



# Plant Heritage

CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

## Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Group



*Camellia* × *williamsii* 'November Pink'

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2020



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**Cover photo:** *Camellia* × *williamsii* '**November Pink**' Photo by Doug Smith

## Editor's note

A big thank you to all those who have been generous with their time and contributed to this issue. The deadline for the Autumn Newsletter is 14 September. I would really appreciate short articles on a wide variety of topics from members and Collection Holders. Contact the editor: Juliet Bloss: Tel: 023 8084 8085. email: [sevenmeads@aol.com](mailto:sevenmeads@aol.com)

# **FAIRWEATHER'S**

## **AGAPANTHUS OPEN DAYS AT HILLTOP NURSERY**

Pay a visit to our wholesale nursery  
Agapanthus Open Days on Saturday 18th &  
Sunday 19th July 2020, 10am to 4pm.

View our National Collection, buy plants, take  
a nursery tour & watch demos on getting the  
most from your Agapanthus.

Agapanthus plants are also available to buy  
from our Garden Centre and online shop.



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## Chairman's Letter

Has winter finished? 2018 gave us the 'Beast from the East' at the end of February. In 2019 it was all over bar the shouting by the 3rd February, with the highest winter temperature ever measured in the UK, at 21°C, at Wisley, at the end of the month. Remarkably, with only two weeks to go, this winter we have recorded a mere 2-3 nights below -1°C, and nothing below -2.7°C, and we are in a frost pocket! Unless the jet stream does something really mean, we are set for the mildest winter in over 20 years – probably much longer. However, with storm Dennis underway I am obliged to write this by candlelight, and last week's storm Ciara shattered one of our bigger gums (above), measured on the ground at over 25m (83ft), so perhaps it is dangerous to be too complacent.



In my letter of spring 2018, I praised the *Camellia* x *williamsii* hybrids, in particular 'November Pink'. This hardy shrub is a real harbinger of spring which, despite its name, away from its Cornish birthplace rarely opens its flowers before early to mid-December. It produces a succession of single blooms, and even though a heavy frost will brown the open ones these have the decency to fall off, and the next set of buds will open and take over. So much better than many of the double *japonica* selections, particularly the white ones, which merely seem to turn brown and hang on the bush like dead cabbages. 'November Pink' can continue to flower right into March, by which time some of the later varieties will have taken over. I couldn't resist taking a photo for the front cover.

We had an excellent year of events and the coming season should not disappoint. The write ups are up to the usual high standard and the articles very informative. I would particularly like to thank our advertisers, who make a very significant contribution to the cost of printing and mailing. All of them are worthy of a proper read. We had a very good AGM and I was delighted to report that the charity is on a sound track for the future. The main points I made, for the benefit of those who were unable to attend were:

- If you would be willing to assist on the gate at the May plant fair, if you haven't already done so please pass your name on to Gill Sawyer (details on back cover). Regrettably, many diaries were printed before the government changed the date of the bank holiday. This is now on Friday 8 May and the plant fair will be on Sunday 10 May.
- Let any of your committee have your ideas for future talks and visits.
- Write your bits for the newsletter; articles on a single plant are always welcomed, particularly from collection holders.

- Think about helping us to help run our group. David, our treasurer is keen to step down in the near future and a treasurer-in-waiting would be a huge asset.

After the meeting, we were treated to a brilliant talk by Julian Sutton, who made us all think about how we stood on many issues, the majority of which are certainly not black and white.

I wish you all good gardening for the rest of the year.

*Doug Smith, Chairman*

## **Report on Autumn and Winter Events**

**Thursday 17 October 2019**

**Talk by Kevin Hobbs; The Search and Selection of New Plants**

*Images copyright Kevin Hobbs.*

We were delighted that Kevin Hobbs stepped in at short notice to give us a fascinating talk about the process of searching for new plant introductions. Kevin is Head of Product Development at Whetman Plants International, a company best known for Dianthus breeding, but which also has a tissue culture laboratory in China. The company specialises in phylogeny to identify plant breeding opportunities, and a team that commercialises new plants on behalf of the breeder. It is in this latter area that Kevin is primarily involved, with the aim of increasing the range of plants provided by the company. You may also know Kevin from his various roles with Hillier's Nursery, most latterly as Head of Research and Development.



Kevin provided a vibrant run through the process of discovering and then bringing a new plant to market. The process starts with collaboration with small nurseries and growers worldwide, or perhaps amateurs who discover a novel plant and might send it in for evaluation. Small growers are usually unable to produce large numbers of plants for the worldwide market but can gain royalties if their plant is developed and distributed by a larger company. Kevin travels all over the world to find these new plants and stressed the importance of developing a network of friends to facilitate introductions to nurseries. Respecting the

original name of the plant, for example the Japanese name, and gaining Plant

Breeder's Rights are also important in order to gain the trust of breeders. Plants that have been lost to cultivation may also be re-found, for example *Anemone pavonina* 'Chapeau de Cardinal' (above). This was lost from France in the last century but reappeared in Japan a few years ago.

