



Plant Heritage

CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

Cornwall Group Newsletter. May 2018

Spring has arrived and the sunshine has appeared, then disappeared, then appeared again. The rain however, is always with us.

We were lucky with the weather for our visit to Caerhays Castle. It rained (naturally) but it stopped when we got there. The right sort of luck. If there had been some sunshine we might have got over-excited. Camellias have a history intertwined with the history of the garden and we were able to see them at their peak scattered through this remarkable property.

I was able to attend the national AGM at Wareham on 28th April, marking 40 years of the organisation. It was good to see a few other Cornish faces there as well as a number of members from Devon. It was a busy meeting, there have been a number of changes in key personnel in the last few weeks. There were also a number of pressing matters that needed attention. Delegates discussed the situation at length and the organisation is well prepared to weather the current changes preparing for the next 40 years.

The plant sale in Truro is coming up, please come along and say hello. Bring some plants if you can, buy some plants if you like. Best of all, bring the good weather.

The early forecast for the day is looking fine. I will spend the rest of the week worrying!

Last Meetings.

Caerhays Castle. 17th April 2018.



Colour in the gardens.



Caerhays Castle.



Magnolia (I see no primroses).

The weather forecast for our visit to Caerhays Castle didn't look good. Just ten minutes before I set out the forecast promised light showers all afternoon, and if the forecasters can't see ten minutes into the future it is difficult to see how it can be called a forecast. The drive to Caerhays was misty with light rain. As I got out of the car in the car park

by the beach I discovered that there was also a very strong wind gusting. Not ideal conditions. However Caerhays Castle and the gardens lie in a deep valley and the mature trees provide plenty of shelter. As I approached the entrance I could feel the wind drop and miraculously the rain stopped. The light mist remained but as anyone will tell you, it only makes the colours look brighter!

With a visit like this it is always difficult to know the best time in the season for a visit but I think it worked out well. The garden was full of colour, there were still flowers on the early flowering forms and we had some glimpses of colour from the late ones so we were able to get a suggestion at least of the range of the whole collection.

As the path through the garden leads up the hillside the ground levels out in a series of clearings that have been planted with young specimens of the newer hybrid *Magnolia*. The grass has been colonised by a vast population of primroses (which we certainly didn't notice because we were there to see magnolias). They trickled and flowed down the hill, weaving in and out between the trunks of the young saplings like pools of soft spring light (but we certainly didn't notice it and it certainly wasn't very pretty indeed).



Magnolia 'Atlas'



Magnolia x loebneri
'Leonard Messel'.



Magnolia 'Caerhays'
Surprise'

We had come to see the National Collections of *Magnolia* and *Podocarpus* (and related genera) and although the early flowering species of *Magnolia* had been hit by the cold weather in March, later species and hybrids were looking good. We didn't get to see the magnificent display of tree Magnolias that can colour the hillside with pink but many of the smaller hybrids were looking very impressive.

M. 'Atlas' captured the spirit of the afternoon for me, the large flower perched on a slender twig and the soft pink colour condensing gently from the misty sky. A seedling from the cross *M.* 'Mark Jury' x *M. x soulangeana* 'Lennei', it was raised in New Zealand where temperatures are higher and skies bluer, but it looked at home in this Cornish valley. However the great strength of the collection at Caerhays lies in the mature plants of their own hybrids. Tree magnolias have been planted in the garden at Caerhays since the start of the 20th century. *M. sprengeri* var. *diva* first flowered in 1919 and by the 1930's a range of other large growing species were blooming alongside. They hybridise freely and Caerhays have done a magnificent job raising a great many. More importantly, they have rejected those that were not a significant improvement on the parents. In the process they have set a bench mark of quality for magnolia breeders worldwide.

M. 'Caerhays Surprise' is one of their best. In 1959, Phillip Tregunna took pollen from a late flower of *M. campbellii mollicomata* and used it to fertilise *M. liliflora* 'Nigra'. The result was a moderate sized shrub with large bright pink flowers. It flowers as a young plant and is easily managed, even in a small garden.

