

The Royal Horticultural Society

The Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group



Bulletin 72 ~ December 1999

Forthcoming Events

15 March Committee Meeting
7-9 April Rhododendron Identification Study
Weekend, Edinburgh

5 - 10 May Group Spring Tour
23 - 26 May Chelsea Flower Show
24 May Committee Meeting followed by
AGM at 4.00 pm

Chairman's Notes

This is a very good time to assess the state of your rhododendrons (November) and there is no doubt that they are showing great promise for next spring's display. We have enjoyed a good balance of rain and sunshine, at least here in the Windsor area, which has suited them admirably.

A recent walk in the Valley Gardens revealed an excellent bud set. A large specimen of R 'Titmess Park' (*barbatum x sutchuenense*) caught my eye and I felt sure that the buds were "on the move", wishful thinking of course but this hybrid can flower in January if the weather is kind and certainly flowers in February. Not far away, I came upon one very sad sight, a large (6' x 6') specimen of *R. pachysanthum* covered with bedraggled flowers, such a waste.

Autumn is the period when associate trees and shrubs adopt an important role amongst the rhododendrons but sadly the autumn colour has not been good here. We have had more than our share of strong winds and heavy rains, which has virtually ruined the promised display. The thousands of our native birch, *Betula pendula*, that are such a feature hereabouts failed to don their golden cloaks and likewise our native oak is very reluctant to produce its final show (of the year) of golden brown. Some of the exotics have performed well, not the least the Japanese Maples and on my walk I came across an *Acer palmatum* 'Sango Kaku' (syn 'Senkaki') which was quite breathtakingly beautiful clad in clear pale gold.

I found *Mahonia lomariifolia* and its offspring the *Mx medias* at their peak, at least at their peak for my taste with the racemes half open and half in bud. *Mx media* 'Charity' and 'Lionel Fortescue' were particularly good. These mahonias are a great set of plants with twelve months of very special architectural foliage and up to three months of winter flower. They fit in so well to the light woodland scene and offer a distinct contrast to our rhododendrons.

Well so much for my early winter walk, I hope you enjoy winter walks in your gardens and I hope other gardens, for winter is an excellent time to view them.

Happy Woodland Gardening!

John Bond

Editor's Notes

Members who are regular attenders of the Spring and Autumn Group Tours will be sad to learn of the death on 5 November of Helen Speed. Helen accompanied her

husband Mac on many of these tours when they were a valued and well loved couple. We send our sincere sympathy to Mac in his time of loss.

Now, just as the Bulletin goes to the printers, I hear also that we have lost another much loved tour "regular". Rosa Glanville, wife of Lt. Colonel Bob Glanville died on 27th November. They were gracious and generous hosts to us in their lovely garden on earlier tours and we send our sympathy to Bob now.

A new body has been formed to increase general awareness of Vine Weevil. More details will appear in the April Bulletin, but for now any members finding this little beastie amongst their cherished plants is asked to contact The Vine Weevil Advice Centre, Denton House, 40-44 Wicklow Street, London WE1X 9HL. Te. 01711 278 6886 e-mail vineweevil@clear-group.co.uk

I have been wondering for some time whether we as a Group make the best use of the talents of our members! Lately I have received several e-mails from overseas telling me how well liked is the vireya website created and maintained by Chris Callard; Chris has written me a very short description of his website which you will find further on in this Bulletin. Also a Canadian member, Dr. Margaret Trembath, tells me she edits a local newsletter ("The Yak") for a chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. I would like to publish a list say once a year of similar enterprises run by other members of our Group with a contact address where more details could be obtained by those of you who would like to know more. So please write or e-mail me and tell me about newsletters or websites you are involved with.

SPRING TOUR RHODODENDRONS OF CHESHIRE AND NORTH WALES

Friday 5 May - Thursday 11 May 2000

This exciting Study Tour led by our Chairman starts with three nights at the 4 Star Mollington Banastre Hotel, Chester, followed by three nights at the 3 Star Celtic Royal Hotel at Caernarvon. The tour will return to Chester on Thursday morning when there will be an opportunity to explore the historic city with its Roman Walls, medieval black and white timbered buildings and 13th century galleried shops before returning home.

Our provisional itinerary for the 5 days is:

Friday—Meet for dinner at the Mollington Banastre Hotel. An informal discussion after dinner will be led by John Bond, Group Chairman and former Keeper of the Valley and Savill Gardens, Windsor Great Park.

Saturday—Visit private gardens on the Wirral followed by lunch at Ness Botanic gardens and the North West & N. Wales Branch show. We shall be escorted by Ken Hulme, former Director at Ness.

Sunday—Visit Arley Hall, Cholmondeley Castle, where the Marchioness of Cholmondeley has recently made plantings of Rhododendrons and Azaleas, and Bolesworth Castle. Evening lecture by Ken Hulme on *R. maddenii*.

Monday—Visits to Aberconwy Nurseries and Bodnant Gardens. Transfer to the Celtic Royal at Caernarfon for 3 nights.

