

The Royal Horticultural Society

The Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group



Bulletin 75 ~ December 2000

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

2001

13 March Executive Committee Meeting
Westminster

13-14 March. Early Camellia & Rhododendron
Competition, Westminster

10-11 April Main Camellia Competition, Westminster

28-29 April Main Rhododendron Competition,
Saturday & Sunday Westminster

6-11 May Spring Tour -Devon & Dorset

22 May Executive Committee Meeting,
Westminster

18 Sept. Executive Committee Meeting,,
Westminster

11-14 Oct. Autumn Weekend with I.C.S.

20-23 Oct. New Zealand Rhododendron
Association Annual Conference,
New Plymouth

20 Nov. Executive Committee Meeting,
Westminster

Chairman's Notes

Catch 22 - your co-operation needed

I have just visited three garden centres - one part of a major group, one large independent, and the third a small outlet with usually a good range of trees and shrubs. I looked at the magnolias available. "Leonard Messel" was at all three; "Susan" was at two, with sister "Jane" at one; simple *soulangeana* (whatever that is) was at two, with its varieties "Alba", "Lennei" and "Rustica Rubra" at one only; *liliflora* "Nigra", *stellata* and its varieties "Royal Star"; "Heaven Scent", "Wada's Memory", "Burgundy" and *sieboldii* were also to be found at only one - a total of 14 species and varieties, some represented by only one plant and eleven in only a single outlet. I don't know how representative these outlets are, or if at this time (end of October) stocks are abnormally low in an increasingly spring focused business, but this count struck me as a very limited and unexceptional choice, at a time when many gardeners like to plant.

I then consulted the current issue of "The Plantfinder". This was much more encouraging. At a quick count it listed some 180 cultivars as current. However, on closer inspection, of these only 8 were widely available (more than 30 suppliers), and as many as 80 available at only one or two outlets. I understand that phone calls often lead to frustration as few specimens of the newer and more desirable varieties are stocked and a negative response is not uncommon. Having said that we should be grateful to the smaller more specialist nurseries for making these available; and "The Plantfinder" is a good bet to find what you are seeking, even if you may have to wait for a year or so.

I revisited Jim Gardiner's recently published and excellent book "Magnolias - a Gardener's Guide", as the most comprehensive up to date account of the genus in cultivation. I was curious to know how many magnolias were featured. It covered around 400 species and cultivars. Many of these magnolias of course will be of interest only to limited numbers of cognoscenti collectors;

and many more will be unsuitable for general planting. On the other hand many others will provide the average garden with a range of superb flowering trees or shrubs of surpassing excellence, hardy, easy to grow, tolerant of a wide range of conditions and in a variety of sizes suitable for large and small gardens alike - and many flowering within 2-3 years of planting. The choice is enormous and there is something for everyone.

So my undoubtedly inadequate but nonetheless interesting garden centre sample yielded a paltry 3.5% of plants available, using Jim Gardiner's book as a base. "The Plantfinder" comparison rose to a much more respectable 45%.

On the same theme, Sir Peter Smithers, who started a magnificent collection of "newer and superior hybrid" magnolias in his new garden at Vico Morcote in southern Switzerland in 1970, very generously gave carte blanche to a nearby nurseryman, Otto Eisenhut, to take propagating material from his collection and set up a world-wide business. In his book *Adventures of a Gardener* (1995) he wrote, "It has secured the distribution of many of the finest magnolias which would never have made it to the garden centres. Now they will probably do so." He also wrote, "Since planting in my garden began, much important work has been done with magnolias. It is slow to reach the gardening public but one day it will do so these new hybrids will be eagerly snapped up by propagators and the public." I hope Sir Peter's generosity and optimism will be rewarded, but during the 30 years from the start of his plantings, progress has been remarkably slow. The public seem blithely unaware of the excellent new forms available, and the garden centres are very slow to stock them, if at all. This should be disquieting to all who love gardens and plants.

