mobiles? These work a treat on crows in cornfields. E.W.

## Rhododendron Publications for Members of the Group

This list supersedes and consolidates the several lists that have appeared in recent bulletins and takes into account all the recent postal charges which became operative from April 26th, 1999.

1—*Rhododendron Handbook 1998*. This is available to Group Members only at the special offer price of £30 post free. This applies to members world-wide; to any address outside the UK the book will be sent by surface mail 20at printed paper rate. If air mail despatch is wanted an additional £5 per book is requested.

2—*Yearbooks* - back numbers. These are all mint copies (but may have become slightly soiled through prolonged storage) and were obtained from the publishers after they had been written-off for accounting purposes. They are available to members at the original cover price plus despatch costs. The prices shown are inclusive to all addresses in the UK Members overseas should please add



an additional 50p for each book which will be sent at surface mail rates.

1979/80 .....	£2.20	1988/89.....	£5.00
1981/82 .....	£3.50	1990.....	£5.20
1982/83 .....	£4.00	1991.....	£5.50
1983/84 .....	£4.00	1993.....	£5.70
1984/85 .....	£4.00	1994.....	£6.00
1985/86 .....	£4.00	1995.....	£6.00
1986/87 .....	£4.30	1996/97.....	£9.00
1987/88 .....	£4.30	1998.....	£11.00

The current Yearbook for 1999 is available at £11.00 (inclusive).

3—*The Rhododendron Story*. This was published in 1996 at £15.00 but is available to members at the special price of £12.00 inclusive of p. & p. to UK addresses. For overseas orders, members are requested to please add an additional £1.50 per book.

Cheques should be made payable to "The Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia Group. Payment may also be made by Access/Mastercard/Visa by giving us your card number, expiry date, name on card and your billing address. Send your orders to Mr David Farnes, 5, Pine View, Ashgate, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 4DN. For queries before ordering telephone 01246 272105

## Book Reviews

*Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker: Traveller and Plant Collector* by Ray Desmond. 286pp, 1999, illustrated in colour and black & white. *The Antique Collectors' Club with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.* £29.50

Rhododendron lovers must have a special place in their hearts for Joseph Dalton Hooker who, in 1849, introduced from their Himalayan homeland nearly 40 species of the genus. If tribute were still needed to the memory and achievements of Sir Joseph Hooker, Britain's foremost botanist, this volume would supply it. Joseph Hooker was blest with many of the essential gifts a scientist needs, but one helped to make him pre-eminent in his field. He was a talented artist: this together with his powers of observation and the speed with which he was able to transfer to paper what his eye and brain saw were probably unique amongst his peers. This book reproduces, mostly in colour, nearly all of the sketch books of his Antarctic and Himalayan expeditions, giving us a visual record which could hardly be bettered. The restoration of the sketch books, preserved at Kew, has been made possible with generous support from a private source, but their interpretation by Ray Desmond, lately librarian and archivist at Kew, reveals the tools and methods of one who was an artist as well as a great explorer, taxonomist and phytogeographer. He allows us to follow Hooker into the hitherto unknown Sino-Himalaya and to see how he formulated his questions and recorded his answers. He was first and foremost interested in finding out more about why and how the plants he collected got to the different places where they occur. It was this aspect of his quest that brought him into a lifelong friendship and collaboration with Charles Darwin, for whom he provided much essential data for his work on natural selection.

The first two chapters tell of his upbringing by his botanist father and his precocious interest in plants. Joseph's first opportunity came when through his father's good offices, he was offered the opportunity to join Capt. (later Sir) James Clark Ross's famous four-year voyage to

the Antarctic, exploring and mapping the icecap in HMSS Erebus and Terror. Winters were spent in New Zealand and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) where Joseph collected plants and perfected his own particular gifts of infinite curiosity, patient observation and meticulous record-taking. The botanical account of the 4-year expedition resulted in his *Flora of the Antarctica* (1844/5) in which for the first time his field notes and drawings of plants were transformed with the aid of the almost psychic skill of Walter Hood Fitch into hand-coloured lithographs, the new process which had replaced engraving on wood or copper for botanical illustration. There are nine of these magnificent examples reproduced here in colour and four more which were done for *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*.