Tuesday—Visits to Plas Newydd, Menai Straits, home of the Marquess of Anglesey; a private garden at Bod Hyfrd and Crug Farm Nursery.

Wednesday—Visit to gardens and village at Portmeirion returning to Caernarfon through scenic Snowdonia.

Thursday—Return to Chester after breakfast, and disperse.

The cost will be approximately £430 per person with a single supplement of £60 based on dinner, bed and breakfast and including 3 lunches.

Places are limited to 30 and a deposit of £100 is required.

Payment of the balance is due 4 weeks prior to departure and no refunds will be available from the Group after that time.

A basic insurance with cancellation cover is included within the package price, subject to underwriting and policy terms & conditions. Full details are available upon request and an application form will accompany the booking confirmation.

Cars may be left, at the owner's risk, throughout the tour in the car park of the Banastre Hotel which is situated a couple of miles from Chester City Centre.

This year the tour is being organised by the Group Committee in conjunction with members of the North West & North Wales Branch. Your Committee aspire to provide the opportunity for Members to visit and appreciate a variety of gardens (some of which are not normally open to the public) and to enjoy the company of fellow enthusiasts in convivial surroundings, at a reasonable cost. However, whilst every effort is made to ensure that the tour runs successfully, your Committee would ask Members to bear in mind that those involved with the organisation of the tour act on a voluntary basis and not as professional tour operators.

Those who wish to join the tour are kindly requested to forward £100 deposit per person to the Group Treasurer, Mr Chris Walker at 81 Station Road, Shepley, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD8 8D5.

Autumn Weekend Report

The Autumn Tour was based on Harrogate and took place from the evening of Friday, 22 October until the morning of Monday, 25 October.

The tour was led by our Chairman, John Bond, and the first full day was spent at Castle Howard. In the morning

we explored Ray Wood, which is a veritable treasure house of rhododendron species and other plants.

The rhododendrons were planted by James Russell, who came to Castle Howard in 1968 on the closure of Sunningdale Nursery. This nursery was originally Standish & Noble, which had the privilege of introducing Sir Joseph Hooker's Sikkim rhododendrons in 1852. James Russell brought with him the Sunningdale collection of rhododendrons, which included some layers of the original introductions, including *thomsonii* and *cinnabarinum*. We walked up to the Wood through an unusual avenue of R. Polar Bear hybrids. The tone for the morning was set by the first plants we saw on entering the wood - some young plants of *Rhododendron kesangiae*. Our appreciation of the plants was greatly assisted by the quality of the labels, which included the collectors numbers and often the precise source of the introduction.

It is only possible to give a flavour of the species we saw. These included *basilicum*, *fulvum*, *floccigerum*, *haematodes*, *hemsleyanum*, *hirtipes*, *metternichii*, *pocophorum*, *rex* (Rock 18234), *roxieanum* and *uvariifolium*.

It should not be assumed that the only plants of note were rhododendrons.

There are many fine trees, including *Acer* 'Silver Vein', *Acer pensylvanicum*, *Betula ermanii* 'Grayswood Hill', *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*, *Cornus nuttallii*, *Magnolia acuminata* and *Magnolia hypoleuca*. By way of contrast we came across a clearing covered with a carpet of *Cornus canadensis*.

We left the wood only when it was time for lunch. Afterwards some members toured the magnificent house, while others visited the walled garden and the plant centre. We returned to Harrogate in time for some members to visit Betty's famous cafe for tea and cakes!

On Sunday morning we visited Thorp Perrow Arboretum, which comprises 85 acres of native and exotic trees planted mainly by Sir Leonard Ropner from 1931 onwards. It also includes some ancient woodland and a pinetum dating from 1840-1870. Steady rain did not prevent us from studying much of the planting, and we noted particularly *Acer cappadocicum*, *Acer griseum*, *Betula medwediewii*, *Cotoneaster x watereri*, *Hamamelis virginiana*, a *Quercus frainetto* looking splendid in its autumn colours of brown and gold and a *Taxodium distichum* by the side of the lake.

On the way back to Harrogate we added a spiritual dimension when we stopped at Ripon for half an hour to admire the fine cathedral. The coach then took us to Harlow Carr Botanical Gardens, the home of the Northern Horticultural Society. We were made very welcome on our arrival and were met by two members of the Society who have taken a particular interest in the woodland, Dr Maurice Jeffrey and Alf Latham. Fortunately the rain had stopped, but it was extremely wet underfoot as we made our way down the slope through the main garden to the woodland which rises up again on the further side of the stream.

As we entered the woodland we were faced with a long line of *R. fortunei* hybrids planted alongside the main path, which runs right through the wood and the arboretum. Maurice and Alf showed us a clearing which had been planted with a variety of species and hybrids in 1996-7. As we moved through the woodland, we were shown a good collection of mature rhododendrons, including *argyrophyllum*, *campanulatum* 'Knap Hill' form, *calophyllum*

hybrids, *fulvum*, Loderi 'Pink Diamond', *rex ssp arizelum*, *souliei*, *wightii* and *williamsianum*. Among the trees we noticed *Eucryphia x nymansensis*, *Nothofagus betuloides* and *Oxydendrum arboreum*.