Garden Centres are the main plant shop window for the public. Priority is generally given to eye catching displays of plants that will flower in pots. This puts longer term woody plants like magnolias at a disadvantage unless the public knows what it is looking for; and one way and another the public has little

information about the wealth of plant choices. This is Catch 22 - the public cannot ask for plants which it does not know about and not surprisingly, the trade will not give priority to plants for which there is no demand. Hence a choice of only 14 mostly old magnolias, across 3 garden centres

The principal means of raising public awareness of plants, providing a regular source of new plant information and thus stimulating demand, is television. However most TV gardening programmes are now alas part of the entertainment industry, with plant information not at a premium. Indeed plants appear now to be incidental to the vogue for decking, water features and blue fences, with ever shortening attention spans. Plants have become so out of fashion that one garden designer has gone so far as to assert that "the British obsession with plants gets in the way of good garden design". Comment is unnecessary.

Plant awards are a very effective way of bringing the best plants to public attention. No less than 105 magnolias have received awards over the years - for exhibition and garden use. However, awards are not well publicised, and indeed the highest RHS encomium - the Award of Garden Merit - has availability as one of its selection criteria. If a plant is difficult to track down it is not selected, in spite of the fact that in every other respect it may be a superlative plant. Having said that, garden centres are beginning to acknowledge the sales power of awards by giving increasing prominence to AGM awards in their displays. Hopefully this could help to highlight the most desirable plants; although if awards are withheld from excellent plants that are deemed not to be readily available, there is less incentive to stock them to make them available. Catch 22 again!

The national press has to cover an enormous range of gardening interests and much of its coverage is of necessity very general. The gardening press by definition has an interested readership and can cover subjects like specific plant groups in more depth and at present is probably the most fruitful regular source of plant information for a wider audience.

The question is, as a Group should we be concerned about the information gap and the relative unavailability of excellent plants? Personally, I think it does matter that many of the very best magnolias, and indeed camellias and rhododendrons remain in limbo. The irony is that these plants are an investment offering compound interest over a long period and thus, particularly with limited space, it is important to plant only the very best.

Is there anything to be done about it, even in a small way? There is much knowledge and expertise about magnolias within the membership of the Group and it could be useful to try to "liberate" it for the benefit of a wider, non-specialist audience. Many members are well qualified to offer opinions as to the best plants. Indeed many of my friends in the Group are unusually uninhibited in this respect.

Here's a suggestion of something we might do: aim to produce a Group consensus by asking members to select the top 10 magnolias **for general planting**, by rating equally beauty of flower, reliability of performance and tolerance of different conditions as the essential criteria. In other words, which are the very best garden plants, irrespective of whether they are easily available in the trade.

All I would ask you to do is to send a postcard or a letter to Mike Robinson, Hindleap Lodge, Priory Road, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5JF or e-mail lanarth@hotmail.com. Don't be put off from voting if you don't grow them yourself; if it is a joint agreed list, e.g.

husband and wife, please specify as this will mean 2 votes. We will then collate, analyse and publish the results.

If you provided a response in good numbers we would try to bring your conclusions to the notice of a wider public, and raise awareness of the Group at the same time.

As a tiny incentive, I will provide a fabulously rare, unconscionably beautiful and frighteningly valuable magnolia to the person whose choice coincides most closely with the consensus.

Who knows, at best we might encourage more people to think and talk about plants and even contribute something to stimulating a demand and encouraging a supply! If you respond in numbers to magnolias, there will be an excellent incentive to repeat the exercise for camellias and rhododendrons. It's down to you. Let's hear from you.

Editor's Notes

Thought-provoking, challenging words from our new Chairman! Join me in sending a big, warm welcome to Maurice Foster by doing what he asks and drawing up your top ten list. Do not, please do not, think "ah but this is not for me" if you have an opinion on magnolias get out your pen or PC and join in - you might even be lucky enough to win that fabulous sounding magnolia. Be aware I shall be trying to beat you to it!

Turning to one of the best perks of our Group - the Tours - Hurrah! - our Hon. Tours Organiser returns with what promises to be a fantastic tour in Devon and Dorset - and having put together one very short Autumn Weekend, I can certify that this is a demanding job indeed. A very warm welcome back to Valerie.