From our special point of view the most important period in Joseph's life was about to begin. His father William had been appointed Director of the new National Botanical Garden at Kew in 1841 and so soon as Joseph had returned from Antarctica in 1842, father and son began to plan his next botanical expedition. Funded by the British government with an allowance of £400 a year, Joseph set off for India on HMS Sidon with the intention of exploring the flora of the Himalaya, of which little was yet known. Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 cover the momentous years of 1848 and 1849 when Joseph was travelling first in Sikkim and Nepal and then in the Khasia Hills of Assam. Based in Darjeeling he assembled his team of Lepchas (the local tribesmen), porters and ponies and planned his expeditions. These four chapters give a detailed account of his daily life: the problem of finding and training native collectors, the appalling Monsoon weather that made drying and pressing plants a heroic task and often kept him soaked to the skin for days on end, his efforts to map and survey the rivers and calculate the height of the mountain peaks, and the attempts, often frustrated, to send living plants home to Kew via Calcutta, were all lucidly set down in the journal. There are vivid descriptions of the hardships when trekking: the difficult terrain, mountain rivers to be crossed on swaying bamboo bridges, impenetrable rhododendron scrub and, always, the leeches and the biting insects. There were also unfriendly villagers, lack of fresh food, obstructive officials and lamas, and even a fraudulent havildar, all culminating in the dramatic standoff between the weak Raja of Sikkim with his scheming Dewan and Joseph's companion, the Political Officer in Sikkim, Colonel Campbell, who was held hostage for several months in constant fear of his life. For months on end Joseph's life was a wandering one, but on 24 July 1849 he achieved his ambition of reaching the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet. Interspersed with all these practical daily occurrences and near disasters are wonderful descriptions of scenery, atmospheric effects, the fascinating plants, and above all the majestic mountains, frightening and serene in turn, with the arid, bleak passes where nothing grew.

All of this makes compulsive reading and is vividly told by Mr Desmond, but in the end it is the illustrations that make the whole of Hooker's active life so real to us today. The connecting strand is the countless small pictures, some in pencil, many in water colour, made by Joseph in the field in his little notebook, which he managed to have always ready while weighed down by barometers and thermometers and theodolites and vasculums full of plants. His observation of the small details of what he saw is incredible. To the on-the-spot sketches are often juxtaposed little wood engravings, often only vignettes, made for the published *Journals* by the faithful Walter



Hood Fitch, who was able to interpret the reality of the scene he never saw but somehow could imagine. As a contrast to these small pictures are the monumental hand-coloured lithographs of the genus *Rhododendron* built up by Fitch from Hooker's sketches and drawings. These were printed in *Rhododendrons of the Sikkim Himalaya*, published in two folio volumes in 1849 and 1850. Reproduced here in colour are *Rhododendrons falconeri*, *barbatum*, *edgeworthii* and *griffithianum*. All these illustrations from whatever source make this book quite outstanding and worthy to stand by the great botanical books of all time

The final chapters (10 and 11) chronicle Hooker's later years, which were spent in his own words, "bowed down with administration" as his father's successor, Director of Kew for twenty years. He made two or three other expeditions to the wild, collecting and classifying the plants he found: to the Pacific North West of the USA and to Morocco - important may be, but short on adventure when compared to his early life. His scientific and literary output was enormous: see his bibliography on pp 275-8. His *Voyages and Journals* are classic travel books, his text books still used today and his water colours, if ever they appeared in the sale room, would surely rival those of his contemporary Edward Lear.

It seems ungrateful to cavil on one small issue, but this reader would have found it helpful to have a list of the illustrations for reference. The captions have all the information needed, but if you lose the page it is hard to find the picture you want.

Cynthia Postan

**John Lindley Gardener-botanist and Pioneer Orchidologist**  
Edited by William Stern, Antique Collectors' Club in association with RHS pp 232, £29.50. ISBN 18514 9296 8

The name John Lindley immediately calls up the Library at Vincent square in most of our minds. In his day however, he was known better as a respected horticulturist and botanist, especially an expert on orchids. This is a book that will tell you much more about this man of enormous energy, a polymath who balanced the demands of many different horticultural interests. He was Assistant Secretary and then Secretary at the Horticultural Society's garden at Chiswick; at the same time he was Professor of Botany at London University, travelling there by horse five days a week to lecture to his students. Two of his lectures are reprinted in the book. In the late 1830's to 1840 he was instrumental in saving Kew Botanic Gardens from a Parliament bent on selling them off. He also led the commission of inquiry into the Irish Famine, this report bringing about the repeal of the Corn Laws. On top of all this he co-founded and edited the *Gardener's Chronicle* for many years.