Harlow Carr was the last garden we visited on the Tour, which was thoroughly enjoyed by the fifteen people who attended. At the conclusion of the final evening, 'Mac' Speed thanked Joey Warren for setting up the Tour and John Bond for leading us. Any members passing near Castle Howard in spring, summer or autumn would be well advised to call in and visit Ray Wood - they would not be disappointed.

Martin Gates

Rhododendron Identification Study Weekend 7-9 April 2000

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN, EDINBURGH

A two-day meeting has been arranged for members of the group at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh before Easter 2000. It will be a study weekend on hardy evergreen rhododendrons done in a practical way starting with laboratory recognition of the features used to distinguish species and their groupings.

Those who have no previous experience will find it the perfect entry to this aspect of rhododendrons. They will not be overwhelmed by science - it will be interesting and fun. Those who are already experienced will find the laboratory sessions equally rewarding for the aim is to give each person adequate stimulation and challenge.

The course will be conducted by Dr. David Chamberlain, taxonomist, rhododendron specialist and plant collector of the RBG Edinburgh staff. We shall have the facilities of a teaching laboratory, microscopes and of course plant material from the garden. Building on the laboratory study will be a conducted tour of the rhododendron collection in the garden.

Other features of the weekend will include a tour of the RBG herbarium and probably of the vireya rhododendron collection in the glasshouse area behind the public access section. A visit to Glendoick gardens near Perth has been arranged for the Sunday. We shall lunch there in the garden centre.

Administration—Good quality hotel accommodation has been reserved a short distance from the RBG for Friday and Saturday nights (D B&B). We shall meet before dinner on the Friday, 7 April, work indoors and out at RBG on Saturday with lunch there. Sunday will be RBG herbarium, Glendoick and vireyas though the sequence is not yet fixed.

It is appreciated that many members live a long way from Edinburgh but the superb facilities and material are there and it is hoped that sufficient members will take advantage of this unique opportunity. In essence it is a chance to look over a botanist's shoulder, see how he identifies a rhododendron species and find how to set about doing so oneself. For those not wishing to drive to Edinburgh there are many choices. There are direct trains even from Plymouth. From London the journey is just over 4 hours. By air it takes 1 hour from Heathrow, Gatwick or Stanstead. British Airways and British Midland each offer virtually an hourly service plus Air UK. Trains

and planes offer special weekend return fares ranging from approximately £50-£75. Bus companies like Stagecoach for much less. There are direct flights from Southampton and Bristol.

The cost of the weekend will be approximately £270 per person inclusive of hotel, laboratory and RBG charges, lunch on Saturday, teas, coffees plus bus transport to and from Glendoick. Sunday lunch will be an extra to allow individual selection from the excellent choice available. The cost is for shared double room accommodation. Single rooms are available but with an extra charge.

Options

For any one who would like to reduce the cost we can find known good quality B&B accommodation nearby, still dining together both evenings but saving approximately £70 per person sharing double accommodation.

For those not requiring accommodation at all the reduction would be £120 per person, making the course cost £150 per person; again this still includes dinner both evenings. In all cases drinks are extra.

The limiting factor is the laboratory accommodation. if any couple would like to split for Saturday morning because one wants to join everything else but not the laboratory sessions, that would be helpful. (Princess Street shopping is not far away). We would rejoin for lunch and thereafter for the gardens, etc.

Time is short to secure the hotel and the RBG, so please an immediate indication of interest is necessary. Thereafter confirmation with a deposit will be required by the 21st January, 2000. The whole is dependant on sufficient members wishing to attend. On the other hand the laboratory limits the total. Within these confines places will be on a first come basis.

Please write as soon as possible direct to Dr. R. H. L. Jack, Edgemoor, Lanark. ML1 1 9BG, indicating interest and type of accommodation. This without commitment in the first instance.

Robbie Jack

Branch News

South East Group Propagation Weekend. July 1999

We were able to revive the annual two days of practical techniques this year when Mike Robinson offered to host and lead the weekend at his home in the Ashdown Forest, sharing the tuition with Everard Daniel. About a dozen members and friends gathered, some from as far away as Norfolk, and we tried out our skills with cuttings from all three of our genera, rhododendron seed sowing, and especially grafting of the less often seen rhododendrons such as *R.sherriffii* and *R.clementinae*. We had a plentiful supply of rootstocks this year, so were able to graft a wide range of varieties, both from well known collections and from our own plants. This exchange of material is one of the delights, as is the exchange of thoughts and ideas. I especially remember the opinions on genetic manipulation and on lime tolerance that Judy Rose brought from work at East Malling.