Please make certain you read her outline for a tour of N. Germany in 2002, surely worth saving up for.

Also please spare a moment to read the outline of next year's Autumn Weekend, many of this year's participants have written to say how much they enjoyed this joint event and the new gardening friends they made. If you have not been on an Autumn Weekend before, why not make 2001 the year to try it out? I am sure you will not be disappointed.

This year the RHS has moved the Main Rhododendron Competition at Vincent Square from the usual Tuesday and Wednesday to the weekend, Saturday and Sunday 28 and 29 April. It will be interesting to see whether this will bring extra entries to our main competitive show. It will give a chance to growers who must fit their gardening into non-office hours, on the other hand those of us who live some distance from London may be disappointed that shops and other facilities we wish to visit at the same time, are closed.

Most of you will receive a Newsletter from the RHS relevant to the area in which you live. It is well worth spending a few moments reading this to see what courses and events are being held. Here are some interesting lectures and workshops included and there may be one near you.

Spring Tour 6-11 May 2001 and Onwards

A full account of the gardens was given in the August bulletin. In addition we have places reserved at the Deer Park Hotel, Honiton. This is a fishing hotel in 30 acres of lovely grounds and with spectacular views over the river Otter. There is no single supplement charged. The hotel

is also willing to meet people at Exeter Airport or from British Rail at Honiton.

There is an outdoor heated swimming pool at the hotel also tennis and squash courts and a croquet lawn (if anyone has time to use them!)

It is hoped that a lecture will be arranged.

At the time of writing this (mid-Oct) there are only a few places left on the tour.

Further details from : Mr Valerie Archibold, Starveacre, Dalwood, Axminster, Devon, EX13 7HH.
Tel. 01404 88 1221

Combined Autumn 2001 Weekend with International Camellia Society

The joint Societies Autumn Weekend will be held from 11-14 October - three nights' stay, when it will be the turn of The International Camellia Society (U.K. Region) to make arrangements. The weekend will be based in South Wales where the two principal gardens to be visited will be Aberglasney to see the newly restored gardens under the direction of Group member Graham Rankin and The Botanic Garden of Wales where Group member Ivor Stokes is the Director of Horticulture. Both these gentlemen will be giving an illustrated lecture during the weekend. At least three other gardens will be visited and full details of the arrangements will be published in the April 2001 Bulletin. Meantime further information can be obtained from me David Farnes, 5, Pine View, Ashgate, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S40 4DN Tel. 01246 272105

Proposed Tour of Rhododendron Parks, Gardens and Nurseries in North Germany at the Time of the Westerstede Festival 17-23 May, 2002

Our Committee have suggested a visit to Germany at the time of the Westerstede Festival (not a conference) the third week of May 2002 ~ I have been in contact with Herr Lux, the owner of a large and prestigious travel firm (Luxreisen, Bonn) and he has very kindly agreed to make arrangements if there is sufficient interest to form a party. He stresses that members would have to make their own travel arrangements to Germany and then gather at Bremen Airport where a coach would meet us all at a fixed time.

Because there is an annual garden show in the area we plan to visit, the hotel position may become critical, therefore Herr Lux will need to book in early Spring 2001 to ensure our accommodation. I must know soon in the New Year then, approximate numbers of members wishing to come.

If you are interested then please fill in the form at the end of the Bulletin and let me have it as soon as possible. (not later than 31:1:01)

Details of the Tour

Rhodo 2002 (as it is called) will take place in Westerstede between 17-23 May. The Deutsche Rhododendron Gesellschaft (President) Professor Spethmann says that a 4-hour visit to the Rhodo 2002 at Westerstede is fully sufficient. This is an exhibition of various nurseries and breeders, placed in one large hall

and with a lot of rhododendrons and other plants around. There will not be any seminars or speeches. Professor Spethmann has suggested that we might meet members of the German Rhododendron Society perhaps at Bremen. There are famous rhododendron nurseries around this area. One is at Bad Zwischenahn and has a very large collection of rhododendrons and also a lovely hotel where perhaps we may stay.