After finding a potential plant it is evaluated for hardiness, stability and interest to the UK and other global markets, particularly the United States. Trials can take many years, and it may take at least six years to get a plant to market.

Once a plant is selected a critical part of its success in the market will be governed

by how the plant is launched and marketed. Launching a plant at the RHS Chelsea flower show is one of the best ways.

Notable introductions by Hilliers Nursery include *Choisya dewitteana* 'Aztec Gold'

and *Cotinus* 'Candy Floss' bred by Alan Postill. Plant trends are



also important. Kevin noted that the tropical look is gaining in popularity with patio, conservatory and house plants, including succulents, selling in increasing numbers. He is also searching for edibles that can be introduced in the UK. Kevin's talk covered a huge variety of exciting plants that have potential for the future, too many to mention. However one that caught my eye was a dark green and cream leaved *Ginkgo* (above). I'll be first in the queue for that one!

Thanks again to Kevin for agreeing to talk to us at very little notice and sharing with us the joys of hunting for new plant introductions.

**Becky Getgood**

**Thursday 21 November 2019**

**Social with Talk by David Tite on Carnivorous Plants**

David is a real enthusiast with immense knowledge of carnivorous plants and a hugely diverse personal collection. For many years he has assisted Matthew Soper of Hampshire Carnivorous Plants, although he is due to retire shortly and plans to devote more time to his personal collection.

We were given a wide ranging talk about this group of plants with fabulous photographs of both his collection and of plants growing in the wild. It was

especially interesting to see photographs of our native species such as *Drosera rotundifolia* (Sundew) growing in the New Forest. There were gorgeous photographs of pitcher plants growing in Florida, looking like a strange wild flower meadow. We were also impressed with the montane pitcher plant, *Nepenthes rajah*, which is big enough to trap rats! These plants catch quite a range of creatures such as flies, beetles and other insects which they use for sustenance, as they are all from areas where nutrients are hard to come by.



*Sarracenia* cv Juthatip Soper AGM bred and named by Matthew for his wife. A dramatic hardy cultivar

David's talk also covered growing carnivorous plants at home and he explained just how easy this is and how hardy they can be. Hampshire Carnivorous Plants has an excellent website where you can see wonderful photographs. Particularly interesting

are their Open Days: the April Open Day sounds a particularly good one for beginners, with potting demonstrations and advice about compost and growing tips. Visit [hantsflytrap.com](http://hantsflytrap.com). It really is worth a look.

The evening was rounded off with an excellent supper provided by the members; especially noteworthy were David Howell's cheese straws!

### ***Lynsey Pink and Gill Sawyer***

#### **Thursday 16 January**

#### **Talk by Andrew Cleave on Mountain flowers**

Even though it was a very wet and miserable evening, a good number of people turned out for Andrew Cleaves' talk on Mountain Flowers. We were treated to some excellent photos of the beautiful alpine flowers that can be found in the mountains of Britain and Europe, ranging from the Pyrenees and Picos mountains of Spain and the Alps and Abruzzo ranges further east, to the Arctic regions of the far north. Alpine flowers can be found from the highest peaks down to the shoreline around Europe.





Some of these include the rare Lady's Slipper Orchid, *Cypripedium calceolus*, (above) and the Arctic Saxifrage, *Saxifraga nivalis*, which is very rare in the UK. Some of the rarer plants can only be accessed by scaling a mountainside onto the rocky shelves that the mountain goats can't reach. It is much more likely, though, that Andrew will take a cable car to the summit and lead his tour down a mountain track, allowing plenty of time to stop and admire.

**Margaret Pallant**

## **Sunday 8 February**

### **AGM Talk by Julian Sutton: Dilemmas of a Nobody.**

We were aware that our friend Julian is a great speaker and, having seen the title, were impatient to know more about what he had in store for us. This is how he described it to Lynsey Pink.

“Asked to speak on a conservation theme to a Plant Heritage meeting I realised that whenever I think about conservation - of wild plants, habitats, garden varieties, whatever - I end up with a pile of dilemmas and feel particularly insignificant. Here are my dilemmas laid bare, some age-old, some very contemporary; and my tentative conclusion is that the most useful thing any of us plantsmanly gardeners (whether honest nobodies or deluded somebodies) can do is to curate our collections robustly and fearlessly”.

He made these points brilliantly. Starting with the giant redwoods of coastal California (right), will these become endangered if the mists from coastal currents cease to provide adequate moisture? Then, considering the ethical aspects of wild collecting, it would appear in certain situations perfectly legal to dig up large quantities of plants, whether this is sustainable or not. Certainly the CITES list tries to protect certain groups of plants, but the number of cacti confiscated at customs points suggests this is not particularly effective; and the appearance of large specimens in certain warmer gardens is questionable. An area he explained particularly well, and perhaps a topic that few of us had considered, was the difference between phenotypic and genotypic diversity: which we are trying to conserve? Certain populations of plants of the same species in the wild, show great diversity in appearance (the phenotype).





