

# The **World** *of the Rhododendron*



**Spring Review No.88 ~ 2021**

*The Scottish Rhododendron Society*

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### Cover Pictures:

**Front:** *Rhododendron floccigerum*

**Back:** Smooth bark and red flowers

**Top:** *Rhododendron exasperatum*

**Bottom:** *Rhododendron barbatum*

**Pictures by John Roy**

## Editorial

Welcome to your 2021 Spring Review. I had intended the next publication to be the Yearbook, but with the continued restrictions on movement because of the pandemic, I don't know when I'll be able to get to Glasgow. In order to maintain the high standard and quality of the Yearbook, I need the input of professional printers. So this is again a kind of "emergency" publication. It is important to keep our members informed, especially about forthcoming events. You will find two inserts in this issue for garden tours in 2022.

In spite of there being not a lot going on, you have sent me enough articles for a nice wee Review. As I write, spring is slowly awakening the garden and there is much to look forward to. Early rhododendrons such as *R. barbatum*, *R. moupinense* and *R. dekatanum* are looking good. The prolonged colder weather this winter has delayed flowering but that is a good thing in that so often a mild winter brings on the flowering only for it to be nipped by a frost.

A number of my rhododendrons have flower buds showing for the first time. If all goes well I will have flowers on *R. lacteum*, *R. lanatoides* and *R. erosum* to name a few.

As the Scottish National Rhododendron Show has had to be cancelled for a second year, we are going to run a virtual show again on our website:

<http://scottishrhododendronsociety.org.uk> .

You can email your pictures to: [postmaster@scottishrhododendronsociety.org.uk](mailto:postmaster@scottishrhododendronsociety.org.uk) .

Closing date is 21<sup>st</sup> June, so plenty of time to get your pictures in.

If you are a Facebook user please go to our Scottish Rhododendron Society page where four members post pictures and comments about our plants. When we are unable to visit other gardens it has been great to see pictures from around the world. There are also other plant based pages that give lots of pleasure in normal times, but have been invaluable in the last year.

Also I have produced a Scottish Rhododendron Society YouTube channel and have posted some videos up there. Go to the YouTube website and search for Scottish Rhododendron Society. If you have a video you think is worthy of publishing on our channel then email me and I can arrange an upload.

Meanwhile, read on and enjoy your Spring Review.

*John Roy*

## President's Column

**John M. Hammond**

In many ways our members are extremely fortunate to have absorbing interest in gardening, or to be professional horticulturalists, as in one way or another it will have provided a level of support in both a physical and thought-provoking way to counter some of the effects of being in a Covid-19 'lockdown' over the past year. It is no surprise that gardens in general have become increasingly popular during the pandemic as a means of distraction from the virus and our local garden centre has been very busy during the periods it has been open to sell a wide range of food and gardening materials.

I am writing these notes in late-March and the past few days have been relatively dry for a change, although the winter is still with us; dull, cloudy skies, together with a sharp cold wind. After the persistently wet and cold winter the soil remains saturated, and the springtime bulbs have not been encouraged to put on an early show. A few rhododendrons are in bloom including, *R. flinckii*, a Stephen Fox collection from Bhutan, *R. calophytum* from Glendoick, and the Exbury form of *R. lutescens*. The latter is of some interest as it often begins to partially flower in late-October, gets hit by the first significant frost, then stays dormant for a couple of months only to bloom partially again around mid-January and gets hit by a hard frost, then finally is covered with clear lemon-yellow flowers in mid-March. This is a good garden plant from the Triflora Sub-section that is around 9ft in height after 20 years and doesn't seem to mind being pruned to curtail its spread. There are plenty more rhododendrons with swelling buds, and a large *Magnolia* 'Yellow River', is just beginning to open its buds with a host of large clear yellow flowers. This is another good garden plant that has stood up to the frequent severe gales coming in from the south west Atlantic over the past several years and is a better choice than *Magnolia* 'Elizabeth', which tends to be brittle and loses branches when grown in a location that is open to the wind.

It is unfortunate that the pandemic has resulted in the postponement or complete cancellation of the Society's activities, and on your behalf, I would like to thank the organisers on our Committee who have continued to work behind the scenes to rearrange, postpone or cancel our Annual Show & Plant Sale, our A.G.M., our Garden Visits and the Spring Tour of Southern Ireland. Inevitably, there is a considerable amount of work involved in organising these activities in the first place, only to have to rearrange them, or start again from scratch to get them in next year's programme. We remain hopeful that some normality will return later this summer and we will be able to meet again in the autumn. Be sure to take care, keep safe and well.

## Secretary's Notes

### Katrina Clow

It is a year now since the first lockdown and it seemed reasonable to think that we should be looking forward to SRS events postponed in 2020; however, this is not to be. After much heart searching, the Tours Committee decided to postpone the Southern Ireland tour and the post-show tour to North Ayrshire and once again, we shall miss our great Rhododendron Show and Exhibition at Garelochhead and the ever popular plant sale. Our loyal, diligent propagators are accumulating plants and so we look forward to a bumper plant sale at the 2022 show.

At least we had the seed sale, organised by Willie Campbell and as usual, well supported by our overseas members and a great success financially. Even if you are not buying seed, we welcome your contributions to the seed exchange.

Thank you for staying with the Society. Our events will resume in Autumn and we can look forward to meeting up again. Meantime, any items of interest will be welcomed on the web site.