Then there is Linswege (Herr Hobbie) with a show garden and nursery. Possibly the best garden of all is Bremen Rhododendron & Botanic Garden. This beautiful and instructive garden has the largest collection of rhododendrons in mainland Europe and is near the great rhododendron nurseries of the Rastede area. This park has 700 of the world's 1000 species rhododendrons within its 89 acres. It also incorporates the Botanic Garden which is laid out with both modern and formal systematic beds.

Then there is the new Botanic Garden at Hamburg, started in 1970, and attached to the botany faculty of the University of Hamburg. It has a highly original modern design with beds representing a botanical order or section cleverly linked to its neighbours and illustrates the development of botanic divisions, classes, orders and families. There is an excellent collection of rhododendrons.

At Hamburg there is a most important breeder of rhododendrons, Herr Hachmann whom we could visit, and at Hanover there is Herrenhauser Garten which has a new glass house (tropical forests) and long-term experimental fields of rhododendrons (and roses) which could be interesting.

Apparently few private gardens are open often enough to be included in the tour. I have had one only so far.

Herr Lux has recommended other nurseries/parks/botanic gardens and I will get details of these to send to interested members.

At this stage it is difficult to estimate the cost of the tour, and Herr Lux recommends a stay of six days. One would expect the cost to be less than a similar tour would cost in the U.K. because of the strong pound, but there will be the cost of the initial travel to Germany.

The tour would differ from previous Spring tours in that most, if not all, the gardens will be Parks and Botanic Gardens; as I have previously mentioned, there are very few private gardens available to us. But I have it from a recognised authority that the parks and gardens are of the highest standard, with glass houses, propagation areas and research laboratories.

V.A.

Tour of N. Germany in May 2002

Please reply to Mrs V. M. Archibold, Starveacre, Dalwood, E. Devon EX13 7HH. Tel. 01404 881221

I am wishing to join the Germany Tour 2002, and enclose a deposit of £20, returnable in the event of the tour receiving insufficient numbers to be a viable proposition.

Name

Address

.....

Cheques to be made out to the Group, please.

Valerie Archibold

Combined Autumn Weekend 2000 with I.C.S.

The Autumn Weekend, held for the first time as a joint venture between The Group and the U.K. Region International Camellia Society, was held in Wiltshire based at the Leigh Park Hotel, Bradford-upon-Avon, 27/29 October. Both Societies have in the past used this hotel for their autumn weekends so it was both fitting and convenient to stay there again, where we were made welcome as previously. The idea for a joint weekend had been suggested for some time and it was pleasing to note that there was an almost exactly equal representation from both Societies with 75% being members of both organisations and of the remainder there was an even number from each. The Autumn Weekends began in 1981 as a social reunion for those members who had attended a tour of gardens in the previous Spring but of course these meetings are open to all members of each Society irrespective of their attendance on earlier occasions. In the event there were only four who had not been on one or both of the tours last spring and in addition we were joined by seven members as day guests. Thus it was pleasing to note that the original concept for the autumn "get-together" is being strongly maintained: it was enjoyed this year by 39 members!

We gathered for dinner on the Friday evening after which Ted Brabin and David Farnes gave an impromptu account, illustrated with some of their colour slides, of their expeditions with others, to the Tsari Region of Tibet. This is an area made famous by the explorers and plant hunters of the years between the two world wars - Frank Kingdon F. Ward and Ludlow and Sherrieff who found "seas of primulas". We marvelled at the fine pictures of spectacular mountain scenery and the drifts of flowers in profusion, especially rhododendrons and primulas.