We hope to repeat this event next year, probably on or about July 10th and would welcome members and friends from any of the other branches. It is a very friendly and informal event, which suits experts and absolute beginners alike. Do come; if you contact the South East

branch chairman, John Hilliard, details will be mailed to you early next year. Contact details for all three of us are in the members list.

We visited Wakehurst Place for our autumn garden visit, on the 16th October, when the autumn colours are always worthwhile. David Hardman took 25 of us on an informal walk past the new Millennium Seedbank and down into Bloomers valley past the National Collection of birches in Bethlehem Woods. The circuit then took us back to the mansion via the Pinetum, where we studied the recent losses and replanting. When thanking David for the delightful tour, Philip Evans discussed the possible revitalisation of the species collection, but Kew are very aware of the CITES agreement, which restricts the introduction of new, wild-origin material.

Our November meeting was held in our new venue in the Pavilion at Ardingly College. After our customary buffet, about 40 of us listened to Tony Cox's fascinating lecture about his 1995 trip to SE Tibet, along the Yarlung Tsangpo and up the Doshong La where a few of the party crossed the snow covered pass into Pemako. The expedition also visited the Rongchu valley. Tony is a particularly good photographer and plantsman, and showed a very wide range of plants in flower, including the very striking true *Rhododendron uniflorum* var. *imperator*, which differs from the form in cultivation. The flowers are about 4 times the size of the tiny leaves and a very good, rich pink. Tony now grows *R. nivale* and *R. bulu* from the plants he photographed and also showed us a fine form of *R. triflorum* var. *mahogani*, with a distinct brown blotch - not always an improvement in his opinion. This area is the main stronghold for *Meconopsis betonicifolia* and they saw a wide range of other meconopsis and also primula, such as the dusky purple *P. tanneri* and *P. falcifolia*, the daffodil primula. An excellent talk about a fascinating area, alas now closed to visitors once again.

(*Bulu* translates as *rhododendron*, so *R. bulu* is the *rhododendron rhododendron*, or, if you take it to extreme, ie Bhutanese to Latinised Greek to English, the pink tree pink tree!!)

Everard Daniel

New Forest Branch

On 16 October, about 20 members and friends met at Jermyn's House, Ampfield, to hear a lecture by one of our members, Dr. Raymond Thornton on "Halfdan Lem and the Lost Rhododendrons of Southampton".

The title of the lecture was intriguing and the explanation fascinating. The story began before the war, when Lord Swaythling's gardener, Fred Rose, crossed Norman Gill, a griffithianum/arboreum hybrid with "Jean Marie de Montague", a griffithianum hybrid with bright pink flowers. One of the progeny was Anna, a plant of unusual foliage, with deep reddish pink flower buds, opening deep pink with a reddish flare in the throat.

When the war came seeds from this cross were sent to Halfdan Lem in America. Lord Swaythling's estate became overgrown and to-day very little remains of his rhododendron collection. However the plants which Halfdan Lem raised from the seeds sent from Southampton formed the basis of many of his well known hybrids. These include "Lem's Cameo", "Walloper", and "Lem's Monarch". Thus Southampton's loss was America's gain.

Martin Gates

N.W. England and N.Wales Branch

January 15—Group Social and arrangements for Branch Local Show

February 26 —Lecture by Alan Clark, "Plant Collecting in Tibet and Sichuan".

April 14-17 —Branch visit to Cornish gardens

May 6 —Local Show to be held at Ness Gardens.

All meetings are held in the Lecture Theatre at Ness Gardens.

Kenneth Hulme

S. West Branch

The South West Branch held its Autumn meeting at Rosemoor on 6 November.

Dr. George Hargreaves, a member, gave a lecture on "The Rhododendron Story". The talk was profusely illustrated with high quality slides. All the photographs were of plants growing in some of the great gardens of the British Isles. Dr. Hargreaves concentrated on those plants introduced by Hooker, Forrest, Wilson and Kingdon-Ward.

In the morning while some looked around the gardens, others attended a rhododendron slide quiz. Nigel Wright was the winner. The quiz had been developed by Kenwyn Clapp and was introduced by John Bodenham. A well supported Plant Sale took place.

Lunch was taken in the Rosemoor restaurant. 85 members and guests attended the day.

Alun Edwards

Wessex Branch

Our Autumn season started with an illustrated talk by David and Eileen Farnes on the joys and trials of plant hunting in China. David's excellent slides, accompanied by his interesting account of the rhododendrons they found, their habits and habitats, added to the many delightful slides of the people and places they encountered along the way gave us a vivid picture of trekking in China. Eileen's beautiful slides of the many and unusual alpine plants found growing in the same region added greatly to an evening that was much enjoyed by everyone.

Our plans for next year include a talk by Mr Ivor Stokes on the new Botanic Garden in Wales, on March 3rd, and in May we are paying a visit to Exbury Gardens. We also have the exciting prospect of our "Millennium Special" which is a three-day trip to France from May 19th - 21st. We will be visiting four wonderful gardens, plus the plant fair at the Chateau de Courson. Our annual show is going to be held on June 4th, at Ramster, and the official opening of the Hardy Hybrid Collection will be on the same day.