### More on Liquid Fence

Following the article in last year's Summer Review about Marion Kinns' use of Liquid Fence, the following information has reached the editor:

Marion Kinns is very sad to report to members that it is no longer possible to obtain Liquid Fence in the U.K. although it is still for sale in the States. The stockist in the States is Mr Medical and they sold to the U.K. via Ebay. The statement on ebay now reads 'will not ship to the U.K.' This is a big disappointment as it did work well against deer in the garden.

Keith White reports: The Liquid Fence is available to me at 8 places within 10 miles from my home. Sizes vary between 32 oz and 2.5 gallons for the concentrate. 32 oz of the repellent concentrate is \$35 US at a nearby home improvement outlet.

I would be happy to buy some and ship it to Scotland. As for me, I am going to try it out. Every year I have had to put an electric fence around the roses to keep the deer out. The Liquid Fence sounds easier. The deer were even trying to eat out of the bird feeder this morning. Another job for LF.

# Forthcoming Events Update

## David N Starck

All information in this Update is subject to Covid19 restrictions applicable at the time.

### **2021 SRS/RSCG Joint Autumn Conference: Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> – Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021**

#### **Venue: Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh**

Arrangements for this event have been finalised. The Saturday is a Lecture Day and the Sunday will be Garden Visits. Registration Forms are expected to be sent out in April. The Conference Programme remains unchanged at present.

### **2022 Spring Tour of Gardens in SW Scotland: Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April – Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

We felt that we should not ignore our own Scottish Gardens and are putting in place this Tour of South West Scotland. We are hoping to visit the following Gardens: Glenwhan, Castle Kennedy (Lochinch), Logan Botanic Garden, Logan House Garden, Threave, Galloway House & Gardens, Cally, Corsock House, Drumlanrig, plus a couple more gardens which are not normally open to the public. This Tour will be limited to 25 people and will be a self-drive tour. For those interested an A4 Interest Form is enclosed with this publication.

### **2022 Post Show Tour: Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

As usual this is the day after the SRS Annual Rhododendron Show. This Tour will be to gardens in Kilsyth, namely Aeolia Garden and Blackmill Garden. These two gardens are on either side of Allanfauld Road. Both have woodland gardens as well as some herbaceous beds. While we are at Aeolia Garden we will be having home made tea/coffee and cakes. Lunch has been arranged at a suitable venue nearby, and we hope to visit another garden after lunch. For those interested an A4 Interest Form is enclosed with this publication.

### **2022 SRS/RSCG Joint Autumn Conference:**

This event is, as usual, a joint conference with RSCG. We are interested in hearing from anyone who wishes a specific subject to be the topic of this Conference. This is your chance to put forward your ideas on what you require from both Societies. Please send an email to [david@lochloren.free-online.co.uk](mailto:david@lochloren.free-online.co.uk) if you wish a specific topic or group of topics covered by this Conference.

## **2023 Spring Tour to Southern Ireland: Dates to be confirmed**

This will be our third attempt to take a group of Members on this Tour of Gardens of Southern Ireland. The programme will be much the same as that arranged for 2020 and 2021. There may be changes to the programme depending on whether gardens will be open Spring 2023. We will be sending out an Interest Form in 2022.

## **The Exploration Fund**

### **Willie Campbell**

At the AGM a couple of years back it was agreed that we ring fence a sum of money for the purposes of Education. Since then we have had a lot of discussion at committee level and we have decided to change the fund name from **Education** to **Exploration Fund** more in keeping with the fund expectations.

The **Exploration fund** would be open for one off grants to Students and Young Horticulturists with an interest in plants from the Sino-Himalayan regions. In other words, rhododendrons, trees, shrubs and companion plants from these areas of the world in their natural habitat.

The fund will have a listing of “Aims” for any candidates to help them in making a request for a grant and help with the completion of an application form. These forms will be available on our website or on request.

All Application forms will be scrutinised by the administrators of the Exploration Fund. These forms will have all the relevant permits enclosed or arrangements that are ongoing at the application stage for the country, region and area the applicants are expecting to visit. If it is with a party or group these details should be available to the fund administrators as well.

Philip Rankin has agreed to lead the fund Administration team, by checking the candidate’s application form, trip requirements, permits and the vision of the applicant or what might be gained from any such trip. Philip will have John Roy and Ian Sinclair to assist, both well versed in visits to the Sino-Himalaya region.

On completion of the visit, the applicant is expected to give a report, which will be published in our Society Publication.

**If you think you may be able add a donation little or large to help build up the Exploration Fund for the future, please send a cheque (or Bank Transfer) to**

our Treasurer Colin Whitehead, his details are in the committee section of this Newsletter. If you are a taxpayer, you will be able to claim “Gift Aid” on any donation as we are a Scottish Charity, it could come from your garden opening, special event, a plant sale or even a legacy. Please think about how we can give some of our younger generation of Horticulturists a start in the study of the plants, we all love and care about in their natural wild habitat.

## More adventures with Rhododendrons in rural Aberdeenshire

Geoffrey Westmoreland

This is written during a very wet early October, after a very dry September, during which our private water supply dried up for a few days. Much drama was involved, including myself lifting hundreds of litres of water from the nearby river Don. Plus, the usual argument between a neighbour and the local farmer regarding who can draw water from our nearby well cistern as the water level drops. Aberdeenshire council set up a system to supply water to shire residents with private water supplies, as the problem was fairly widespread. (*7,500 homes in Aberdeenshire have private water supplies – the largest group in Scotland.*) I made use of the service and collected 240 litres on one occasion in our Land Rover. Thank you Aberdeenshire Council. A nearby neighbour has a bore hole, and with climate change these may become more common up here in Aberdeenshire.