On the Saturday morning we visited The Abbey House Gardens in Malmesbury and were shown round the 5 acre estate by the owners, Ian and Barbara Pollard who have developed and designed the garden in just 4 years with the help of one full-time gardener. The site was once part of the Benedictine Monastery founded in the seventh century AD and The Abbey House dates back to the 16th century while the ruins of Malmesbury Abbey form a stunning backdrop to the gardens in the front of the house. Ideas and designs from the past with the appropriate plants and planting are incorporated in the herb garden which is surrounded by a circular colonnade of modern design supporting over 180 fruit cordons and a great many climbing roses and clematis. Extensive herbaceous borders would have been a riot of colour earlier in the year but there was much still to enjoy in the late flowering perennials. Behind the house and at a much lower level we saw the latest development in extensive plantings of trees and shrubs including many camellias, hydrangeas and rhododendrons amongst the native trees. The zig-zag pathway lead us down to the river and the fish ponds representative of those kept by the monks in days gone by. The local guide book lists the following adjectives in describing these gardens, "...wonderful, calm and beautiful, peaceful, paradise on earth, quite breathtaking - we agreed!"

Saturday afternoon was spent at Westonbirt Arboretum to enjoy the great range of autumn foliage colours but heavy rain spoilt our visit and photography was impossible although the acer glades were still showing their brilliant colours in spite of the recent very wet and windy weather. Our disappointment, however was lessened greatly by the lecture after dinner from Dr

G.B.Hargreaves (Group member from Bristol) entitled "Westonbirt through the seasons" in which he showed many beautiful slides including, especially, those of rich autumn colours for which the Arboretum is so famous.

It is always enjoyable to visit the gardens of members of either society so on Sunday morning we travelled to 'Algars', north of Bristol, the home of I.C.S. members John and Barbara Naish who escorted us around their 5 acre estate in much better weather than on the previous afternoon though it was still very wet underfoot. John is very keen on magnolias and he has planted more than a few in the fifty years since they first occupied 'Algars Manor'. In fact 57 species and cultivars are listed in John's planting lists. The collection includes many of the newer hybrids from Kosar, Gresham and Jury. It was interesting to see *M.denudata* 'Purple Eye' near the house showing its curious contorted seed pods as well as several flower buds about to open. John's favourite magnolia is 'Caerhays Belle' (*sargentianum* var. *robusta* x *sprengeri*) "Diva" planted in 1988. An area known as The Barbraetum is the brainchild of Mrs Naish who has developed, since 1986, a difficult-to-manage meadow into a delightful tree and shrub plantation giving flower display in the spring and autumn colour of both fruit and foliage. A *Sorbus vilmorinii* laden with pink fruits and an *Acer palmatum* 'Osakazuki' were especially outstanding. A very generous donation of 40 trees from Westonbirt, surplus to their requirements, has helped to give an air of maturity to this more recent part of the garden. As if the delights of the garden were not enough for our pleasure, we were then entertained to a sumptuous buffet lunch in the Jacobean Manor House, full of charm and character, built in 1610.

Our thanks must be recorded to Eileen Wheeler for all the hard work in organising and arranging this first-ever joint weekend, especially as it was her first attempt at such an undertaking. Undoubtedly the weekend had been very successful and enjoyable. Plans for autumn 2001 are already in hand: it will be the turn of the I.C.S. (U.K.) to make the arrangements for the joint meeting.



Branch Events

Current Programme of Branch Events notified to me to date:

2001

- 20 Jan.—North West. Social meeting - K. Kennedy on Local Tours. *Organiser: C. Reddington*
- 24 Feb.—North West. Lecture on Companion Plants - R. McBeath. *Organiser: K. Hulme*
- 3 or 10 March—Wessex. To be arranged - a Saturday lecture
- 7 April—South West. Garden visit Truro. *Organiser: A Edwards*
- 22 April—New Forest. Garden. Visit Dr. Thornton's collection. *Organiser: M. Gates*
- 28 April—North West. Local Show Ness *Organiser: C. Reddington*
- 29 April—Wessex. Annual Show, provisional date. *Organiser: Mrs Miranda Gunn*
- 5 May—North West. Garden visits Southport area. *Organiser: K. Hulme*
- 5 May—South West. Garden visits Chagford and Lustleigh. *Organiser: A. Edwards.*
- 5-8 May—Scottish Society Show, AGM & visits in S.W. Scotland *Organiser: J. Hammond*
- 6-11 May—R.C. & M. Group: Spring Tour Devon & Dorset. *Organiser: V. Archibold*
- 11-13 May—North West. Branch visit to North Wales. *Organiser: C. Reddington*
- 10 November—South West. Lecture on Camellias -Jennifer Treharne. *Organiser: A. Edwards*

