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The joy and satisfaction of our Annual Conferences cannot be expressed in words. As much as we look forward to visiting the gardens and places scheduled in our programme, I believe uppermost we also look forward to renewing old friendships and making new ones amongst Camellia lovers.

As we congregated in the foyer of the Kilbirnie Hotel, Newquay, on the afternoon of Wednesday 22nd April the atmosphere told everything of the occasion. The efficient organisation of our dedicated Jo Freeman, the lovely Camellia floral arrangements by Mary Chapman, the smiles and greetings exchanged between members. Altogether 72 members and 4 Chinese visitors attended the Conference.

Our visit to Cornwall coincided with the Cornwall Garden Society's 75th County Spring Flower Show and throughout the whole period of our Conference we enjoyed the glorious Spring sunshine of this beautiful South Western part of England.

Our first visit on the 23rd was to the outstanding National Trust Gardens of Lanhydrock 2½ miles South East of Bodmin, which is approached by a magnificent avenue of beech trees, and where we were met by the Head Gardener Peter Borlase who gave us a great welcome and looked after us throughout our visit. He told our assembled group how the gardens on acid soil overlaying clay were laid out to a design by George Gilbert Scott in 1857 - prior to that it was a typical English landscape where the parkland came up to the house - when the battlement wall was built and the Yew trees planted followed by lots of formal planning until 1927 when it was decided to simplify the area by grassing over many of the large ornamental flower beds and today only 6 sets of rosebeds remain, but to a different design.

The owner Lord Clifden made over Lanhydrock House with its park and woods to the National Trust in 1953, but continued to live in the house until his death in 1966.

Our tour began with the informal area where we were delighted with the magnificent sight of a large collection of Magnolias, first planted in 1933 amongst which in flower were two *M. × veitchii* Isca a lovely clone of a hybrid *M. campbellii* × *M. denudata*, one *M. campbellii* and two *M. mollicomata* all towering some 60-70 feet high. As a matter of interest, the Head Gardener mentioned that these *campbellii* and *mollicomata*

Magnolias are said to have originated as seedlings raised from Himalayan seed at Gill's Nursery, Penryn, Cornwall, who sold them to Veitch's of Exeter from where Lord Clifden bought them. We were told that nothing more was done until 1949 when more *M. mollicomata* and a few *M. Soulangiana* were planted. When Peter Borlase was appointed Head Gardener in 1966 after the death of Lord Clifden, the Trust decided that as the area was an ideal setting and very favourable for Magnolias, 68 different cultivars were planted. Some of these such as *M. dawsoniana* (a rare and magnificent species from West China) planted in 1968 are now fantastic particularly this year, but as Peter explained it is necessary to make visits every 2-3 weeks to appreciate the full beauty of these magnificent flowering trees, and with lots of paths to walk right around them, it is most fortunate as they can be viewed from all angles. We also noticed a beautiful specimen of the pink flowered hybrid 'Leonard Messel' and some large trees of *M. sargentiana robusta* another large flowered early species, and also *M. hypoleuca* with its decorative leaves which flowers later and the tender *M. rostrata*, but most outstanding was *M. Albatross* (*cylindrica* × *Veitchii*) a promising new hybrid.

Peter's enthusiasm and dedication has convinced the Trust that Magnolias are to form a major part of a plan for the next 10 years, so another 40 selected cultivars are to be planted in this woodland area. These will mainly be the best clones of the Gresham Hybrids. Lanhydrock is therefore certain to retain its reputation as one of the most interesting Magnolia gardens not only in Cornwall, but in the British Isles and is blessed by its splendid setting.

Lanhydrock is also noted for its collection of Hardy Hybrid Rhododendrons, but since Magnolias have done so well they have taken preference. However the Rhododendrons have also a pride of place in the gardens and some of those in flower as R. 'Alison Johnstone', R. 'Queen Wilhelmina', R. 'Cornish Red' and a lovely group of the yellow coloured flowers of R. 'Jack Skelton', R. 'Sloccock's Unique' and R. 'Diane' were outstandingly beautiful and added such a lot of colour to the scenery.

So far as Camellias are concerned, we were told the strange story that for some unknown reason the old Lord Clifden in his day disliked Camellias so intensely, but yet his sister Violet loved them and she bought many giving them to the then Head Gardener - a Mr. George Potter - little knowing that he was under orders to plant the Camellias where they wouldn't grow! The fatal result of this was that when the present Head Gardener took over there were only 20 Camellias in the whole estate. However we were gratified when Peter Borlase told us that he was very fond of Camellias himself because of their attractive and varied colourful flowers, good all the year round foliage, and being so very accommodating and hardy. He has during his tenure of office increased the Camellia colony to some 260 cultivars and we found some striking examples of the use to which he has improved the landscape of the gardens by his efforts.