The main event during May and June (*June was a washout once again this year*) was taking pictures of our rhododendrons as they came into bloom for the Society’s virtual show – a lot of pictures were eventually submitted by email to a very tolerant Matt Heasman.

Getting the right pictures took several weeks, as a result of which I inevitably compared our flower show with previous years. Sadly, some plants did not produce a good showing this year. One reason was quickly obvious. A particular windbreak was now almost completely shading several plants. Significant pruning and cutting back of trees had not been done for a couple of years, so out with the loppers, the saws and secateurs.

After the windbreak was sorted, my heart sank as it was painfully clear most of the rest of our “woodland” garden needed the same treatment. I read recently something to the effect “*the problem with woodland gardens is the trees*”. Very very true. Covid-19,



and an immune system problem has required me to “shield” from March through to 1<sup>st</sup> August. (*The government tried to send me food parcels – the palaver that entailed is another story.*) However, the required radical pruning and cutting back of trees coincided nicely with my shielding. The weeks of work, (just me on my own), resulted in huge piles of debris. It has taken me a week to burn only about of half of it so far. I have enough leftover at the moment for several big November 5<sup>th</sup> bonfires.

Getting light back into the garden has been the main problem this year, the pruning and cutting back has had a positive effect. (*The work has been good exercise as well. I discovered the other day that at 68 I can now touch my toes again!*) Lack of deadheading of our rhododendrons may also have reduced our flower show this year. Previously I have deadheaded “where practical”. This year I purposely deadheaded every flower I could, probably reaching at least 99% of our flowers – on over 100 plants. One *R.* ‘Percy Wiseman’ hybrid alone had 300 flowers. I accept that was probably over the top verging on crazy, but what else was I going to do on long sunny Aberdeenshire afternoons, whilst “shielding”? It was either that or open the gin. Plus, it was an experiment, along with the tree pruning and cutting back, to see if it improves our flower showing next year. Time will tell.

P.S. This is written towards the end of an unusually (for recent years) cold February, and with snow on the ground with us nearly every day since Christmas Eve. The Beast from the East II hit us in the first half of February, snowing us in and one morning giving us our all time record low of -24°C. Braemar only got to -21.5°C according to the BBC. I generally selected my hybrids to be H5 or H6, so I’m hoping my babies are not too badly affected.



*Rhododendron*  
**‘Pfauenauge’ or ‘Peacock  
Butterfly’**

**Pictures by Geoff  
Westmoreland**



*Rhododendron*  
**'Cassata'**



*Rhododendron*  
**'Madame Masson'**



*Rhododendron*  
**'Mrs T H Lowinsky'**

# This Last Year at Osberton

## Penny Murch

The Covid shut down last spring came right in the middle of our sales time at Osberton Nurseries. Half the spring orders had gone to garden centres, but half remained. Eventually most of these plants would be trashed and they still sit in a slowly consolidating heap. Some, mostly dwarfs and evergreens were salvaged, cut back and sold last summer, which made us feel a lot better. In all this worry and gloom there was one good thing, all of us were able to see the different varieties in full bloom, and how beautiful they were. For some it was the first time ever and I took the advantage of taking some photos and include a selection here.

Trouble never seems to come alone, but can be followed by a second problem that compounds the first. So it was last spring. If you remember, there was a late May frost and this caught some of the varieties that had been put out in the fields to grow on for next year. They looked awful, and then they did not get over it and so many had to be thrown away. Young plants in this situation rarely get over a knock like this, particularly when they have a small root system. It was not only rhododendrons, many people in the area had the same problem with potatoes.



It is January as I write now, and thankfully garden centres are open so we trust they will stay that way. And as Societies like ours are predominately filled with those of a certain age, it looks as if the vaccine is just around the corner for many of us. That is us too, arms out, bring it on.

***Rhododendron ‘Ramapo’***

**Pictures by Penny Murch**





**Evergreen Azaleas**

**Evergreen Azaleas  
crop ticketed and  
ready to go out**

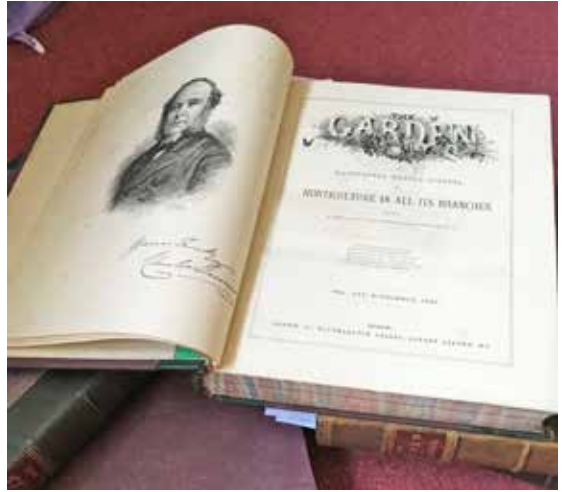


***Rhododendron*  
'Dreamland'**

# Rhododendron Research for our Doune Collection

## Fiona Campbell

We have in our possession many books. The majority of them as you might expect are garden related. Some of them I have read cover to cover but mostly they are just dipped into for research purposes. Some of the oldest books dating from 1878 are the 11 bound volumes of *The Garden, An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Horticulture In All Its Branches*, founded by William Robinson.