Martin Gates, Hon. Branch Co-ordinator

Report on Wessex Branch French Tour (19-21 May)

This trip, which arose from the Chairman's suggestion of a way for the Branch to mark the millennium, was a tour of three gardens in Normandy and a visit to the flower show at the Chateau de Courson, S.W. of Paris. Both nights were spent in Rouen which enabled us to not only sample the excellent restaurants but also to see some of the architectural sights such as the Cathedral.

On the first day we visited the garden of Princess Sturdza, Le Vasterival, near Dieppe. This garden had been reclaimed from swampy forest in a valley leading down to the sea and the wet spring meant that one could readily appreciate what an achievement that was. We were taken round by the indomitable Princess herself who showed us the many unusual and beautiful plants she grows. The garden is in the style of an English garden but with that indefinable attention to the detail of position and form that is more characteristic of the French approach. She grows many magnolias, rhododendrons and camellias, as well as other woody plants such as Acer, Prunus, Stewartia and many rarities, but the early spring meant that many of these had already finished flowering. Being shown round by the Princess we gained an unforgettable insight into the creation of the garden and the care she takes, even today, so that the tour seemed quickly over although we had spent over two hours there.

Saturday morning was the visit to Monet's garden at Giverny. We had to arrive early to avoid the main rush of visitors that turn up later on. As it was it was not long before the crowds built up. The garden is bisected by a road and the lower part contains the now famous lily ponds immortalised by Monet. The season was too early for the water lilies but the wisteria in full flower draped over the Japanese-style bridges and the fresh green growth of the weeping willows created a memorable effect. The upper part of the garden, around the house, is more formal with straight beds, some edged with lavender, and gravel paths or grass between them. This, in contrast, was a riot of colour since the irises, poppies and geraniums were in flower with some early roses. It was indeed a marvellous sight, the experience of which was slightly diminished by the limited access and the crowds.

The afternoon was spent at the Journées des Plantes at Courson, sometimes described as the French Chelsea. It was a more modest affair but much the better for it since the show concentrated on plants and there were many nursery stands from all parts of France as well as some even from the UK. There were a great number of interesting things on sale and only the strict limitation on coach space (as well as garden space back home) prevented more from being bought.

The following day we turned north to the coast around Dieppe and the first garden was Clos de Coudray. Like Le Vasterival, the English influence on the design was clear but this is a much more recent garden incorporating many newer ideas on layout and planting. The garden is conceived as a succession of different compartments, some traditional, some more modern. The plethora of plants, many of which were unusual and experimental, was intriguing. The excellent nursery attached to the garden allowed for some final purchases to fill the remaining space on the coach. After lunch we had a brief tour of Bois de Moutiers, another garden in a valley leading down to the sea. The house, which the garden surrounds, was designed by Lutyens and the adjacent area of garden by Jekyll. On the seaward side of the house large trees and drifts of rhododendron in flower framed a view of the sea in the distance. The more adventurous explored the woodland garden but some, who remained around the house, were fortunate to meet the owner's daughters.

It was a fascinating tour - something of an appetiser to tempt one to go back to explore the region's gardens for while we visited some of the best gardens, there are many others to see. I am sure that all of us who went would wish to thank Miranda Gunn for all her efforts in organising this highly enjoyable tour.



Showing at Vincent Square, Westminster

The Committee is keen to encourage members to join in the RHS Plant Competitions by exhibiting even a single entry. Showing is fun. It takes a little effort but it is fun. There are classes for our three Genera each spring in the monthly shows held in Vincent Square. Early and Main Camellia Competitions are held in mid-March and mid-April, Early and Main Rhododendron Competitions are held in mid-March and late April. There are classes for Magnolias in mid March and mid April. If you are an experienced exhibitor you will know the form. If not the following will help to encourage you.