Others are particularly unvarying. *Nerine sarniensis* in the wild is exclusively red (left), but the plant clearly carries the genes (the genotype) to produce forms with pink, white, and mauve flowers in cultivation



(right). Julian moved on to consider the problem of defining a named variety. A hybrid produced by a gardener is fairly easy; however, is it reasonable to go through a large number of wild collected plants of a species and pick out the odd ones and give them cultivar names?

Should we be growing on some of our weaker seedlings, which may produce interesting plants, but perhaps not in year one? Are we selecting cultivars whose seeds all germinate at the same time? Fine for the breeder, but probably not to the



benefit of a wild plant. Are nurserymen applying cultivar names inappropriately? Are the less scrupulous ones creating new 'selling' names merely to increase their business? Are they propagating named cultivars from seed, or even selling these seeds, when the offspring are unlikely to come true to type? Certainly so: *Hesperantha coccinia* 'Snow Maiden' (left) is an example.

Finally, if they are selling rare or unusual species are they being honest about how and where these were sourced?

Many of these problems can be overcome by honesty and much attention to detail, particularly by identifying the origins of our plants and labelling and documenting them accurately..

Julian left us with a very strong note. In his own words, we must "curate our collections robustly and fearlessly".

A brilliant and thought-provoking talk. Thank you, Julian.

**Doug Smith**

## Future Events

**Thursday 19 March 2020: Shawford Village Hall: 7.30pm**

**Talk by Kit Strange: Cultivation of Temperate Aroids**

Kit Strange, alpine horticulturalist at Kew Gardens for 17 years, specialises in bulbous plants. Kit is from Denmark but has lived in the UK since 1990. She gave us an excellent talk on 'Bulbs of Kyrgyzstan' back in 2009 and we decided that it was time to invite her back. Kit has travelled widely looking at plants in the wild and has collected seeds for the millennium seed bank. She has also been working closely with colleagues in the Falkland Islands to conserve and propagate native species. (Brought forward from 2019)

**Friday 17 April 2020: 2.00pm**

**Visit to Maurice Foster's garden at White House Farm, High Cross Road, Ivy Hatch, Sevenoaks, Kent. TN15 0NN.**

A much anticipated return trip to the wonderful garden of Maurice Foster VMH. Maurice refers to his 15-acre garden as being in the Kentish Alps as it is at an elevation of 500ft, so may be a little breezy on a windy day. Maurice grows a wide range of trees and shrubs, many from his collecting trips. There are new plant introductions from his breeding works, some of which we hope to see on our visit. At this time, main attractions should include magnolias, camellias and early hydrangeas. The cost is £10, to include a personal tour of the garden, tea and biscuits. Please give Gill your name by 31<sup>st</sup> March if you intend to go. Car share if you can as parking is limited.

**Sunday 10 May 2020: 10.00am – 4.00pm. Please note date.**

**Grand Plant Sale: Longstock Park Nursery SO20 6EH**

The main fund-raising event of the year and the "Best Plant Fair in Hampshire". Thirty plus specialist nurseries, Greenfields Hog Roast, Traditional Ice Cream, members' plant stall, music from the Jazzbeans. Longstock Nursery, farm shop and café open all day. **Please bring clearly labelled plants for our sales table.**

**The following nurseries and other specialist stall holders are booked to attend the event:**

Beans and Herbs – Brambly Hedge – Butterfly Cottage Garden – Chase Plants – Edulis – Elworthy Cottage Plants – Fernlea Nurseries – Floyds Climbers and Clematis – Fox Plants – Garden Treasures – Hilltop Garden – HJ Plants – Lodge Hill Plants – Long Acre Plants – Longstock Allotments – Marcus Dancer Plants – Mrs Mitchell's Kitchen and Plants – Nicholas Lock Plants – Paddock Plants – Park's Perennials – Peake Perennials – Pennards Plants – Phoenix Perennial Plants – Riverside Bulbs – Roseland House – Snape Stakes – Spring Hill Plants – Tufton Plants – Wild Thyme Plants.

**If there are any nurseries that are likely to have a plant you are looking for contact them in advance and they can probably arrange to bring it to the fair.**

**Entry:** Free to members and children. John Lewis employees £2; adults £5.

**Directions:** From Stockbridge turn right at north end of the High Street. From all directions, follow signs.

**Friday 12 June 2020: 10.00am**

**A guided tour of Noar Hill, Selborne, nr Alton GU34 3LW.**

Once the site of medieval chalk workings, this 20-hectare nature reserve is now carpeted with an array of beautiful chalk downland flowers in spring and summer, including juniper and pyramidal orchid. The vibrant flowers and the butterflies that feed on them create an oasis of colour among the surrounding fields of crops. A walk through this unusual and historic landscape is always a fascinating experience. Our guide will be Mike Allen, Reserves Officer, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Finishing at the Selborne Arms for lunch. Park in the lane near the reserve or in Selborne. Please car share if possible.