With plenty time to spare I decided to browse through them to see what they said about rhododendrons and how that may relate to our own rhododendrons. I did come across some interesting pieces. Direct quotes from the books are in italics.

Firstly, *The Alpine Rose – Rhododendron ferrugineum* which grows wild in the pasture land of the Alps and Apennines. It forms a low spreading bush covered with small Box-like leaves, rusty coloured on their under surfaces. In early summer it produces its rosy pink blossoms, generally in profusion. They are easy to grow in any soil but like others of the race, they prefer peat.... they seem to thrive best in the North. Willie and I saw it in the Dolomites several years ago. In our garden, very similar to this we have identified the other Alpine rhododendron *R. hirsutum* planted by previous owners and described in *The Garden* as a charming dwarf shrub with



**Top: Old volumes of “The Garden”**

**Left: *Rhododendron hirsutum***

**Pictures in this article by Fiona Campbell**

each twiggy branch crowned with an umbel of rich rose flowers. In the 1880s RBGE had large groups planted on the lawns. Further research online tells me *R. hirsutum* was the first rhododendron to come to Britain in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.

Another paragraph in *The Garden* spoke about *Rhododendron fulgens* in York Nurseries and the problems they had getting it to flower. Over the years several sites had been tried and finally in a sheltered spot but with mid-day sun in March 1884 there was success with 7 fine trusses. We have 2 plants of *R. fulgens* which produce flower buds in March, but often the frost damages them. This year is our best flowering with 5 trusses on one of them, but the foliage is never good.

A favourite rhododendron of ours is *Rhododendron* 'Praecox'. We have had one in a pot for many years, but last year decided it needed more space and planted it out in the last remaining space in the front garden. It will hopefully do better there. It is a hit or miss getting the flowering right to avoid frosts and I see it was very popular with the late Victorians. From the pages of *The Garden* it appears that *R. 'Praecox'* was a popular greenhouse/conservatory rhododendron. I was surprised to read in all *The Garden* books just how many rhododendrons were grown inside. All the tender ones and many from Sikkim/Himalaya spent their days in the glasshouses of the time and were often forced for indoor decoration. Sadly, I did not encounter any references to Scotland and the furthest North region I found mentioned was Lancashire.



*Rhododendron fulgens*

Propagating notes from *The Garden* 1888. *Himalayan rhododendrons can be propagated either by seed, cuttings or by grafting on allied species..... Though the seed will germinate in a cold frame during the winter, the young plants make far more rapid progress if kept in gentle heat during their earlier stages. A temperature rather above that of an ordinary greenhouse is the best for the seeds. Whether pots or pans are used they should be well drained and filled with fine sandy peat pressed down moderately firm and level.... the seeds may be sown at once, and just covered with fine sandy peat.... and so it goes on with much detail on after care. There are detailed notes on propagating using cuttings and grafting methods.*





**Above: *Rhododendron denudatum***

**Right: View along back border from  
*Rhododendron orbiculare***

*Rhododendron orbiculare*, *R. denudatum*, *R. fulgens* and *R. hookeri* are settling in alongside some hybrids by the back fence. *R. orbiculare* which was grown from seed 8+ years ago is well established and flowers well although *R. fulgens* is difficult as already mentioned. *R. denudatum* from Glendoick's open pollinated seed and *R. hookeri* also from seed are doing well at 4/5 feet in height.



Last year Willie planted out from his pots several other rhododendrons: *R. adenosum*, *R. viscosum*, *R. maddenii* ssp. *crasum*, *R. brachyanthum* ssp. *hypolepidotum* and *R. sanguineum*. The *R. maddenii* from Alan Clark's Vietnamese seed is poorly. It is not hardy enough for Central Scotland and the azalea *R. viscosum* may also succumb to the cold winter. However, the *R. adenosum* grown from a cutting from a seed grown plant that Willie grew at Gargunnock looks healthy. The *R. brachyanthum* was seed grown while the *R. sanguineum* was a bargain plant from Glendoick. Both look as if they have settled into their new sites. We look forward as ever to the flowering season just ahead and watching the progress of our collection.

2020	Wuerzburg		Radlett		Glendoick	
	mm	inches	mm	inches	mm	inches
January	11.0	0.43	58.5	2.30		
February	121.0	4.76	110.0	4.33		
March	47.0	1.85	43.0	1.69		
April	7.0	0.28	44.0	1.73		
May	39.0	1.54	1.0	0.04		
June	58.0	2.28	61.0	2.40		
July	22.0	0.87	51.0	2.01		
August	40.0	1.57	75.5	2.97		
September	35.0	1.38	32.5	1.28		
October	46.0	1.81	203.5	8.01		
November	21.0	0.83	45.5	1.79		
December	38.0	1.50	90.0	3.54		
<b>Total 2020</b>	<b>485.0</b>	<b>19.09</b>	<b>815.5</b>	<b>32.11</b>		
Total 2019	418.0	16.45	724.0	28.50	729.8	28.73
Total 2018	448.0	17.64	663.5	26.13	643.7	25.34
Total 2017	587.0	23.13	642.5	25.30	818.0	32.21
Total 2016	622.0	24.49	692.0	27.24	783.3	30.83
Total 2015	529.0	20.83	662.5	26.11	948.0	37.29
Total 2014	517.0	20.36	862.5	33.96	915.5	36.05
Total 2013	655.0	25.79	735.5	28.95	665.5	26.21
Total 2012	585.0	23.04	903.5	35.56	980.0	38.58
Total 2011	506.0	19.93	520.5	20.51	815.6	32.10
Total 2010	776.0	30.54	682.0	26.87	741.8	28.22
Total 2009	518.0	20.40	793.0	31.23	782.0	30.79
Total 2008	521.0	20.51	753.5	29.67	810.8	31.92
Total 2007	786.0	30.93	785.5	31.00	801.0	31.51
Total 2006	583.0	22.95	617.0	24.29	752.7	29.63
Total 2005			477.0	18.78	899.4	35.40
Total 2004			662.0	26.06		