Miranda Gunn

International Branch

I've not received much enthusiasm from members for a N. Holland and Germany Tour in 2001 so perhaps we can put in our diaries the reminder that the Rhododendron 2002 Westerstedt Exhibition will be the following year. This is near Oldenburg, N.W. of Bremen. If it is anything like the last show, it should not be missed. The year 2002 will also be celebrated as "The Year of the Ghent Azalea" details will doubtless follow.

For those wishing to visit rhododendron gardens in Europe in the meanwhile, Comt Philippe de Spoelberch reminds me that he will be delighted to welcome all group members to his magnificent garden, "Herkenrode" at Haacht in Belgium, between Louvain and Malines. He now has more than 1700 well labelled rhododendrons in over 800 taxa in his 15 hectare arboretum. Other fine gardens in the area include Bokrijk and Hemelrijk as well as Kalmthout, outside Antwerp and of course the Trompenburg arboretum in Rotterdam. These gardens are at their best in May and early June.

There has been little correspondence on the subject of deer deterrents; Deerbusters (Maryland USA) acoustical devices certainly work but their range is limited which makes them expensive for a large garden. David Millais sells a Swedish spray Anti-Gnag which lasts 3-4 months in winter and is said to be very effective. In the U.S. a product called Bob-Ex (bobcats are deer predators) is said to have similar properties.

The best story is from Richard Thornton, Steward of the Wessex Group, who strung lines with coal-tar soap. This deterrent was very effective until it was finally pulled down by the local badgers who resented the nasal interference to their favourite run!

Michael Jurgens

Aberglasney

One of our members Mr. Graham Rankin has recently come to West Wales as Head Gardener at Aberglasney, where ancient gardens are being revived. Formerly Head Gardener at Hascombe Court, and before that at Tilgates, he also spent several years gardening at Windsor Great Park both in the Savill and Valley Gardens. Now he has undertaken the mammoth task of producing lots of colourful planting from the sea of mud left by the landscaping and walling contractors, so that this year's visitors would not be disappointed, whilst simultaneously starting on the planting for a stunning garden in the future. Amazingly this he has managed to do

He has brought with him some very special plants for the woodland area, amongst them *Acer laevigatum*, *Magnolia macrophylla* and *Manglietia insignis*, also some very nice rhododendrons. All were flourishing when I saw them in the late summer and it will be interesting to see how the more tender cope with a Carmarthen winter. There are lots of plans for the future and much planting is being undertaken this winter. I can highly recommend Aberglasney as a garden "worth a detour", as well as the gardens themselves you can see some interesting archaeological remains (possibly some digging still in progress to watch), a handsome house as background and to revive you after your garden tour, a superb small cafe serving light lunches and teas way above the average. On a sunny day you can sit outside, eat, drink, and enjoy the splendidly restored pool and borders down below you - quite magical.

Opening times for Aberglasney in 2000 should be April through to October, details from Aberglasney Gardens Llangathen, Carmarthenshire SA32 8QH. Tel. 01558 668998

E.Wheeler



The Rhododendron Tours

Garden visits have now become a common and popular form of holiday

break. The practice arose naturally when people could visit the great country houses opened to the public through the National Trust, many of them having gardens as popular as the houses themselves. Tours of several in the same area was the next step and there cannot be many people who have not taken part in at least one garden tour organised by the National Trust or commercially.

However, we in the Rhododendron Group can perhaps claim to have been pioneers of this fashionable leisure activity, although the motivation was never merely frivolous. It was in 1949 that the Royal Horticultural Society organised a Rhododendron Conference, to be followed in 1950 by a similar one on Camellias and Magnolias. These conferences had a serious horticultural and botanical purpose and were attended by experts in both fields. When the meetings were over the Society arranged for the participants to be taken on extended tours of gardens well known for the three genera, mostly in the South-West, Surrey and Sussex. Later, in the 1950s, when the Rhododendron Group became an established entity within the Society, day tours for ordinary members took place either before or after Chelsea week. It must not be thought, however, that the purpose of these outings was not entirely serious. Gardens, such as Exbury, Borde Hill, Tower Court and the Savill and Valley Gardens, were chosen for the wide variety of species and cultivars to be seen and their educational value for members with gardens smaller or newer than the great exemplars. They were for obvious reasons all within reach of London by coach or car. Their immediate popularity was clear, so much so that steps were soon taken to organise longer tours covering more remote parts of the country, where acid-loving plants grow more freely and other large gardens not so well known or so frequently open to the public were located. Officials and staff of the RHS, such as Patrick Synge, Robert Adams, Norman Gould and David Pycraft (who many people will remember), were active in promoting these tours well on into the 1960s. The memorable tour of 1967 leading up to the Rhododendron Conference at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh took members north to Argyll and the Isle of Arran as well as Edinburgh. In the early days members were expected to provide their own transport and accommodation, but the demand was obviously there and the Rhododendron Group was not slow to commence organising this.