**Friday 10 July 2020: 10.00am**

**A Day at Wisley discovering how Award of Garden Merit trials are run. GU23 6QB.**

We will be hosted by Sabatino Urzo, the Trials Manager at the RHS, and will have the use of a classroom for the day. Sabatino will give us a tour of current trials and explain the trials process. He will also answer such questions as: What kind of plants are trialed and how are they selected? How are the trials assessed and where can we see the results? The cost, £10, is for lunch as Sabatino is not charging us. Garden entry is free to RHS members with current membership cards, otherwise entry charges apply. Numbers and payment to Gill Sawyer, please, by 12 June; include any dietary requirements.

**Sunday 6 September 2020: 2.00pm – 6.00pm.**

**AUTUMN PLANT SALE at Meon Orchard, Kingsmead, Nr Wickham. PO17 5AU.**

A visit to Doug and Linda Smith's garden, in conjunction with their NGS Open Day. A 2-acre Garden planted with a huge array of exotic plants, including three National Collections. Specialist nursery stalls and members' plants, 20-acre meadow and ½ mile of River Meon river bank. Please bring plants for sale. Members and children free, general public £5. Home-made teas. Ample parking.

**Directions:** A32 north from Wickham for 1½ miles, turn left at Roebuck Inn, garden in ½ mile. Follow NGS yellow signs.

**Time:**

**Later events will be published in the Autumn Newsletter**



## New Members

The Hampshire & Isle of Wight Group welcomes the following new, or re-joining, members. We look forward to seeing you at some of our events.

**Paul Chapman, Chris Cotterell, Gillian Taylor, Valerie Williams, Adam Friday, Dennis Wren, Judith Marshall**

## Collections Coordinators Report Spring 2020

Hampshire National Plant Collections currently total 49, plus 5 on the Isle of Wight.

### New Collections

We've had no new collections since my last newsletter report, but we have had some exciting new proposals. These include a new *Buxus* collection from Andrew and Lena Napier, *Lavandula x intermedia* from Richard Norris and his team at Longbarn Lavender in Alresford, and a collection of *Arum* from Chris Cotterell. The Plant Conservation Committee (PCC), have given the go ahead for them to come back as full applications.

Chris Kidd at Ventnor is also working on his collections of *Eucalyptus* and *Ficus*; both will be full applications soon.

I recently visited the Hawk Conservancy Trust with PCC member Kevin Hobbs. Their extended cafeteria patio area includes a long raised bed that could house a collection of 'Whetman Pinks'. The Devon based breeders have offered this opportunity via Kevin. There is also scope to plant shrubby species to enrich the grounds and habitat for their birds. We're excited to collaborate with another conservation charity.

### Changes to collections

The title of the *Pinus* collection at Hilliers has been changed to acknowledge the many dwarf pines in the gardens; the *Cerciphyllum* there have also moved to full status now that the youngest are maturing. Kim Williams' *Begonia rex* Cultorum Group has been given full status.

### Withdrawals

Sadly we lost both the *Patrinia* and Langley *Buxus* collections this year. As always, thanks go to the collection holders who worked so hard to keep them as long as they were able.

## News

We get news from collection holders from time to time about their projects. For example, recently Amanda Whittaker has been able to provide *Crassula* samples for further research by a PhD student from Denmark. You'll read about it in this newsletter.

Lynsey Pink has made some progress with distributing her *Salvias* to rationalize her huge collection of this genus. She is splitting them geographically: Talbot Botanical Gardens in County Dublin have taken a large number of the Mexican, central and southern American species; Louise Danks at the Duchy College, Cornwall, is also keen to take this group. Logan Botanics have taken an interest and a Hampshire member, Angharad Pike, is interested in the Californian group. You can't just dig up a collection and move it; it's a slow process of propagating and establishing plants with the original collection as a safety net so that plants are not lost. Eventually Lynsey will re-scope her collection to a more manageable group.

## Coordinators meetings

The Hampshire team of coordinators met in August to do a bit of a round-up of visits, clarify a few issues and get an update from Lucy Pitman from National Office. Another potential coordinator, Camilla Hiley, joined us for this and will be a welcome addition to the team. As usual, in October we also met up with coordinators from other counties across the South West region at Stourhead, a great venue for an autumn meeting.

## National Collection Coordinators Seminar at Birmingham Botanical Gardens

For the first time National Office organized a gathering of coordinators from across the country. It was really well attended from all corners of the UK, and we had a very positive and productive day sharing experiences and discussing the issues that collections' coordinators have in visiting diverse plant collections. Based at the Botanical Gardens in Birmingham we had a chance to see their NC of *Cyclamen* spp. Many of the sweetly scented *C. persicum* held under glass were in flower.