Each aspect of his life is dealt with by different author, which makes for very entertaining reading. William Stern edits the whole book and chronicles his life, Phillip Cribb evaluates his love and knowledge of orchids, Christopher Brickell demonstrates our debt to him for founding modern horticulture, W. G. Chaloner expounds Lindley's work in palaeobotany, Brent Elliott takes us through the foundation and development of today's Lindley Library. Kathryn Bridge gives a short account of letters written by the Lindley family to relatives in British Columbia, Canada, showing another aspect of life then and finally William Louis Tjaden writes on the foundation of the Lindley Medal. There is also a bibliography compiled by

J. M. Allford. Thus we get a many layered and vivid portrait of the man and his works; never until now a great reader of history, I was completely captivated.

The book is beautifully produced with many fine colour reproductions from Lindley's publications, some drawn by Lindley himself, others by Miss Drake a much under publicised artist who worked for Lindley. It is a joy to the eye, vastly instructive and also a very good read.

E. Wheeler

## **Discounted book offer by Timber Press**

**Timber Press** have just published *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Camellias* by Stirling Macoboy rrp £29.99. They are, however, prepared to offer this book to our members at £27.99 p&p included to addresses in the UK, the price to overseas members being £31.99 inclusive of p.&p.

I hope to print reviews of this book and also *The World of Magnolias* by Dorothy Callaway in the Christmas Bulletin. Both these books were originally published by Batsford now reissued by Timber Press.

## **Whitehills Nursery, Newton Stewart DG8 6SL**

Many of the seedlings in 9cm pots which we offered in the last bulletin are now well established and have been potted on into 1,2, or 3L. pots. We have about 30 different species so please send for a list if you are interested. Prices from £3 plus VAT and carriage. We regret we cannot accept export orders.

Tony Weston.

## **RHODODENDRON, CAMELLIA AND MAGNOLIA GROUP OF THE RHS**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,  
Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1999.**

Chairman: Mr John D. Bond, LVO, VMH

Apologies: Mr Derek Cox, Dr Alun Edwards, Mr Christopher Fairweather, Mrs Miranda Gunn, Mrs Jane Idiens, Major T. Le M. Spring Smyth, Mr Tony Weston, Mrs Eileen Wheeler.

**1—Minutes of 1998 Annual General Meeting**, printed in August 1998 Bulletin No. 68, were agreed to be a true record and were signed by the Chairman.

### **2—CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

**Membership** remains at around 750, it would be nice to have more.

**The Group needs greater publicity**, the Internet will help. We produce an excellent Yearbook, I hope you agree, and I wish to thank Philip Evans for this. It is important that we keep it to a high standard. I am suggesting widening the subject matter to include companion plants, such as Pieris; rhododendrons should not stand alone, and so many plants associate well.

**The Bulletin** is good, newsy and informative, Eileen Wheeler does well.

**Tours**—Valerie Archibold resigned; organisation of this year's tour has gone to a tour operator, Boxwood Tours,



who are extremely helpful. Only 14 people have booked, many fewer than previous years, and a very small percentage of our membership. The Autumn Weekend in November suffered from the worst wet weather, otherwise it was very successful.

The Group has maintained an **outstanding seed list**, thanks to Alan Clark at Muncaster Castle, who visits China annually and collects seed there, we are very grateful to him, and also to Tony Weston, and more recently to Bruce Archibold, for their distribution work.

When I took this Chair there were suggestions that we should do more good works amongst the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia world, perhaps finance young people going to China. The RHS has **ample bursary moneys**. The Group is looking in other directions. It has started a hardy hybrid collection in a private garden, Ramster, at Chiddingfold, Sussex, to preserve the old plants which are disappearing fast from our gardens and nurseries, they are very important plants. Also the Group has provided money to purchase Rhododendron species for Wisley; we are part of the RHS. There has always been a token collection at Battlesdon Hill and RHS are very pleased. All the plants are young, 15" to 2 ft high. A plaque will give credit to The Rhododendron Group, there will also be a plaque at Ramster.