By this time (11.30 a.m.) many of us, conscious of the fact that we had been limited to only a morning visit and had instructions to be back in the coaches by noon, decided that Lanhydrock House itself was so marvellous and inviting that many of us (including the writer) decided to abandon the remainder of the garden tour and make a dash for the House. We were not disappointed and on another occasion - if ever the opportunity arises - the Society would be well advised to consider spending a whole day here - since there exists an excellent shop, restaurant and refreshment bar organised by the National Trust.

We left Lanhydrock after making a presentation to the Head Gardener Peter Borlase

of Camellia 'Tiffany' as a token of our appreciation for such an enjoyable morning.

Our lunch arrangements were at the St. Tudy village hall where the caterers laid on an excellent meal. St. Tudy is a pretty village and we enjoyed this break in its peaceful surroundings.

Our next engagement was to the gardens of Tremeer, once the home of General Harrison who started this 6-acre garden some 42 years ago. The soil is acid, and the average rainfall is 45ins.

General Harrison and his wife were great Camellia and Rhododendron enthusiasts and they have left behind them a garden of treasures, now so sympathetically cared for by the Haslam-Hopwood family - the present owners.

Mrs Hopwood senior, who met us on arrival was very kind and left us to wander at will. The *williamsii* hybrids of Camellia are kept separate from the japonicas on the right. From the terrace below the house one looks across the lawn to the Rhododendrons and these clearly show the great interest the founder had for the violet-blues raised from *R. impeditum* and *R. augustinii*. There were also many hybrids raised from *R. williamsianum*. The paths through the Rhododendrons lead down to a delightful pond at the lower part of the garden where Camellia 'Donation' was reflected whilst at the east end we noticed Camellias 'Elsie Jury', 'Anticipation' and 'Francie L'.

On returning to the house one could not help but see the somewhat unusual spectacle of *Euonymus fortunei* 'variegatum' which clothed the whole front of the beautiful large house.

As a mark of our appreciation Camellia 'Lulu Belle' was presented to Mrs Hopwood on our departure.

On Thursday evening after dinner we were given two interesting lectures on Camellias by the visiting experts from China. The first of these was Professor Xia Lifang who spoke of the white forms of *C. reticulata* and said that from the seeds of this species, oil is extracted for cooking. This species no longer exists in primitive forest, although it is widely distributed in the central Yunnan and readily regenerates from stumps, after felling for fuel, and it is widely cultivated for economic purposes. However in the N.W. part of the Yunnan province it exists in numerous coloured forms, both single, semi-double and double and are regarded as the origin of many cultivars. According to some villagers they have been in cultivation for 200-300 years in the same villages, growing on volcanic ash with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5. Some selected forms have a higher oil-yield and are, therefore more valuable.

A few arboreal Camellias are still being discovered, but as yet unnamed. These individual trees are over five hundred years old and peasants tie red ribbons on them for good-luck at New Year.

Yellow Camellias also exist in the Yunnan province but would regrettably be difficult to cultivate in the British Isles, although attention is being given to breeding types which might be more useful in the future, but that is probably optimistic. In nature, *C. chrysantha* grows in S.E. Yunnan in the area close to Vietnam on the banks of rivers, as the second layer of vegetation is evergreen forest.

The area is composed of limestone rocks and there are several other yellow-flowered species in the same region.

The second lecture by Dr Zhang Aoluo dealt with the geographical distribution of the Camellia and other vegetation and of particular interest was his statement that over 30,000 species of plants exist in China (in addition to ferns, mosses, fungi, etc.), and of

these, over half of them are to be found in Yunnan province. An indication of the very rich and varied flora of that region which has given us so many worthy garden plants.

Both of these speakers were ably assisted by their interpreter Mr Sing Wang.

On Friday morning we left for Dr J. A. Smart's garden at Marwood Hill, near Barnstaple in Devon. It was a long coach drive, but mid-morning we had a welcome break in Bude for coffee and biscuits. However it was a very pleasant journey through beautiful Cornwall and Devon countryside and the sun shone all the way.

Before lunch at the Barnstaple Motel, Dr Jimmy Smart had just time to pop in for a few minutes on his way to judge at the Cornwall Spring Flower Show at Treilissick. This gave Joyce Wyndham the opportunity to present Jimmy a plant of Camellia 'High Wide N' Handsome'. He welcomed us to Devon and to see his garden where he explained he had left his Head Gardener Malcolm Pharoah to show us around. After an excellent lunch we wound our way round through the narrow picturesque lanes to Marwood Hill, not far from the North Devon coast, to his beautiful garden hidden in the hillside, where the soil is acid and rain-fall heavy. Average 45 inches a year.