***Cyclamen persicum* from the  
Birmingham Botanical Gardens  
National Collection**

## How members can get involved with plant conservation

There are Plant Heritage schemes that encourage individual members to grow and nurture plants in need of conservation. The Plant Exchange is the most established, but is still only used by just a few members. Plants that are offered and received are rare or threatened, and always in very short supply, so they will usually be eligible for the Plant Guardian Scheme. This allows members to look after a small, manageable number of plants to save them from disappearing from our gardens. The intention is for you to propagate and share them to increase their circulation. You don't need to have offered plants to receive them. Start with a few and it won't be long before you are contributing as well. Lynsey Pink is the plant exchange coordinator for Hampshire.

## Threatened Plant of the Year Competition 2020

The RHS and Plant Heritage have created this new competition to be displayed and judged at RHS Hampton Court Flower Show in July 2020.

Any member can enter a plant. The plant has to have been unavailable in nurseries since 2005 and threatened in cultivation. Entry forms are on the new website under the 'conservation' menu, and once your form is sent, the conservation team at National Office will check entries for eligibility. It would be great to get a winner in Hampshire.

## Saving collections by sharing through Dispersed Collections

Some collections are lost to us because collection holders can no longer manage the numbers of plants in their collections.



***Clematis montana* 'Broughton Star' in Val's garden.**

Val Le May Neville Parry has recently asked me to review the future of her collection of *Clematis montana* Group. Many of you will have visited her garden and seen her wonderful collection in flower. She is beginning to find it difficult to manage. We are looking for volunteers to take cuttings of her material and start to grow them in their gardens. She expects it would take 3 years from cutting to

garden specimen. The most ideal situation is to have as many specimens as possible on a few sites. But a coordinated approach to this could disperse the collection in smaller numbers. This is a project that could take a few years, so Val has asked me to begin looking at it now whilst she is still able to cope with the garden. We plan to start with some propagation workshops based at Val's garden this summer. It could be possible for cuttings to be rooted by our propagation group and supplied to those with space to grow them. Dates for our propagation group sessions for 2020 are below.

### **Dates for 2020 propagation group workshops:**

#### **Wednesday 25 March 2.00pm – 4.00pm**

Spring cuttings and seed sowing. Venue: Lynsey & John Pink, 2 Hillside Cottages, Trampers Lane, North Boarhunt, Fareham PO17 6DA [landipink@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:landipink@tiscali.co.uk)

#### **Wednesday 3 June 2.00pm – 4.00pm**

Clematis cuttings Max 10. Venue: Val Le May Neville-Parry, By The Way, Lodge Drove, Woodfalls, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 2NH. [val@lmpn.co.uk](mailto:val@lmpn.co.uk)

#### **Wednesday 17 June 10.00am – 12.00pm**

Clematis cuttings. Max 10. Venue: Val Le May Neville-Parry, By The Way, Lodge Drove, Woodfalls, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 2NH.

#### **Wednesday 12 August 2.00pm-4.00pm**

Semi-ripe cuttings and perennial seed sowing. Venue: Lynsey & John Pink, 2 Hillside Cottages, Trampers Lane, North Boarhunt, Fareham PO17 6DA

As always, details will be given in our regular email newsletters and we'll need you to contact the host so that we can cater for you.

***Rosie Yeomans, National Collections Coordinator***

## **Changes afoot at Bramdean House Garden**

**B**ramdean garden is well-known to most Hampshire members, but changes are afoot. For many years visitors have been greeted by Victoria Wakefield, a keen gardener and former trustee of Kew and member of several RHS committees. She took the garden over from her mother in 1975 and has developed and looked after it ever since, but she and her husband have now passed the property on to their son, Edward Wakefield and his family, and Victoria is no longer so actively involved.



The 5-acre garden is famous for its mirrored herbaceous borders, displays of spring bulbs, and collection of interesting trees and shrubs. There is a 1-acre walled working kitchen garden for vegetables, fruit and cut flowers, which also includes a collection of old-fashioned sweet peas. There are grassy wild-flower areas, and in front of the house is an impressive undulating hedge of clipped yew and box. The garden has recently hosted a trial of Nerines for the RHS.



A new head gardener, Maggie Tran, has been in place for over a year – a year spent in getting to know the garden. Although this is her first job in overall charge of a garden she has had lots of management experience in her pre-horticultural career. She switched

into horticulture 10 years ago, and has spent the time since then in training, and gaining experience of different types of garden, both in England and abroad. This has included two years at Wisley and stints at Great Dixter, the garden created by Christopher Lloyd in East Sussex, Longwood Gardens, Pennsylvania (an American botanical garden), and the De Wiersse garden in Holland.