I was particularly pleased to see a large specimen of *M. x loebneri* 'Leonard Messel'. The pink tinged flowers and greyish bark appeal to me more than the pure white cultivar 'Merrill' but I have rarely seen it growing to the same "small tree" dimensions. It seems to spend a lot longer dithering in the "big bush" phase before it finally reaches for the sky. Growing as we saw it here the effect was like the frothy sea spume beating

against the shore. Despite the calm in the garden, a couple of hundred yards away that's what was happening.



Magnolia 'Ann'



Magnolia 'Albatross'.



Magnolia 'Black Tulip'

Among the modern hybrids my eye was caught by the pink spidery flowers of *M. 'Ann'* and by the size and purity of *M. 'Albatross'*, grown at Lanhydrock from seed produced at Trewithen in 1970.

Equally impressive but at the other end of the spectrum *M. 'Black Tulip'* was bred and introduced by the Jury family in New Zealand. The small, dark flowers seem to have short petals and are distinctly tulip-shaped. The tips of the tepals had been caught by the frost, or the rain but it will be interesting to see how this sapling develops as it matures.



Camellia 'George Blandford'



Camellia saluenensis .



Camellia 'Saint Michael'

Camellias also have a long history at Caerhays. In 1918 George Forrest collected seed of a *Camellia* that was later to be named *C. saluenensis*. Original plants of the collection still grow in the beds at the base of the castle walls though they are now showing signs of age. In 1923 J. C. Williams crossed the plants with a *C. japonica* form that also grows on the castle walls. The resulting hybrids were named *C. x williamsii* and they are now the major group of camellias in cultivation, valued for their hardiness and wide range of size, flower colour and form.

C. 'George Blandford' was raised at Caerhays and named after a gamekeeper and gardener who worked on the estate for over 70 years. It received Awards of Merit from the RHS in 1965 and 1974. *C. 'Saint Michael'* got an Award of Merit in 1987 and was named after the parish church of St Michael Caerhays.

The gardens also house an extensive collection of *Podocarpus*, a genus of conifers originating on the ancient supercontinent of Gondwana and still found mostly in the southern hemisphere. Many of the species are slightly tender in the UK and the gardens at Caerhays provide an excellent mild location for the National Collection. In recent years many new cultivars have been named, often selections from the New Zealand species or hybrids between them. Several have potential to make distinctive small conifers and on a dry day it would have been nice to spend some time comparing them, one of the great benefits of being able to see the whole group grown together as a National collection. On a wet day, the tea shop had a greater appeal. In the car park

we saw a large plant of *P.* 'Orangeade', one of a group of hybrids raised by Graham Hutchins at County Park Nursery (*P. lawrencei* x *nivalis*). Graham did an enormous amount to popularise New Zealand's plants among UK gardeners and 'Orangeade' showed that the genus has the ability to produce orange flushed new growth that is very pretty. It responds well to clipping and that would be my advice. The one in the car park was like a ploughed field, big and brown.

More immediately delightful were a number of *Stachyurus* species growing in the garden. They look very similar in flower, but if there were a hundred species, it would still be worth growing them all. On a misty day with the memory of dripping rain lingering among the branches they were a joy. Caerhays is delightful and we were very grateful for a chance to have a good look around. If you haven't been, a visit is one of the great pleasures of spring (stout shoes).



Stachyurus chinensis 'Joy Forever'.



Podocarpus 'Orangeade'.



Stachyurus praecox.

Plant Heritage Annual General Meeting , Springfield Country Hotel, Wareham, Dorset , 28th April 2018.



The fortnight running up to the AGM was slightly chaotic for the organisation with a number of resignations by volunteers. Sandra Tognarelli and Gail Goodwin have resigned as members of the Board of Trustees. Mike Buffin has stepped down as Chairman though he will remain on the Board of Trustees.

A statement read at the start of proceedings explained that with a new job, and a family to consider, he had reluctantly accepted that he no longer had sufficient time to lead the organisation through its current restructuring and that he was resigning in order to spend more time with his family.

Council has elected Cecelia Bufton as Chairman and Rosemary Day as Vice-Chairman and they have jumped straight in at the deep end with the AGM! The new Chairman thanked the outgoing Chairman and the Trustees for all the work they had put in to moving the organisation forward to this point.