Malcolm Pharoah greeted us and told our assembled members how Dr Smart came to start the garden here by buying the fields which were pasture land - some 12 acres - forming a valley with a little stream running through, and in 1969 dammed the stream to make the 2 lakes which we see today. He then planted many flowering Cherry and Eucalyptus trees, really as nurse plants to shelter the young Rhododendrons and other more delicate shrubs he was to plant. Over the years many of the Cherries have been removed after serving their useful purpose as the Rhododendrons etc. have now become well established. About 9-10 years ago Dr Smart purchased another 12 acres of adjacent hillside land further down the valley and a part of this has been planted out as a bog garden where a fine collection of Primulas, Irises etc. abound, and the remainder developed with trees and shrubs with a final planting this year of trees extending the garden to 20 acres. Malcolm reminded us that when Dr Smart originally bought the garden they were in fact an extension of the walled garden and rose garden of his old Georgian house, which he sold when he built an entirely new split level house in 1972 with large glass windows in a strategic position overlooking the lakes and most of the gardens.

Malcolm then gave us a conducted tour of the gardens in brilliant sunshine and proudly pointed out the glorious flowering Magnolia \times *loebneri* 'Merrill' - a cross between *stellata* and *kobus* for which Dr Smart was awarded an F.C.C. about 4 or 5 years ago, and across at the other side an outstanding specimen of another \times *loebneri* form in pink 'Leonard Messel', whilst nearby that rare and magnificent species of Magnolia from West China *dawsoniana* which takes 15 years to flower. Just below was Rhododendron 'Alpine Glow' of the Avalanche Group with its widely funnel-shaped delicate pink fragrant flowers and next to it the large trusses of bell shaped pale yellow purple blotched flowers of *Rhododendron macabeaenum* and a little further on *Rhododendron desquamatum* with its aromatic oblong elliptic leaves and mauve flowers. We then passed a group of Camellias, including 'Philippa Forwood', 'Donation' and *saluenensis*, before coming to a fine 25 year old specimen of Eucalyptus *simondsii* followed by another *R. macabeaenum* but nearby *R. falconeri* a magnificent Himalayan species with rust coloured tomentum and trusses of waxy, creamy-yellow, purple blotched bell shaped flowers. At this point, the glorious Spring sunshine with the joy and tranquility of the gardens was disturbed by R.A.F. aircraft, from, we were told,

the Chivenor Training Base. However our attention was soon drawn to a fine collection of Spruce and standing out so majestically was *P. likiangensis* with its very distinct young reddish shoots and reddish-pink cones. As we wound our way round the hillside we passed a fine showing of Camellia 'Donation', *Pinus nigra maritima* and then came to a plantation of Birch with the striking white bark and showy catkins of Betula 'Jermyns', *B. Jacquemontii*, *B. turkestanii* and *B. utilis* Grayswood. We next came to a beautiful young specimen of *Eucalyptus gregsoniana* (A.M. last year) and amongst the collection of these attractive Australian Gum trees which had survived the recent severe winter were found *E. debouzevillei*, *E. niphophila* (Snow Gum), *E. coccifera* from Tasmania, *E. johnstonii* also a specimen of the rare *E. pauciflora* 'Pendula' of which we were told that this was brought back as seed from the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales where it grows in a very limited area. It comes true from seed.

One had to pause at *Viburnum carlesii* 'Diana' and enjoy its fragrance, also *V. × burkwoodii*. Down by the stream we were attracted by *Lathraea clandestina* which is a parasite growing on the roots of the Willows, and also the wide variety of Astilbe, whilst in the pond large carp and golden orfe were visible.

We then visited the area outside the gardens by the Church containing Camellia mother stock plants and what a wonderful collection we found. Malcolm told us these were mainly those collected by Dr Smart from Australia and America in recent years and many just flowering for the first time. We noticed in flower 'Little Bit', 'Janie Anderson' and a very good red single form labelled "Portugal (5)", a variegated leaf form labelled "Portuense", 'Grandiflora alba', 'Lady Vansittart', 'Star above Star' showing a pretty pink flower, 'Freedom Bell' and 'Kerlerrec'. Apart from this outside mother stock area Dr Smart also has a large glasshouse planted out with Camellias, some touching the roof, and here in bloom amongst so many there were excellent specimen plants of 'In the Pink', 'High Wide N' Handsome', a tiny form called 'Kitty', 'Spring Sonnet', 'Grand Prix' - a fine red, and 'Reg Ragland' - a good red semi-double flower which has such outstanding foliage.

After this well conducted tour of the gardens and Camellia stock plants we made for either or both of the plant sales areas where there was a large selection of containerised ornamental plants propagated at Marwood Hill or to the well organised tea room where delicious cream teas were being served under the kind and attentive eyes of Dr & Mrs Brook.

We found Marwood Hill Gardens of great interest and containing a very varied collection of carefully selected choice plants. It is a garden for all seasons and this report simply attempts to highlight what caught my eye during our short April visit which cannot do justice to the foresight, dedication, toil and love which Jimmy Smart has given to this once grassland valley in North Devon and now a unique garden for posterity.