The weather stations:

Wuerzburg is in Lower Franconia, North Bavaria, Germany.

Radlett is in Hertfordshire, north west of London.

Glendoick is in Perthshire, east central Scotland.

Glenarn is on the Gareloch, west central Scotland.

Ballachulish is in the Scottish west Highlands.

Ellon is in Aberdeenshire, north east Scotland.

Morar is in the Scottish west Highlands



Glenarn		Ballachulish		Ellon		Morar	
mm	inches	mm	inches	mm	inches	mm	inches
136.4	5.37	620.5	24.43	30.0	1.18	286.0	11.25
365.0	14.37	579.6	22.82	58.0	2.28	257.0	10.12
215.9	8.50	331.0	13.03	20.0	0.79	165.0	6.50
25.4	1.00	52.6	2.06	12.0	0.47	38.0	1.51
72.9	2.87	172.5	6.79	45.0	1.77	111.0	4.39
123.7	4.87	163.1	6.42	67.0	2.64	162.0	6.40
200.0	7.87	196.9	7.75	93.0	3.66	154.0	6.06
206.5	8.13	126.2	4.97	74.0	2.91	86.0	3.40
130.3	5.13	257.0	10.12	37.0	1.46	221.0	8.72
158.8	6.25	436.1	17.17	237.0	9.33	352.0	13.86
174.5	6.87	417.8	16.45	31.0	1.22	275.0	10.83
177.8	7.00	356.4	14.03	207.0	8.15	191.0	7.52
<b>1987.0</b>	<b>78.23</b>	<b>3709.4</b>	<b>146.04</b>	<b>911.0</b>	<b>35.87</b>	<b>2298.0</b>	<b>90.50</b>
1682.8	66.25	2795.0	110.04	876.0	34.49	1927.0	75.87
1577.3	62.13	2769.6	109.04	709.0	27.90	1789.0	70.43
1692.5	66.63	2759.8	108.66	918.5	36.16		
1647.7	64.87	2827.5	111.32				
2196.7	86.50	3858.7	151.92				
1933.5	76.11	3359.9	133.28				
1641.2	64.61	2654.6	104.51				
1956.3	77.01	2615.0	102.95				
2257.6	88.75	3468.5	136.56				
1403.8	55.27	1727.0	67.99				
1889.1	74.37	2980.7	117.35				
2056.6	81.00	3321.1	130.75				
1921.5	75.63	3236.6	127.42				
1722.2	67.79	3314.0	130.47				
1511.3	59.50	3082.2	121.58				
1619.3	63.50	3266.6	125.03				

No measurements from Glendoick for 2020 as Peter Cox is unable to provide them for now. I think you can say it was a fairly damp year all round, but especially in the west of Scotland. Glenarn had its third highest total, Ballachulish its second highest and Morar its highest. But it is Ballachulish that once again runs away with title of wettest place and Wuerzburg is the driest.

# Designing our Rhododendron Garden

Paul Haynes



I wrote an article with the above title in December 2019 you will find it in the Yearbook 21. 2020. There I described our garden in Morar and how I was trying to follow the advice given in Kenneth Cox's book "woodland gardening" to plan and design my own garden.

If you look back at the article the following information will make more sense. I said that the garden divides up conveniently into rectangular sections, a sheltered back garden to the north of the house, a bed on the east gable and a larger south facing front garden with a separate narrow front garden strip by the main road. Three of these areas were designed and planted in 2019 and this year I am working on the design and planting of the main section of the front garden so this is a progress report for a year later.

I will start by explaining how covid has affected the work in the garden. I had a large number of rhododendrons planted in nursery beds intended for various gardens, events and plant sales. Unfortunately these events have been delayed and I now have nursery beds overcrowded with rapidly growing rhododendrons and lots of others in pots that should be moved to the nursery beds. This is just a nuisance for me and it means I can't converted the nursery bed areas into permanent planting. I can sympathise with

commercial growers, similar delays in moving on plants ready to sell must be a serious concern and have financial consequences for them.

