



CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

Cornwall Group Newsletter. March 2018

As the New Year started I was enjoying the mildness of the weather and hoping that it would continue until Spring. We very nearly got there. At the last moment the weather turned bad. Ice, snow and almost catastrophic low temperatures have done more damage in the garden than I have seen for many years. Last autumn I was planting out some rather tender shrubs and I am sure I will have lost a few of them however there is a *Leucadendron* still looking good and some *Agave* I planted against a south wall have shrugged off the snow - at least for now. There is more in the forecast for tomorrow.

I hope your gardens have escaped the worst of the potential damage and that despite the occasional freezes, Spring is well underway.

We were lucky with the weather for our visit to Trewidden, the sun came out and we were able to see the garden as the winter chill departed. The garden is vulnerable to winds from the west blowing straight in from Land's End and some evergreens were showing wind damage. An *Acacia riceana* in the courtyard was in full bloom despite the impact of the winds and summed up the whole garden on the day. Beautiful in flower, crispy in places. A carpet of the newly emerging leaves of *Erythronium revolutum* made it clear that spring would take the small injuries to the garden and kiss them better.

Strange how the days get longer and the weeks get shorter. Before we know it we will be visiting Caerhays Castle with all thoughts of frost banished. Could you let me know if you are hoping to come, Caerhays would like to know how many to expect (perhaps they want to bake us a lovely cake, I don't know). It is also the perfect time to start propagating plants. Please bear us in mind as you split and divide things, the Hardy Plant Society sale in Truro is coming up on the 5th May. Plant sales provide us with some income for the year and also help us distribute less common plants. The sale is always well attended by plant lovers throughout Cornwall and by propagation and distribution we can help to meet Plant Heritage's aim of (note the new logo) "conserving the diversity of garden plants".

Last Meetings.

Annual Meeting. 30th January 2018.

I thought for a moment as I drove towards Chacewater that the weather might be turning. Flashes of sunshine were appearing through the clouds but unfortunately the promise was lost in another day of showery weather. Fortunately it is a warm room and

we were able to sit in comfort and watch the weather.

The day started with the business of the Annual Meeting. We had a full programme of events last year that were enjoyed by the members gathered, who confirmed that they would like to continue at this level of activity. It is pleasing to report that we made a slight financial surplus on the year, mostly as a result of plant sales. It is much more comfortable to contemplate a small gain than to explain away an equivalent loss! Many thanks to all those who contributed plants through the year and helped out at events. We have attracted a number of new 'Plant Nannies'. Thanks to all of them for helping to conserve plants and keep them growing in Cornish gardens.

National Collections in Cornwall have done well this year. Welcome to the new National Collections of *Kniphofia* at Eden and the Wilson 50 Azaleas at Trewidden, we hope to visit them both this year.

After many years of service between them, both Ros Smith and Alistair Rivers have said that they intend to stand down at the end of this year so we will be looking for a new Secretary and Collections Co-ordinator. Please consider volunteering, possibly for part of a role, so that we can keep the wheels rolling smoothly. Ros and Alistair have done an amazing job of keeping the organisation moving forward through the years, their contribution has been quite remarkable and we owe them a great debt of thanks.

Ros started the study sessions of the day with a presentation about the micropropagation work she is doing at Cornwall College. She brought a selection of slides showing everything from the propagation of threatened *Rhododendron* from floral buds to the germination of tropical orchids under sterile conditions. I found it particularly interesting to see the way Ros had propagated *Rodgersia* 'Ring of Rubies' from a tiny flower bud sent in the post. I was fascinated to see the culture she had growing from the anthers that had fallen off while the material was being prepared. She brought a range of specimens of plants in culture and it is quite remarkable to see the plantlets developing.

Charlie Pridham is putting together a collection of climbing honeysuckles and considering applying for a National Collection. He showed us a range of beautiful plants from around the world and it is clear that there is still a lot of potential for new hybrids. Perhaps it will be possible to add the scent of the Old World species to the bright scarlet and orange of those from the New World. There is also scope for plants with good evergreen foliage and good colour from leaves, stems and berries.

Liz Pridham had put together a magnificent lunch and it is particularly nice to share a meal and chat about Cornwall, gardens and conservation (and other things).

After lunch John Price introduced us to *Camellia reticulata* and the collection at Tregothnan. He brought an assortment of flowers and some specimens that showed the difficulties of grafting them in the UK. Apparently the Chinese find it much simpler with reliably warm spring weather.