Then began the great era of the planned tour which enabled members of the Group to explore the extraordinary riches of the British private garden largely unknown to the outside world. From about 1970 when the RHS granted autonomy to the Group the annual tour has become, together with the Rhododendron Competitions at Vincent Square, the Seed Exchange, the Year Book and the regional Branches, the glory of our membership of which we are proud. Those of us who went on the early pioneering tours will remember with gratitude our friends who planned and researched them. Walter Magor had an encyclopaedic knowledge of potential gardens in Cornwall, Scotland and Ireland and made many journeys of reconnaissance to assess distances, timetables and the likely availability of accommodation, as well as approaching with infinite tact the owners of gardens of hitherto unsuspected magic and horticultural range. Nigel Glass was an inspired organiser who put life into Walter's

schemes and made them happen. Who can forget the 1983 tour of southern Ireland with visits to, amongst others, Annesgrove, Mount Congreve, Mount Usher and Fernhill? Or the convivial coach rides down the narrow Irish lanes between showers and sunshine?

The early tours of this period, masterminded by Walter and Nigel, set the framework which later tours enlarged and codified. What they particularly did was to lead members always to expect high standards from the gardens, many of which were private and some never open to outsiders. The plants we found in these gardens were always of supreme interest because of their age (dating back to Hooker's introductions or to those of the Sino-Himalayan collectors), their unfamiliarity, their lost labels (and therefore their lost identity) or their rarity. The days spent wandering round these time-capsules, as many of the gardens were, provided an unequalled opportunity to see at close quarters, and in flower, plants we had either only read about or had not even heard about. No one who was lucky enough to be a participant went home without added knowledge and inspiration to try to grow some species or hybrid not yet in his or her own garden. For those who were regular 'tourists' the educational experience could never have been obtained in any other way. For one thing the geographical range if undertaken by individuals would have taken far longer to visit and have required much research. But more valuable than anything was the exceptional opportunity to talk to the owners of the gardens and their experienced and knowledgeable gardeners about the plants and all problems connected with rhododendron cultivation. The composition of the 'tourists' varied from year to year, including people from other European countries and from New Zealand, Australia and the USA, but many of us came regularly to meet old friends and to increase our knowledge of our own country. We were also lucky to have a small number who were particularly interested in the species and their presence always sparked off discussions about identity, nomenclature (e.g. according to the Balfourea or Revised Edinburgh classification) and morphology, from which others could benefit. There was always the free interchange of views and expertise that is so vital among those with a common interest.

I have spoken in general terms of the value of these small (never more than 40 participants at most) tours, how they came into being and their pioneering intention. But the most influential period of the annual tour has been since the early 1980s. With the sad and pre-mature death of Nigel Glass and Walter's reluctance to lead a tour in person, there was a great danger of the tour being discontinued. How fortunate for the Group that Valerie Archibold was persuaded to come forward! Since that lucky day years ago she has borne the entire burden of organizing a six-day tour in early May, just before Chelsea Week. It might seem invidious to enumerate all the tasks of an organiser, who has not only to decide which area we should concentrate on, but also to find private gardens worth visiting and to persuade the owners to allow us to invade their privacy. Then, where shall we all stay? "Tourists" demand comfort after a tiring and perhaps soaking wet day. The inner man and woman must be satisfied with liquid and solid sustenance. The hotel must not be too far away, in attractive surroundings and large enough to house us all: some exigent guests demand twin beds, and some double beds, while many hotels offer poor accommodation for singles.

Then the cost must be reckoned. A sound head for figures and a cool one at that: hotels must be cajoled into giving good discounts. Rooms must be comfortable, facilities modern. All these Valerie was prepared to cope with. Transport is another headache. Over the years Valerie's experience has shown her that the communal coach enables her charges to leave their cars at a suitable starting place. Fraternal feelings are engendered by close contact on journeys, add to this, map reading and finding the way is unloaded on to the coach driver and organiser. There is ample stowage space for plants acquired en route, as well as wellington boots, macs, shooting sticks and all the paraphernalia of garden visitors. All these multifarious needs must be anticipated and problems resolved if the tour is to proceed smoothly. Valerie never gave us any inkling of the sleepless nights she may have had in the weeks preceding the tour, or her anxieties about whether we should keep our hosts waiting or find our lunch was not ready at the appointed hour. Always calm, with her well modulated voice and elegant appearance, she was at hand to listen and to advise. Indeed, for so long had Valerie been synonymous with the annual tour that few of us could believe that in 1999 she would not longer be there to look after us. How deluded we were by our past pleasure. Come back, Valerie! How we need you.

It would not be possible to list all the wonderful gardens Valerie has introduced us to over the years since 1983 when she assumed her 'golden fleece', but to help those who did not join us on these annual outings here is a brief summary of the regions we visited and the years in which the visits took place, for some areas were visited many times, although the gardens were not always the same.