Maggie fell in love with the garden at Bramdean at first sight and has enthusiastic plans for developing and enhancing its design and plant collection. Her aim for the garden is to capture and retain the magic and atmosphere that it already has, and to preserve the best of its traditions and qualities, while developing its sustainability. One of her first big tasks is to redefine the celebrated herbaceous borders. Some of the plants have outgrown their spots or are no longer quite in alignment, some need replacing with up-to-date cultivars, and some attention needs to be given to seasonal extensions. The job is made harder by the lack of adequate and up-to-date planting plans to give guidance. The few plans which exist date from 10 years ago, when the planting was very different. There are also some rough lists, which are difficult to work from, and Maggie's intention is to create a scale plan, which will be more visual than a list and easier to adjust. She could do with a drone to take aerial photographs, she says, but has to make do with studying the borders from an upstairs window. In other areas of the garden she wants to introduce more diversity into the grassy areas to aid wildlife, and to create a more relaxed and naturalistic habitat.

The new owners are keen to run the kitchen garden as far as possible using ecologically sound methods. Both they and Maggie would like to make the garden as close to organic as possible in



order to support wildlife and benefit the environment. They are looking to recruit an assistant gardener to help with this and other tasks. They still have the services of Phillip Ludlow, who has been there for many years and will continue to look after the hedges, lawns and wider estate work. Gardens like these were historically designed to have an army of gardeners working for very low wages. The question is how to manage such gardens today while keeping them ecologically sustainable and economically viable.

It will be fascinating to watch the progress of the garden over the next few years, to see how it evolves, what new plant collections it will house, the development of the kitchen garden, and enhancement of wildlife interest. If anyone has not yet visited this lovely Hampshire garden I urge them to go. Members can visit either weekdays by appointment, or when it opens for the NGS.

**NGS dates for 2020:** 9 Feb; 5 April; 14 June; 12 July; 9 Aug; 13 Sep;  
**Times:** 2.00-4.00pm. **Entry:** £5.00.

**Photos:** Maggie at work: Graeme Walker. View of the mirror borders: Maggie Tran

***Juliet Bloss***

## National Collection of *Oxydendrum* at Exbury Gardens

Exbury Gardens is well known for its eye catching displays of colourful rhododendrons and azaleas, most notably in the spring time. However, rhododendrons are not the only plant of interest to be found within the garden's 240 acres. Many of the trees are of special interest, some are champions and many put on a coat of many colours in the autumn to rival the glamour of the spring blooms. We have a National Collection of one of these trees and can boast about having every species in the genus. This is not too difficult as the genus *Oxydendrum* has only one species to its name: *Oxydendrum arboreum*. To make up for the lack of species it is known by many common names, including sourwood tree, sour gum, sorrel tree, sorrel gum, arrowwood, elk tree, lily-of-the-valley tree and titi tree. These names give a clue to the nature and uses of this interesting tree. "Oxy" is the Greek word for sharp or acid. The sourness comes from the sharp flavour and smell of the leaves, which are laden with acid. This genus, in the Ericaceae family, is native to eastern North America, from southern Pennsylvania, south to northwest Florida and west to southern Illinois, and is most common in the lower chain of the Appalachian Mountains and frequently seen growing in oak-heath forests. It is not found on other continents unless introduced.



*Oxydendrum* grow best in moist, acidic soils and the more sun the better as the best autumn colour comes after a sunny summer. In its native habitat this slow growing deciduous tree can reach up to 15m-24m in height, more usually 7m-9m in cultivation, with a girth of about 50cms. It develops into a narrow tree with branches that droop elegantly at the tips. Borden Wood House in West Sussex can boast of having the tallest *Oxydendrum* nationally, with a specimen reaching 20 metres. Leonardslee Garden in West Sussex has the National Champion *Oxydendrum* for girth, coming in at 53cms. Exbury have a Hampshire Champion amongst the stand of five trees in Yard Wood, near the Domesday yew and railway line. It was measured with a height of 14m and a girth of 45cms in 2017. You might be forgiven for thinking that the trees have been blown sideways by the prevailing winds but a noticeable characteristic of *Oxydendrum* is that nearly every tree leans - rarely are they found with a straight trunk, giving them a rather straggly appearance which is clearly seen in our five mature trees. It is a relatively

short lived tree lasting about 80 years, but up to 100-200 years if planted in a favourable location.

The leaves are arranged alternately along the stem and measure up to 10cm - 18cms long, 4cm - 6cms wide, oblong to oblanceolate with finely serrated or hairy margins. Sometimes the ends of branches consist of clusters of leaves growing closely together. When fully grown, they are dark green and shiny above, pale and glaucous below. In autumn, they reveal their presence by exploding into a glorious profusion of rich autumn colours which, combined with the feathery seed capsules, make a breath-taking display in the sunshine and persist late into winter. In spite of the sourness of the leaves a refreshing, thirst-quenching tea has been made from them.