This years AGM was hosted by the Dorset Group at the Springfield Country Hotel in Wareham. And a range of displays showed the work of Plant Heritage, the new "brand image", and historical display about the evolution of the organisation over the last 40 years and a fascination demonstration of the developments going on with Persephone, our plant collections database. A plant identification puzzle had me stumped - I didn't recognise any of them!

At the start of the meeting Sarah Quarterman, the CEO, informed us that she would also be standing down and she was thanked for the contribution she has made since 2014.

The Chairman's report provided an explanation of the current financial situation. As a result of the failure of a couple of grant applications the organisation was facing the

possibility of cash flow difficulties during the summer. Money has been transferred from reserves to meet this shortfall but this has reduced the reserve below the level set by policy. The policy has been temporarily suspended while the situation is rectified. The Board of Trustees has taken executive control of the finances on an interim basis until cash flow has been stabilised. A number of economy measures have been put in place, membership subscription rates have been increased and additional sources of income are being sought. The organisations fund-raiser has been set new targets and money will come from the reserves of local groups.

The 'Fit for the Future' strategy is now complete and has made a number of recommendations have been brought forward. It has been proposed that the organisation should be streamlined by the abolition of Council, their function being taken over by the Board of Trustees. The principle of One Member One Vote should be applied. After some discussion the meeting agreed by a significant majority to adopt the 'Fit for the Future' strategy. Some changes to the Articles of Association will be required to give all members the right to vote at the AGM (currently restricted to members of Council), to hand the power to appoint trustees to the AGM (currently held by Council) and to abolish Council. There was not time to approve these changes to the Articles at this meeting and they will be considered at a joint EGM and Council meeting in July.

The AGM was held as part of a weekend of garden visits in Dorset. After the meeting was closed the group (rushed with relief) proceeded in an orderly fashion to the coaches waiting to take them to the first destination, the Abbotsbury Sub-Tropical Gardens.

I had only joined the group for the AGM but the road home passed Abbotsbury and I was determined to visit. I needed a cup of coffee on arrival, and while I was relaxing in the Colonial Cafe who should arrive but the charabancs of Plant Heritage!

Half of the members went directly into the garden, but I was fascinated to see the other half rush straight into the Plant Sales area to get all the good stuff! Fascinated but not surprised. They didn't know that I had already been there and I didn't tell them.

Lunch had been laid on as part of the visit and the members looked very happy in the garden room. I took the chance to look around the garden and it was interesting to see what had been damaged by the unexpected cold weather in March. The *Echium* still had leaves and will recover rapidly but *Melaleuca* were dead and *Neopanax laetus* had been defoliated and looked very strange.

Many of the *Rhododendron* were flowering and the garden was filled with the song of birds. There are always surprises at Abbotsbury - I don't think I have seen *Citronella mucronata* before, and evergreen tree from Chile like a large holly and there was a fern I want but couldn't identify which is always very frustrating.

A very relaxing way to round off the morning ready for the journey home.



Colonial Cafe.



Citronella mucronata .



Unknown fern.

Next Meeting: Hardy Plant Society Plant Sale.

The Plant Sale is coming up this weekend. This is our major fund raising event of the year. With changes in the support of groups by head office, it may well be our only source of income for next year. Please bring us any plants that you can spare for us to sell. If you can spare an hour or two to help out on the stand, that would also be very welcome. Please bring plants on the day and get in touch if you are able to help out on the stand.

Hardy Plant Society Plant Sale
SATURDAY 5th MAY 2018. 10.00am to 2.00pm.
Truro Cattle Market (just along the Newquay road from Waitrose)

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

The Eden Project to visit the National Collection of Kniphofia.
June 2018.

We haven't agreed a date yet with Eden. We will let you know as soon as it is fixed, details will also be posted on the website.

General Data Protection Regulation.

New Data Protection Regulations come into force on 25th May. If the Cornwall Group of Plant Heritage hold your address, e-mail address or other data we use it communicate matters relating to Plant Heritage or the Cornwall Group of Plant Heritage. We will only use it for this purpose and will not provide it to other organisations.

If you wish your data to be deleted from Cornwall Plant Heritage Group records now or at any time in the future, please let the group secretary know.

This notice is issued in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

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.

cornwallplantheritage@gmail.com