The main flowerbed in the front garden is now planted up with a mixture of rhododendrons and azaleas and clumps of herbaceous species. The theme for this bed is for the colours to start with red contrasting with yellows at the east end then moving on to more yellow then orange followed by yellow orange and the hope is to get a sharp red yellow contrast at one end then have the yellows blending into complimentary orange colours at the other end. At the red end some of the plants are *R. dichroanthum* ssp. *apodectum* and *R. sperabile* which flower one after the other. I put in a *R. wiltonii* with them for foliage contrast. Then azaleas with their fragrance and autumn colour, the ones I have used are yellows *R. molle* ssp. *molle*, *R. luteum* and orange *R. molle* ssp. *japonica*. Moving on to the hybrids *R. 'Golden Gate'* and *R. 'Glendoick Sunset'* both of which have similar orange yellow colours. So that it doesn't look too bare in the winter when the azaleas, acers *Enkianthus* and *Sorbus* have lost their leaves there are evergreens: *Osmanthus*, *Berberis*, laurel and conifers in the same bed. The herbaceous species are planted among them in single species groups of *Dicentra spectabilis*, *Polygonatum*, *Corydalis flexuosa*, *Meconopsis 'Lingholm'* and *Primula*. There are also a few other shrubs and established rhododendrons in the bed and when I see how the colour scheme works out I will have to decide what is to be kept or what has to go.

The front garden also has a small bed in front of the bedroom windows. This bed already has *Kalmia latifolia* and *Mahonia 'Winter Sun'* established as well as *Rhododendron roxianum* and *R. pachysanthum*. (These last two are at the west end of the bed and shouldn't upset the colour scheme). The main colour theme for the east part of this bed is purple with a few yellows and whites for highlights. Most of the species here are



dwarfs under planted with primroses. The species I have used are *R. impeditum*, *R. fastigiatum*, *R. russatum*, *R. saluenense*, *R. calostrotum* all basically purple along with contrasting yellow *R. 'Shamrock'* and *R. tsariense* var. *trimoense* and

***Acer palmatum 'Katsura'*  
new spring growth**

**Pictures by Paul Haynes**

white *R. 'Egret'* and *R. leucaspis*. I am expecting that most of these smaller species can be allowed to grow together and form a series of mounds. For autumn colour I've also added some small growing acers. Nearby I am going to plant *R. 'Purple Splendour'*. It has got such a good colour that I want to keep this hybrid in the garden but it will grow too big and out compete the dwarfs if I put them together and a strong purple is difficult to position in the other beds without the colours clashing. The very early purple *R. dauricum* is an exception as it flowers so early that it shouldn't clash with others. I will put a few of these in for early spring colour.

Now that I've got most of the garden planted I'm looking forward to seeing how all the different colour schemes go together and how well I've done or otherwise with getting interesting foliage or flower combinations throughout the year. I'm quite sure I won't have got it all correct and there will be lots of plants that I will have to be either removed or moved. Fortunately a garden is never finished and will always evolve but I have made a good start and there is no risk of running out of jobs to do, the bridge mentioned in the earlier article is still at the pipe dream stage.

Christine and I have missed the good company of SRS members and we're really looking forward to meeting you all again as soon as the conferences get going again.



# To fence or not to fence? – that was the question

Peter Hogbin



We moved to this place in 2016 and have spent the last 3 years ripping out a pretty uninspiring collection of plants that included a mixture of trees and shrubs including, of course, a good stand of *Rhododendron ponticum*. We wanted to create a more interesting garden and had a list of what we thought would complement the view down Loch Fyne which we enjoy.

But planting a rose bush was the start of the problem. It was very quickly discovered by roe deer which browsed it down to a few twigs. We had seen deer in the vicinity but had been told that they spent their time at the far end of the forest where the grazing is more plentiful. Not so! The deer lay in wait and once fresh plantings were made, they wandered into the garden to enjoy the feast. It was obvious that a fence was needed. Objections to this solution were principally based around the fact that it would spoil the view and it would be expensive to erect. The garden is quite small and the perimeter is less than 200 metres. The cost of a post and netting fence was put in the order of £2000 which seemed out of proportion to the benefits it would provide. The greater objection lay in the fact that it would be an ugly intrusion into the landscape.

In a discussion with a local forester, a casual mention that an electric fence could be an option led me to look at whether this would be an effective barrier to the deer without





**View down Loch Fyne. Can you see the Electric Fence?**

intruding visually and would be at a considerably lower cost to post and netting. This it has proved to be!

Materials costing only £350 and a day of time had the fence erected. The only complication was getting the power from the mains unit to the fence but this was achieved by passing 2 insulated cables sized 1.6mm up a 30 metre poly pipe buried a few inches below the turf to the garden edge. The fence posts are 122cm high (or 4ft in old money). The garden is generally above the level of the forest around so the fence does appear from the viewpoint of the deer to be higher than it actually is. The three lines are spaced about 40cm apart and should be sufficient to prevent the deer from coming through. The line tester shows that any deer coming close will receive a very powerful message to say it is not welcome and should stay well away. For any literate deer, there is a warning notice but for any others, they will receive an unforgettable but quite harmless shock.

Questions remain! We have not fenced the perimeter totally. The road to the house comes past the garden at which point there is a 5ft wall and which I assumed would be a sufficient barrier. The garden gate adjacent to the house is only 4ft high but I have assumed that, as there is nothing immediately behind the gate, they will not think to jump over to explore further. I could regret that assumption but it would be easy to fix a strand of wire over the top of the gate. The last potential weak spot is the passage running behind the house which is very narrow - will they be tempted to run the gauntlet of an unfamiliar and confined route? My instinct is that it would not be something they would attempt.