Richard Morton from Trewidden Gardens introduced us to his journey over the last decade collecting together the Wilson 50 Azaleas. He thinks he has 36 of them so far and is planning to start planting them out in the gardens soon. We saw slides of his trip to Japan to trace the original plants and along the way he met some fascinating people who remembered the Nursery that supplied the original plants and even helped him locate original specimens. Richard hopes that the next five years will see him obtain most of the missing cultivars.

Fern Carroll-Smith closed the afternoon sessions with a presentation about the National Collection of *Kniphofia* that has been developed at Eden. She has kept photographs and records of all the plants in the collection. Apparently 23% of the plants they have bought in from nurseries have been wrongly named and so they are trying to source a number of cultivars that were not true to name. The collection is housed on the slopes of the garden at Eden where it is hoped they will make a bright display. She said that her job had been made much easier by the recent RHS

monograph on *Kniphofia* and advised anybody starting a collection to pick a genus with a recently published monograph!

The "Wilson 50" Azaleas, Trewidden. 13th March 2018.



Azaleas along the drive.



Trewidden.



***Rhododendron* 'Kirin' in the garden.**

Following his talk to us at the Annual Meeting I was looking forward to our visit to Trewidden to see the developing collection of Wilson 50 azaleas.

As we assembled in the car park at Trewidden it was difficult to believe that just a fortnight before the ground was covered in four inches of snow and temperatures dropped overnight to minus 4C. We were much luckier with the weather and the sun shone throughout the afternoon (despite a rather more overcast prediction). The cold weather had taken the garden by surprise. Camellias had lost all of their open flowers but had recovered by the time of our visit. The large tree Magnolias in the garden had been in full flower before the frost and were still just naked branches. There are a number of buds showing but it remains to be seen if they will open properly after the cold shock.

When E. H. Wilson visited Japan in 1918 he spent time in Kurume studying the azaleas. At the time there were approximately 250 cultivars grown in the area that are assumed to be selections and hybrids from a small number of native *Rhododendron* species. He was collecting on behalf of the Arnold Arboretum in the USA and selected fifty of the best cultivars for them. From the Arnold Arboretum plants were propagated and distributed and they became the foundation of the Kurume azaleas grown in the West. The original selection are now referred to as the "Wilson 50", some of them are among the most popular Kurume azaleas grown, others seem to have fallen out of cultivation.

About a decade ago people started to recognise that *Phytophthora ramosa* was a threat to gardens and that *Rhododendron ponticum* was a significant host. As a result the decision was taken to remove the thick planting that lined the drive up to Trewidden House. The old plants had grown up and over the long drive to form a tunnel and their removal must have been quite a shock.

With a large new area in need of planting, Richard was looking for a suitable theme and he decided to use the space to re-assemble the original Wilson 50 cultivars in one place.

A number of the plants, such as 'Kirin', already existed in the garden as plantings made many decades earlier. Others have been obtained from sources in the UK however when he had collected them together Richard found that there were still several cultivars that could not be located. It was also clear that some of the cultivars did not match their original descriptions so Richard visited Japan to see if he could find the original cultivars. He hopes that he will be able to complete the collection in the next five years.



Wilson 50 Azaleas being grown on.

We started the afternoon with a look at the collection that has been assembled so far, grown in a large poly-tunnel. The plants come in a number of sizes that reflect the source of the cuttings and the date they were acquired. plants had been held back by the cold weather or we would have seen a fair bit of colour from the flowers. A couple of established plants in the shelter of garden were showing some buds but the best of the display is to come in the next few weeks. Richard has established a lot of plants along the drive. They reflect part of the collection and are growing vigorously, although they suffer a bit from rabbit damage. He has also started to clear an area in the centre of the garden where he can plant the whole collection as a Kurume Azalea Bowl to make a spectacular display in the season. There is still a lot more work to do, and several large plants to move out to reduce the shade in the area. There is no doubt that it will be finished by the time the plants are ready to put out.



Dicksonia antarctica



Azalea bowl being cleared.



Magnolia x veitchii 'Peter Veitch'

In the rest of the garden it was a pity to see the damage to the *Dicksonia* fronds, but fortunately they will recover and they are an amazing spectacle in the fern pit. The oldest trunks are thought to have come from a shipment imported by Treseders Nursery in the late 1890's. They were collected from the Illawara escarpment to the south of Sydney in Australia and they have clearly adapted well to life in west Cornwall. They are so successful that Richard says young tree ferns are one of the weeds that he has to control in the garden.