The mature bark is grey to reddish brown with thick and deeply furrowed ridges



and a blocky appearance. Younger stems are olive green to red. The timber obtained from the sourwood is quite heavy and hard and because of its close grain. it is sometimes used in furniture making, where it will take a high polish. The leaves and bark were put to a variety of medicinal uses by Native Americans and pioneers alike. Native American Cherokee and Catawba tribes found the strength of the younger shoots made them an ideal choice for arrow shafts. They also used the wood for sled runners, cooking tools and firewood. Early pioneers made the sap into a concoction used for treating fevers. The bark was chewed to soothe mouth pains, and tea made from the leaves was a treatment for diarrhoea, indigestion and dysentery.

*Oxydendrum* is a late flowering tree. In mid-summer small bell-shaped, creamy white and fragrant flowers can be seen growing in panicles 10cm to 25cm long, drooping from the ends of the branches. The urn shaped flowers borne on these tassels resemble lilies-of-the-valley and are typical of a member of the Ericaceae or heath family. Surprisingly, from a tree with so many common names related to sourness, comes a highly prized honey. Honey bees find the flowers highly attractive and the honey they produce has become a rare delicacy. Sourwood honey is light amber and has the fragrance and taste of anise and spice. As this honey can demand a high price on 1 June 2012 North Carolina introduced state guidelines aimed at preserving the authenticity of Sourwood honey. They require



approved honey sellers to keep records of when and where the honey was produced and packaged, including the name of the business or individual that supplied it and the date of receipt. If honey is marketed as being from one floral source, such as Sourwood, it must contain at least 51% Sourwood nectar. Sourwood jelly is another product of the juice from the nectar-rich flowers, and in the Appalachians a refreshing concoction called 'switchell' was once made by mixing a half cup of honey and a half cup of cider vinegar. Four teaspoons of this were added to water on hot summer haymaking days.

Fertilized flowers develop into seed capsules during late summer and the drooping spray of flowers then becomes a spray of seed capsules, very noticeable in the autumn. These remain on the tree throughout the winter giving the ends of the branches a feathery appearance.



*Oxydendrum arboreum* was introduced into cultivation in 1747 but cultivars are rare. *Oxydendrum* 'Chaemeleon' (also listed as 'Chameleon') was selected at the Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha's Vineyard, off the coast of Massachusetts, and is notable for its autumn foliage which can display shades of red, purple and yellow at one time or in sequence. The habit is more upright than the species but it has the same pendulous clusters of white urn-shaped flowers. Speciality catalogues include a West Virginia selection, *Oxydendrum* 'Mt. Charm', which is noted for earlier, bright autumn colour and a symmetrical habit. *Oxydendrum* 'Albomarginatum' has white leaf margins and white marbling.

You can see two *Oxydendrum* 'Chameleon' in Exbury Gardens. One of these is in the area of the wildlife ponds. The other, close to the new birch planting near the picnic area overlooking Jubilee Pond, is not doing quite so well and remains small.

Next time you make a trip to Exbury to marvel at the spectacle of autumn, remember to seek out these noteworthy trees. Be sure to look up to catch sight of the fiery foliage and feathery seedpods which, set against a blue autumn sky, is quite simply stunning.

**Gill Mordant (Exbury Gardens Volunteer)**

## **Rhododendron sub-section Maddenii**

With well over 1,000 species of *Rhododendron* known to science and around 30,000 registered hybrids the genus *Rhododendron* can be a daunting group of plants to get to know. These numbers are increasing all the time with new species being discovered and a steady flow of new hybrids being registered, not to mention taxonomists either splitting or lumping them back together again. This is all inevitable in any large genus of closely related plants as science and technology improves. However, fortunately for us the genus *Rhododendron* is further broken down into 9 subgenera, 11 sections and 50 sub-sections containing closely related plants sharing similar easily recognisable morphological characteristics, and often enjoying similar growing conditions. One of my favourite such groups is the subsection *Maddenia*. There are around 30 species (depending on who you talk to!) and numerous hybrids; a few of the best I will cover later.

Most of the species are found at low altitude in the remote valleys of South West



***Rhododendron nuttalli* with its lily-like corolla and reticulate leaves; from the cool temperate forests of southern China and North Vietnam where it grows epiphytically on steep mountain sides and in the hollows of rotten trees.**

China, the South Eastern Himalayan range or in the sub-tropical hills around Nagaland and Manipur in north east India, where they are mainly epiphytic, growing on rocks, often by the side of springs or waterfalls, and in wetter areas in the forks of trees and on moss-covered logs. They have a somewhat straggly open habit and relatively low leaf cover enabling them to grow between the branches of other shrubs for support. Many of the species are relatively tender, meaning they are only really suited to the milder western and southern counties of the UK. This description does not readily endear them to the average gardener, but the reason for their continued interest with a small band of enthusiasts is their often-spectacular flowers and heady scent.