**Connection to the line**

We have now established 2 beds of new plantings of rhododendron and azaleas which are looking healthy and will surge ahead when the spring weather warms the south facing slope. We have planted dwarf and medium sized plants as we thought that a good range of different shapes and colours would provide a more pleasing effect rather than just a few large specimens.

Already snowdrops and daffodils are pushing through the soil to be followed soon by the tulips. This year we look forward to enjoying a good display of colour which in previous years has been trashed by the deer which particularly enjoyed a feast of tulips as they emerged from the ground. Not this year, they won't. Already

the small investment has paid dividends in allowing us to sleep easy at night. We look forward to the day when we can escape from lockdown and leave the garden knowing that we will come back to a scene, not of desolation, but to one of unfettered beauty.

**Pictures by Peter Hogbin**



# **An Appreciation: Patrick Thomas Gordon-Duff-Pennington**

**John M. Hammond**

Patrick Thomas Gordon-Duff-Pennington, also known as “Patrick of the Hills”, or “Patrick” to his many friends, blew out 90 candles on his most recent birthday cake whilst living in a well-earned retirement on Scotland’s North East Coast at Nairn. Lockdown has created loneliness for many, including the naturally gregarious Patrick, and he sadly passed away on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

Patrick, born 12<sup>th</sup> January 1930 in London, was son of Group Captain George Edward Gordon-Duff and his wife Rosemary Estelle (nee Craven), and he grew up in Moray in the northeast of Scotland. He was educated at Eton and Oxford before National Service in the Cameron Highlanders and carried the Regimental Colours at the Queen’s Coronation Parade in 1953 through the rain.

His parents disapproved of him becoming a shepherd in the wilds of Scotland and on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1955 he married Phyllida, William Pennington’s daughter from Muncaster Castle in Cumberland, adding her surname of Pennington to the two fine Scottish surnames already in his possession; they had met five years earlier at Ardverikie, the Pennington’s estate on Loch Laggan and the newlyweds stayed at Muncaster intermittently in the years that followed.

Sir John F. Ramsden, who originally laid out Muncaster’s rhododendron gardens, passed away on 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1958 and his title passed to his second son, Geoffrey William Pennington. Sir William, who preferred to use his second name, appears to have been quite mean in matters relating to the estate, but it may well be that he did not have a grasp of the key areas that it was essential to support financially, so the gardens deteriorated when the staff were halved, resulting from his economic measures and lack of horticultural direction. In 1959 Patrick and Phyllida left Muncaster and bought Kirkland in Dumfriesshire, a substantial Georgian House, together with the nearby hill farm of Benbuie with its stock of Blackface sheep, where they brought up four highly independent daughters.

In 1969 Phyllida & Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington took over running the Home Farm at Muncaster, as Sir William mainly resided away from the estate and did not have a farming background, which involved Patrick in a journey south from their home at Kirkland every week or two, and this revived his interest in the gardens. In



1982 Phyllida received a phone call from her father asking if she would take over Muncaster estate. By now Sir William was 78, the estate was running at a significant loss each year and the family's retention of the seat of the Pennington's since around 1200 seemed more than a little shaky. Phyllida, with an inbred sense of duty, agreed. And so it was that she and Patrick came to live at Muncaster in 1982, the first members of the family to live full time in the castle since 1850, taking over the reins from March 1983. Sir William passed away in January 1986 and Phyllida inherited the estate.

That the gardens at Muncaster have survived through some difficult times since Sir John's death is largely due to 'Patrick of the Hills'; hill farmer, rebel, negotiator, gardener, poet, and story-teller extraordinaire; whose heart and soul wander amidst the solitude of Loch Laggan's shores and its kindred hunting lodge at Ardverikie, but whose person remained constrained within the environs of an embattled castle on the Cumbrian Coast. For many years he served as Managing Director for the Ardverikie Estate, when the House became 'Glenbogle' in the TV series "*Monarch of the Glen*", whilst it was probably no coincidence that the part played, and the antics of, Richard Briers reflected Patrick and his mannerisms in real life. At various times Patrick has been Hill Farming Convenor of the Scottish National Farmers Union (NFU), Convenor of the Scottish Landowners Federation and Chairman of the Deer Commission for Scotland. Somewhere in between he was County Chairman of the Cumbrian NFU, a member of the Lake District Special Planning Board, and served for many years as a Deputy Lieutenant for Cumbria. He was awarded the MBE, and later the OBE, for a lifetime of services to agriculture.

Phyllida and their daughter Iona made an excellent job of attracting visitors to see the castle and its many acres of rhododendron gardens through sheer determination and hard work to become one of Cumbria's leading tourist attractions. Patrick became the booming voice of Muncaster, promoting it brilliantly, in between working in the gardens and whilst travelling throughout Scotland and Cumbria for many years, working for various agencies and supporting the hard-working hill farmers.

Patrick delighted in standing up against any government or those in authority, firing off letters or calling politicians of all persuasions on the telephone to bend their ear to the plight of whichever dispossessed group he was fighting for at the time, usually those with an agricultural or rural agenda.

An orator of some note, Patrick was a brilliant communicator who could talk to anyone and bring a smile to their faces. He loved to be controversial and would make the most outrageous statements with such a charming twinkle in his eye and his tongue firmly in his cheek that most recipients thought he was joking. Usually, he was deadly

serious. An amazing memory and fierce determination were gifts from his mother, whilst his education mainly taught him that, “diplomacy is the art of telling plain truths without giving offence”, at which he excelled!