Major changes made to the **Constitution** are that Branch Chairmen now sit on the Executive Committee, and that the door has been opened to allow people living at far distant places who now need not join the RHS, e.g., Lake District, Scotland, and the far South West.

I wish to give thanks to everyone who has been so involved. We are losing one member of the Committee, Tom Spring Smyth, who has been on the Executive Committee for a long time.

Alastair Stevenson has been our Treasurer, he is staying on the Committee. We welcome Chris Walker, our new Treasurer. Thanks to Joey Warren, whose help is greatly valued, and to Tony Weston who does a tremendous amount of work, not only the membership. He will be retiring in the year 2000 at age of 80. My thanks go to all of the Committee.

### 3—TREASURER'S REPORT

Mr Stevenson passed round copies of **Accounts for Year Ended October 1998**, which are subject to audit by the RHS. The Group accounts have a surplus of about £21,000. More was spent on the Yearbook. Seed sales brought a profit of £1,500. Miscellaneous Expenses are higher and include £1,000 donated towards RBG Edinburgh's costs in mounting their Vireya display at the Main Rhododendron Show last year; also publications for resale. Income from Sales is falsely high because it includes money for Tours, in and out. The Group's accounts show a comfortable situation.

### 4—RESULT OF POSTAL VOTE

Secretary had received 29 voting forms, Mr John D Harsant and Mr Alastair T Stevenson were elected to the Committee, and all Officers have been confirmed in post. Chairman welcomed Mr Harsant to the Committee.

### 5—ELECTION OF AUDITORS

It was agreed that the RHS should again be asked to audit The Rhododendron Group's accounts.

## 6—ANY OTHER BUSINESS

### a)—Group Tours

Lady Cynthia Postan spoke on the future of the **Annual Tours**, their importance to the Group, that they must continue and not stop by default. She has written an article for the Yearbook, which has been accepted, in which she has paid tribute to Valerie Archibold for organising the Tours for 14 years. Historically Tours began as Day Outings, and became Tours in the 1960s. The Tours teach members about gardens, and the wealth of diversity, in far distant corners. Not very many of the 750 members come, we do get some persons from overseas. Garden owners often need plants identified, which a commercial tour cannot provide. The Group Tour is voluntary, it is an enormous benefit to have together experts, owners, gardeners. She stressed again that this year's Tour must not be the last, that the Branches could be exploited in this respect.

Chairman replied, giving assurance that the last thing would be to delete the Tours, and that he would give thought to what she had said. This matter had already received full discussion in Committee. A questionnaire will be included with the August Bulletin to find out why people are not coming, and compared the Rhododendron Group with the American Rhododendron Society where the Branches are stronger than ours. We have confidence in Boxwood Tours, they are very nice people, who have arranged a good mix of well-known and private gardens, unfortunately not enough people have booked for it.

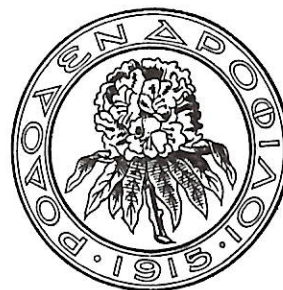
Mr Farnes suggested that a **Branch Organiser** should be appointed to coordinate dates so that clashes of future Tours and Day Visits can be avoided; and that Branches could organise Tours, in rotation. Chairman reminded the meeting that there is a limited season for our three genera, and that other Societies, and our Branches are all organising tours and day visits in a short space of time.. He would welcome such a Branch Organiser. Dates of Tours and Autumn Weekends have been set for year 2000 and will be given in the August Bulletin.

### b)—List of Plants

Dr Jack asked if a record of what has been planted at Ramster can be published in the Yearbook. Chairman replied that he and Mrs Gunn are writing an article for the Yearbook and will include the list of plants at Ramster, also the plants at Wisley. But not for the Website.

## 7—DATE OF NEXT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, May 24, 2000, at New Hall, Vincent Square, during Chelsea Week.



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