Cornwall 1972, 1978, 1989, 1997
Devon & Dorset 1984
East Kent 1972
Gloucestershire 1965
Hampshire 1968, 1976
Ireland (North) 1983, 1996
Ireland (South) 1983, 1996
North East & Borders 1981, 1991
North Wales 1973, 1984
Scotland (Argyll) 1966, 1979, 1992, 1998
Scotland (Highlands) 1986, 1994
Scotland (Galloway) 1982, 1990
South Wales 1978, 1988, 1990
Surrey & Berkshire 1969, 1974, 1975, 1993
Sussex 1967, 1970, 1972, 1987, 1992, 1999
The Lakes 1982, 1990

Cynthia Postan

Vireya Website

Full Fat Fungicide

Spray milk on cucumbers and courgettes and it kills mildew

This article by Debora MacKenzie appeared in the June issue of "The New Scientist". Since a member of staff at Peter Bowles Rose Nursery had told me of a similar cure (this time using skim milk 50/50) used by one of his longstanding customers, I thought perhaps some members may like to try it out on their rhododendrons. My thanks to the Editor of The New Scientist for allowing me to reprint a slightly shortened version of their article here.

The doorstep pint has the makings of an ideal fungicide for protecting organically grown cucumbers and other vegetables, according to researchers in Brazil. It attacks a mould known as powdery mildew, which is a major problem for organic farmers scrambling to meet the growing demand for chemical-free vegetables.

Milk's fungicidal powers were discovered by Wagner Bettiol of the environmental laboratory of Embrapa, the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, in Jaguariuna, north of Sao Paulo. Bettiol, who was looking for cheap ways to control plant pests, observed that byproducts from milk-processing factories killed powdery mildew on courgettes. So he decided to simply spray fresh milk on the plants to see if it had the same effect. To his surprise, he found that it did. In fact, spraying heavily infected plants twice a week with a mixture of one part cow's milk to nine parts water was at least as good at stopping mildew as the chemical fungicides fenarimol and benomyl, Bettiol discovered.

In many cases, milk was both fast and more effective. After two to three weeks of spraying with milk, the area of leaves infected was in some cases only a sixth or less of the area affected on plants treated with chemical fungicide (Crop Protection, vol 18, p 489). Bettiol says several organic growers in his region have successfully controlled less severe mildew infections on courgettes and cucumber by spraying once a week with 5 per cent milk solutions.

Bettiol is not yet sure why milk works so well, but he speculates that it helps the plants in two ways. Milk is known to kill some micro-organisms. It also contains potassium phosphate, which boosts the plant's immune system and so may help it inhibit the mildew's growth.

"If this works, it could be very useful," says Rob Haward of the Soil Association which sets standards for organic farming in Britain.

Debora MacKenzie

Book Reviews

***The World of Magnolias* by Dorothy J. Callaway
Timber Press ISBN 0-88192-236-6 rrp. £35**

The first book I purchased on magnolias was Neil Treseder's book in 1979 and it still has pride of place on my bookshelf, amongst the 10 other publications on the genus. Having said that, Asiatic Magnolias in Cultivation written by G. H. Johnstone, published in 1955 is by far the most beautifully illustrated work, albeit a rather costly acquisition, now fetching up to £300.

The next milestone was Dorothy Callaway's book *Magnolias* published by Batsford. I bought the book as soon as it became available in 1994, it was and is still, the most comprehensive book written on genus. The original publication was reviewed in the 1995 *Rhododendron Yearbook*.

I was very pleased to hear that Timber Press had reprinted the book (now titled *The World of Magnolias*). By the time any book is published on plants it is usually out of date, as hard as one tries to keep up with nomenclatural changes and new cultivars. I was most disappointed when I received the reprinted edition to find that it had not been revised at all - a missed opportunity if ever there was one

The book is very well researched and written by a highly competent botanist and horticulturist. The subject matter is covered exhaustively, and includes information on both the tropical and temperate species, which is a first in any detail. The number of cultivars and hybrids that have been written about has been invaluable to me as a point of reference. The book is well augmented throughout with line drawings and black and white photographs. In the centre of the book there are 142 colour plates, categorised by species, hybrid and cultivar and alphabetically sorted. Most of the plates used are of exceptional quality and have been gathered from many sources.

My one criticism is that the chapter covering the species has been classified under their Subgenus and Sections, which is great if you are a taxonomist, but it makes it impossible to flick through the pages to find a particular species. To make it more confusing, even if you did know that *Magnolia acuminata* was in the subgenus *Yulania* and section *Tulipastrum* the sections are not listed alphabetically. If one wants to look up a species, you have no alternative other than to go to the Index of Plant Names at the back of the book.

It took the author over four years to compile this book, it is a tremendous accomplishment. It is a publication that magnolia enthusiasts are, and will be very grateful for, I certainly have been.