A schedule and entry forms are available in advance from RHS Shows Dept, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE Tel: 0207 6307422 Fax 0207 2339525. The entry form is submitted a week beforehand to allow time for space allocation to be made, an exhibitor's pass to be sent back to the exhibitor with other details such as parking provision (very limited). Staging is at any time from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. on the day before the show or between 7 a.m. and 9.45 a.m. on the day of the show. Vases and water are provided. Stewards are very helpful, also, other exhibitors especially when you are a novice exhibitor. It is a very friendly business. Once staged, exhibits can be safely entrusted to the Stewards' care

If you are a novice get a schedule early, make an entry and for a first attempt try to stage the day before, for there is more time than on the morning of the show. Concentrate on one or two exhibits until you know the form. Select a fresh unblemished flower, i.e. just open. These travel best and retain their condition. Transportation of the selected flowers is a challenge. Freshly cut stems wrapped with damp tissue and the truss or spray in an adequate size of cardboard box with tissue paper to avoid rubbing or crushing in transit is one method. The name of the species or cultivar is placed on a card provided for each exhibit. If you do not know the name 'name unknown' is sufficient but the Stewards will often be able to help by providing the true name for you.

What the judges are looking for is a flower true to name, well grown and well shown. If it has been well grown it will express the vigour and health of the plant for all to see and if well shown it will be free from damage and look fresh. Such an exhibit encourages other show visitors to admire our favourites, to try to grow them and hopefully even join the Group as well.

Anyway do try. It really is fun as already said and there is plenty of experience and help available within the Group. You only have to ask. Also, having made the effort, staged the exhibit and had the fun you may well win a prize card too!

R.J.

Future Interest in Rhododendrons

I have heard some members say that interest in rhododendrons is on the decline. However, during my tour of the gardens for next year's event I think there is much room for optimism.

One garden in particular is Woodland Grove near Bovey Tracey and owned by a very keen young couple Peter and Helen Reynolds. Peter inherited the garden from his father, and Peter and Helen have an heir in their young son, so it looks as if there is going to be continuity there for some time.

Another on-going garden is Shobrooke Park near Crediton, a 600-acre estate owned by Dr Jack Shelley and his wife Clare. This estate has been in the Shelley family

since the mid 1700's and will continue to be so, since there are children to inherit.

In addition to a large collection of hybrid rhododendrons, Dr Shelley is willing to implement a species collection in a few years' time, and this could become a national collection. As the garden is open at times to the public, the collection would be available to members and provide an area of particular interest. We already have a good hybrid collection at the gardens of our Membership Secretary, Mrs Miranda Gunn, and a species collection would be a welcome addition.

As this interest in the south of the country is surely reflected in other parts, I think that the future of rhododendrons is ensured, at least for quite a time.

V.A.

Book Offer

Hydrangeas: A Gardener's Guide by Toni Lawson-Hall and Brian Rothera ISBN 00 71344 72774 X, published by B. T. Batsford Ltd.

Hydrangeas are one of the great standbys to bring colour into the late summer/autumn garden and work particularly well with our three genera. Here is a book that will help you choose the very best for any given site, and we have the bonus of a foreword by John Bond our recent Chairman.

Firstly the different species that are included are listed followed by some very clear and precise black and white drawings illustrating the different shapes of flower head and leaves. Then the species that are in cultivation are described, again with excellent black and white drawings, two interesting evergreen climbing species *seemannii* and *serratifolia* are included here. The next chapter suggests which species or cultivars will be suitable for different sizes and types of garden from small city patch to large woodland acres; named varieties are selected and some of their special features mentioned.

After this cultivation and propagation are tackled, again with clear line drawings to make all clear, followed by some hints on using them as cut flowers, both on how to keep them looking good as fresh flowers and how to dry them for winter use.

Then comes sixty-three pages of descriptions of the individual species and their cultivars, accompanied by some fine colour photographs, (in most cases a close-up of the flower head which makes for easy identification), and a black and white illustration of the leaf.

At the back of the book there are lists: The flower head types of subspecies and cultivars, flowering times of these, a glossary of botanical terms and sketches to illustrate some terms used in the text and finally a list of gardens known to the authors to contain good displays of hydrangeas both in the U.K. and overseas.