Patrick cherished the gardens, which clothed the better part of Muncaster’s 77-acres of hills and valleys, and he was able to disappear and find some peace and solitude amongst the collections of plants and trees that had been laid out by Sir John Ramsden after inheriting the estate in 1917. Sir John commenced work at Muncaster in 1920 and was a subscriber to the wild collections of the great planter hunters in the 1920’s and 1930’s, including George Forrest, Kingdon Ward and Ludlow & Sheriff. Sir John raised a vast number of species plants from wild collected seed, whilst acquiring dozens and dozens of magnificent mature hybrid specimens through his personal contacts with John Guille Millais and Sir Edmund Loder.

Some of the plantings were lost, as little maintenance took place in WWII when the gardening staff were called-up to the Armed Services; whilst gardening staff were rarely available in the difficult post-war years. By the time Sir John Ramsden passed away in 1958 the gardens had begun to deteriorate and, with Sir William having little interest in the gardens when he inherited the Estate, nothing significant took place until Patrick came to live at Muncaster and gradually began to pick-up the baton and care for the gardens, but progress was slow whilst he was often still away on his travels for weeks at a time.

A key player in the garden’s regeneration was Alan Clark; Curator of Muncaster Gardens and previously Curator & Head Gardener at Leonardslee; an intrepid plant-hunter, rebel, nurseryman, landscaper, and plant propagator extraordinaire. That this unlikely duo, from totally different worlds, would not always ‘play to the same tune’ had an air of inevitability about it; but, together at Muncaster they successfully brought about a major programme of clearance, replanting and regeneration. On the one hand there was Patrick, who had resigned himself to the fact that major tree-surgery and replanting was the only long-term option to restore the garden; he had wondered how this could be achieved in a practical way without seriously damaging the existing plants and thus losing the garden’s appeal. On the other hand, when Alan came to Muncaster in 1993 it was in many ways a happy co-incidence, as past Curator of Leonardslee Gardens he was faced with re-invigorating many of the plants that had originally been raised at Leonardslee prior to the First World War. Alan knew from long experience exactly what needed to be done and how to do it, he had the uncanny capacity to be able to visualise what the finished product would look like and had a tremendous appetite for work, such that he couldn’t wait to get started.

Patrick had concerns with the problems of funding and taking forward each stage

of the work, but despite all of this, he had the courage and tenacity to support the restoration project. However, as the work was 'linked' with a project, 50% funded by the Millennium Commission with further grant aid from English Heritage and the European Development Fund for structural and infrastructure renovations, the restoration of the gardens needed to be carried out in stages. So it was that against all the odds and the financial strictures, that the work went ahead in a very practical way. It was a great shock to Patrick when Phyllida, aged 82, passed away at home after a battle with cancer on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2011. She had always found it easy to talk to visitors to the castle and gardens, and she was heavily involved in organising weddings and events, so Patrick then found himself involved in carrying out some of the practical aspects connected with these events.

From the late-1980s I would look forward to spending a day touring the garden with Patrick and his Head Gardener each Spring, arriving before the gardens were open to the public. A myriad of aspects arose in discussion about the plants, but more than that, Patrick was a great raconteur and he kept us entertained throughout the day with memories from another life and times. Each year, in the midst of the New Year festivities, I would often get a call at home from Patrick to enquire how we were keeping and to discuss various aspects regarding the garden. He was very thoughtful and took time out to care for those around him.

A few years ago, we had arranged to meet at 9.30hrs on an early-May morning at the Stables Tea Room. Spot-on time, Patrick in a comfortable well-worn tweed jacket, stick in hand and around 85 years young, arrived from the castle, with his Senior Gardener dutifully following-on, a few steps behind. He carefully walked across the yard, then after a few words of welcome, sat down. So, I asked how he was keeping. 'Oh', he replied in a shocked voice, 'Dreadful news! I went to see my doctor a couple of days ago for my annual check-up, she's a lady doctor you know. After completing the tests, she said, "Patrick, you're going to live forever!" There was a groan, a short silence and a twinkle in his eye. Clearly, he was on good form and it was going to be another 'interesting' day.

Over the years I have arranged many Group visits to Muncaster for Society members, Conference delegate coach tours and overseas visitors. Often these would involve a visit beforehand to plan the itinerary for the garden tours and catering details. On the appointed day Patrick would rise to the occasion, be a most charming host, the stories would flow, and was an inspiration to all those around him. Patrick deserves great credit for continuing to care for the garden and for fighting for resources to do so at times when the Estate finances were being allocated to various new projects. Somewhat inexplicably, the other members of the family did not consider the gardens were a priority, when historically it was the spring flowering season that attracted the

hordes of visitors each year, and other side-line activities were but a bonus.

Many of us who share a love of rhododendrons and happen to have crossed Patrick's path at one time or another, are doubly fortunate and have much to be thankful for. He was a special person in so many ways, always prepared to share his knowledge and experience, and will be greatly missed.



**Group photograph taken en-route up the 'The Hill' to visit the large-leaved species in the Himalayan Collection on 5th May 2010. Left to right, John Hammond, Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington and Gordon Wylie from Oregon.**

**Photo taken by the Senior Gardener.**



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Early flowers in Edinburgh by  
Colin Whitehead

Above: *Rhododendron*  
*sutchuenense*

Right: *Rhododendron oreodoxa*