Even without flowers the large tree Magnolias are remarkable, charismatic specimens. *M. x veitchii* 'Peter Veitch' is one of the original seedlings of the hybrid raised by the Veitch nursery in Exeter. Richard pointed out the young tree had lost its leader soon after it was planted and had developed as a gigantic multi-trunked specimen. The garden is slowly being cleared of the exotic overgrowth of rare trees and shrubs. The difficulty with such a remarkable collection is knowing what to keep and what has to be removed!

The garden is full of special plants. I remember seeing the newly planted *Schefflera macrophylla* in 2009 when it was barely my height, now it is as tall as the tree canopy surrounding it. The slender trunk goes up for about 8m before branching into a compact head. The gigantic leaves had been damaged by the cold winds but were still quite remarkable. It is good to see that it will take an occasional frost once established. I was particularly delighted to see that *Camellia chekiangoleosa* was growing strongly

enough to flower. It has been my favourite species since I since I first saw it (three days earlier at the RHS Spring Flower Competition) and marvelled at the rich red flowers. It is a firm favourite, perhaps not such an old favourite!

Thanks to Richard Morton for taking the time to explain the Wilson 50 collection to us and showing around the remarkable garden at Trewithen. Thanks also to all those who came and made it such a pleasant afternoon.



Camellia chekiangoleosa. View south from the house over the bay. *Schefflera macrophylla.*

Next Meeting: Visit to Caerhays Castle.

Our next trip will be to the gardens of Caerhays Castle to see the collections of *Magnolia* and *Podocarpus*. All being well we should get to see the garden at the peak of spring flowering. The normal garden admission charge will apply. We will be shown around the garden and introduced to the collections. The organisers at the Caerhays end would like to know the size of the group so if you are hoping to come please would you be certain to let me know (quite promptly) so that we can tell them. Thank you in advance, I look forward to seeing you all again on the day.

CAERHAYS CASTLE

TUESDAY 17th APRIL 2018.

Meet at the entrance at 2.00pm.

Caerhays Castle, Gorran, St Austell, PL26 6LY.

Contact: John Sirkett, cornwallplantheritage@gmail.com (01209)215931

INCE CASTLE

TUESDAY 3rd APRIL 2018.

Devon Plant Heritage are going to slip over the border in April to visit Ince Castle near Saltash. Members of Cornwall Plant Heritage are very welcome but places have to be booked, please check the Devon Plant Heritage website for details.

www.plantheritagedevon.org.uk - check the events page.

Cornwall Plant Heritage Website.

Many of you will have noticed that we now have a new website, accessible through a link on the national website or directly at :

www.cornwallplantheritage.co.uk

I would like to ensure that there are records of significant plants and plant collections in Cornwall that are freely and easily available. If collection holders would like to add more than the links in their entries any submissions are very welcome. Let me know about any errors and I will correct them.

Programme for 2018.

Tuesday 30th January. Annual Meeting. Roseland House, Chacewater TR4 8QB.

Tuesday 13th March. Visit to Trewidden to see the new "Wilson 50" Azalea collection.

Tuesday 3rd April, 2.30pm. Devon Plant Heritage visit to Ince Castle, Cornish members welcome.

Tuesday 17th April, 2.00pm. Visit to Caerhays.

Saturday May 5th, 10.00am - 2.00pm. HPS Plant Sale, Truro. June. Visit to Eden and the National Collection of Kniphofia.

July. Chairmans Open Evening.

September. Plant Nannies Event.

Late October. Visit to the National Collection of Lapageria at Roseland House and talk on "Madeira".

Full details should be available at the Annual Meeting and will included in Newsletters and posted online.

Plant Nannies.

The Plant Nannies exist to encourage the cultivation, propagation and dissemination of uncommon, poorly known or endangered garden plants in Cornwall.

They are organised by the Cornwall group of Plant Heritage, a national charity that seeks to encourage the conservation of garden plants through cultivation.

Who can take part?

Anyone with an interest who would like to grow a plant and assist in the Cornish conservation effort.

What does it involve?

We have a few plants available that we think deserve some care to keep them in cultivation. We give them to the Plant Nannies to look after and enjoy in their own gardens. When the plant grows and they feel able to divide or propagate a small section then they return a young plant to us and keep the original. The young plants are either given out to a new Plant Nanny or we sell them to raise money for Plant Heritage.

What does it cost?

Nothing. We hope to raise money by selling surplus plants through regular Rare Plant sales in the region.

What do we ask?

We ask for an e-mail address so that we can send you Cornwall Plant Heritage Newsletters that will inform you of coming events and plant sales.

What do we get?

With your help we can keep plants in cultivation in gardens that are in danger of disappearing. Together we can raise the profile of plants that were once better known but are now endangered and we can raise some money to support the national charity.

Hope to see you soon.

John Sirkett.

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