This is a neat book, 195cms by 255cms, so easy to carry with you if you want to take it into the garden to identify a shrub, but somehow it manages to condense a vast amount into its 160 pages. I would highly recommend it both to the new and to the experienced gardener. It has certainly inspired me to plant more of these lovely shrubs in my own garden.

K.H.

This book is available from bookshops at £25 but Batsfords are offering it to members for £23 post free (overseas members should add £3.50 postage). Members should call 020 7700 7611 and ask for Mail Order, or send a cheque to Batsford, 9 Blenheim Court, Brewery Road, London N7 9NT quoting reference BAT/00/12.

Review

A Pioneering Plantsman: A. K. Bulley and the Great Plant Hunters, by Brenda McLean, HM Stationery Office, RBG Kew and RBG Edinburgh, 1997.

The names of Forrest, Cooper, Farrer and Kingdon Ward constantly ring in our ears amongst the heroes who braved danger in the Sino-Himalayas to bring back the plants we all grow today, though maybe we don't always remember them as often as we should when we select our favourites at (comparatively) modest cost in countless nurseries. But another name should spring to our lips in the same breath. One who did not risk life and limb and indeed never left these shores, but whose imagination, enthusiasm and sheer business acumen were as significant as were the collectors themselves in filling the gardens of today. Arthur Kilpin Bulley was his name, the thirteenth child of a prosperous Liverpool cotton broker, who used his wealth and love of the natural world to found the firm of Bees Ltd in which he grew the plants brought back by the plant collectors he financed. And not only the plants, but thousands of seeds: "Bees Seeds that Grow" in 6p packets at my local Woolworths were as familiar to me in my childhood as the "Bisto Kids" or the dancing fisherman of "Skegness is so Bracing" in the advertisements of that period. I did not know then anything about the name "Bees" but I do now from reading Brenda McLean's absorbing biography of the man whose initial was "B" and whose daughter gave Ness, the garden he created, to the University of Liverpool. This book is packed with fascinating details of Arthur Bulley's private and business life. His contacts with the great academic botanists, like Sir Isaac Bailey Balfour of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, long term residents in China, like Augustine Henry, not to speak of his rivalry with another pioneering nurseryman, Sir Harry Veitch these and many, many other experiences, recreate the sheer excitement of gardening in the early years of this century.

This is all brought to life through an enormous number of contemporary photographs, pages from old nursery catalogues, private letters often with more than candid comments, extracts from that unique periodical, *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, not to speak of a wonderful collection of coloured plates gathered from a variety of sources which show us just how many of the treasures, shrubby and herbaceous, we owe to the plant collectors sponsored by Arthur Bulley. To mention but a few *Rhododendrons forrestii*, *beesianum* and *impeditum*, very many primulas, including *P. viallii* and *bulleyana*, *Roscoea humeana*, *Gentiana sino-ornata*, *trichotoma*, *prolata* and *farreri*, and of course everyone's favourites, the *Meconopsis*

He also employed such famous collectors as George Forrest, Frank Kingdon Ward, Roland Edgar Cooper and Reginald Farrer, to his personal gain but not always to theirs.

These comments do not do full justice to Brenda McLean's *Life of Arthur Bulley*. She is able to maintain our interest in this extraordinary individual, typical of his Liverpool background, strongly influenced by his nonconformist and intellectual ancestry, who yet had the imagination and energy simultaneously to carry on his family business, a completely different and pioneering nursery garden as well as possessing a strong social conscience and deeply held political beliefs. There is much more in her book than I have been able to summarise here and prospective readers will not regret investing in its purchase.

C.P.

C.D. Roms

Homer Salley's 3rd edition of "*Rhododendron Hybrids*", a vast store of information (the books will be known to most of us), has been released in this form and can be obtained from Harold Greer, address greergardens@uswest.com for \$32 US dollars, also from the ARS Journal at the same price. I hear also that Harold Greer has a CD of his own coming out that will boast vast numbers of rhododendron pictures.