Graham Rankin

***The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Camellias*
by Stirling Macoboy
Timber Press ISBN 0-88192-421-0 rrp £29.99**

Since 1981 Stirling Macoboy's *Colour Dictionary of Camellias* has been the bible for camellia growers wishing to read about and see in colour illustrations all the camellias he had ever heard about and hundreds besides.

That that book could be vastly improved was unthinkable but Stirling Macoboy has done just that.

The layout of the new encyclopedia is much improved but, above all, the superb illustrations in the original book depicted only a proportion of the plants described. In the new volume every plant is matched by a superb colour photograph adding up to a staggering figure of over 1,500.

The book opens with the species. To read the descriptions and see the illustrations of well over 40 of these is a joy to any camellia lover and one wonders what new hybrids lie ahead.

The *Sasanquas* follow this opening salvo. Not only has the introduction been re-written (this is the case with every group) but the number described, approximately 100, all illustrated in superb colour, is a real joy to any grower in the U.K. where probably less than 20 are well known. It is a great pleasure to see so many of Bob Cherry's lovely *Paradise* strain (introduced here only comparatively recently) described and illustrated. It is, however, a disappointment that the whole range of American cold-hardy plants raised by Dr. Ackerman of Maryland, USA, has been omitted. Plants under such names as "*Winter's Toughie*", "*Winter's Interlude*" and "*Snow Flurry*", only recently introduced in the UK are really good.

From *Sasanqua*, we move to *Japonicas*. One can only enthuse about this section where some 650 colour photos of the highest quality are displayed. Throughout the

book, wherever known, the date of introduction, name of raiser, parentage and time of blooming are given. This is most useful

In following this book, one must bear in mind that the descriptions and illustrations are, in general, geared to Australia, New Zealand and parts of the USA, with warmer climates than the UK. Size of blooms, colour and flower form can be greatly affected by this. For example, some flowers described and illustrated as "paeony-form" flower formal double here. This is not intended as criticism but as a cautionary word to British growers.

We next come to the Higos, again superbly described and illustrated with about 40 photos - a veritable connoisseur's paradise.

The next section is on Reticulatas extended to about 150 different cultivars. The fantastic display of that number of almost overpowering blooms comes as something of a shock to British growers more familiar with about 24

Hybrids, (the camellias of the future as the author rightly calls them) follow. About 140 descriptions and photographs fully endorse this.

Finally we come to the section on cultivation. This deals most adequately with camellia growing from buying, planting, transplanting, pruning, pests and diseases, propagating, container growing, Bonsai to indoor growing.

The glossary and an exhaustive index complete this truly wonderful book. We know the author as a great horticulturist, plantsman and photographer. All these qualities are displayed here. In my opinion, anyone buying this book is buying a masterpiece.

Logan Edgar

Membership Secretary's Notes

Both the Hon. Treasurer and I are very grateful to those members who have taken heed of the reminder and sent in their subscriptions promptly. I am glad to be able to report that the majority were received by 1st December thereby saving much work on our part in dealing with late payments. Those of you who have not yet paid but who do so during December will not be deleted from the mailing list until January 2000 but they will not receive the December bulletin, the Yearbook or the Seed List until the end of January.

Members who wish to remain in membership but who have not paid by December 31st 1999 will be asked to re-apply for membership by completing a fresh application form as their particulars will by then have been deleted from the database.

57 new members have joined the Group since the last Membership List was printed in December 1998 which brings the total membership up to 768. The names and addresses of the new members are listed on a separate sheet.

The Lady Anne Cowdray tells me she has a quantity of well grown (some 5ft tall) Magnolias grown from her own open pollinated seed. Top price would be £11.50

All details from Lady Anne, Broadleas, Devizes, Wilts. SN10 5JQ Tel. 01380 722035

Committee

Looking ahead to next year, the Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday, 24th May 2000 (Chelsea Week). The people standing for re-election will be :

Dr Robbie H L Jack Miss Cicely Perring.

They are both willing to serve a further 3-year term of office, nevertheless applications are invited should other members wish to apply.

The Chairman, who has served his initial 3-years, and all the Officers also seek re-election. We still lack a Tours Officer.

Mr Tony Weston will resign as Membership Secretary, he has given most valued service since 1994; and was Bulletin Editor for 3 years before that. He will be replaced by Mrs Miranda Gunn. Tony Weston will continue to organise Seed Sales.

Anyone wishing to serve on the Committee please fill in the Nomination paper below. Candidates must be full RHS members and members of The Rhododendron Group, and be willing to serve for 3 years. Should there be extra nominations, there will be a Postal Vote, and voting papers will be included in the next (Spring) Bulletin. Please send completed Nomination Papers to Hon. Secretary, Mrs Joey Warren, Netherton, Buckland Monachorum, Yelverton, Devon PL20 7NL, by 29th February 2000.

NOMINATION PAPER

for Candidates for Election to the Executive Committee at Annual General Meeting 2000

Name of Candidate..... Signature

Proposed by Signature

Seconded by Signature