Here at Exbury we have been steadily building up our collection over the past few years. Being epiphytic they are happy to grow in pots as long as they have a ready supply of water and good drainage. We use a mixture of ericaceous John Innes compost and orchid bark to improve the air space and drainage (think wet but well drained!), very much like for other epiphytes such as *Cymbidium* orchids. We also annually apply a slow release Osmocote fertilizer in the spring, which is enough to get them through the year as they have a very low nutrient requirement. The collection at Exbury now numbers over 60 *Maddenias*, many of which are mature and have been happily growing in pots for many years. Like many rhododendrons



they are relatively easy to hybridise and over the years many fine hybrids have been raised. The most successful and most commonly cultivated is the aptly named *Rhododendron* 'Fragrantissimum' with its funnel-shaped white corolla flushed with pink and bright yellow throat. Its lax ungainly habit is more than made up for by the magical scent which combines nutmeg with the sweet smell of jasmine. Probably the most impressive hybrid in our collection is 'Mi Amour' (*nuttallii* x *lindleyi*), whose massive lily-like flowers are both impressive and beautiful in equal measure. Although not overly floriferous it makes up for it in sheer spectacle, and also has wonderful coppery new growth which is rather distinctive and attractive once the flowers are finished. Most of the *Maddenias* are borderline hardy and only grow outdoors happily in the sheltered gardens of the west country. However, as they show no ill effects from long term pot culture; they

***Rhododendron khasia with a veritable waterfall of white flowers filling the air with a scent of sweet nutmeg; found in the sub-tropical Khasia hills in Meghalaya, N. E. India where it grows by the side of waterfalls and on the edge of forest clearings.***

really only need a frost free glasshouse to overwinter, and as such make excellent patio plants (pot culture also avoids the problem of not having the correct ph in your area). Many *Maddenias* also have magnificent stems with mahogany flakes of papery bark, which is worthy of cultivation on its own merit. They also strike well from cuttings in late summer so are easy to bulk up. All in all, they are a worthy addition to any garden, and due to their size, ability to be containerised, wonderful scented flowers, attractive bark and ease of growing they are really well suited to the smaller garden and a welcome addition to any plant collection. I would love to see them cultivated more widely as they are relatively uncommon in the nursery trade and deserve a much higher profile.

***Thomas Clarke, Head Gardener at Exbury & a member of the Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group***

## Does cell wall composition in *Crassula* affect succulence? The role of a National Collection in original research

You may have heard Dr Olwen Grace from RBS Kew on the Radio 4 Today programme in early February talking about succulent plants. Olwen is a Research Leader in Comparative Plant and Fungal Biology at Kew and was talking about the importance of succulents with respect to global warming. I have always thought my National Collection of *Crassula* Species was important, but it's great to know that somebody else does too. And Olwen isn't the only one: I've just had a PhD researcher spending two days in my greenhouse testing the polysaccharide composition of the leaves. Here's how it happened.



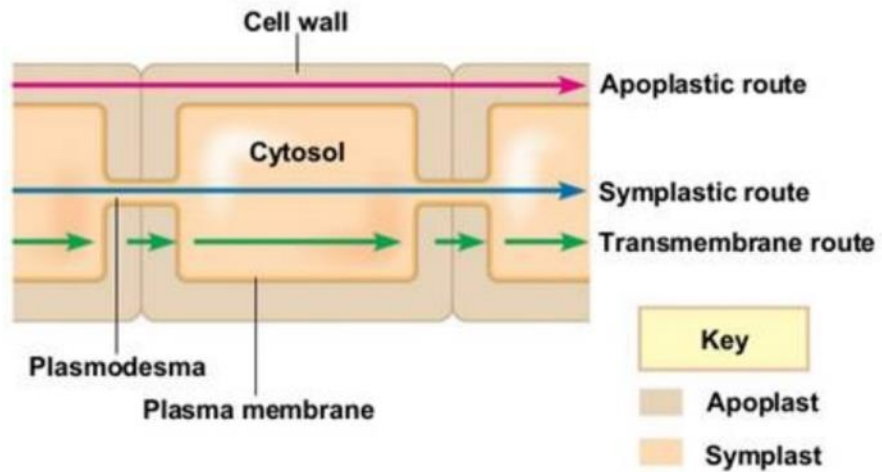
It started a couple of years ago when Olwen Grace contacted me asking if I could donate some *Crassula* plants to Kew for a student, Marc Fradera-Soler, who was writing his MSc dissertation on *Crassula*. I duly had a lovely visit to Kew and gave Olwen a handful of plants from my collection. Marc has now finished his MSc and his paper is currently under review for publication in the *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* – watch this space for information on that when it comes out. After his MSc, Mark began his PhD – also on *Crassula* – working at the University of Copenhagen and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

Marc's PhD focuses on the evolution of leaf traits across the leaf-succulent genus *Crassula*. If you have travelled across South Africa you may have seen just how widespread this genus is; it is present in all biomes of southern Africa, ranging from relatively humid to extremely arid habitats. Marc believes that the reason *Crassula* species occur in such a wide range of conditions is due to the varying degrees of leaf succulence and CAM\* performance, and also their remarkable xeromorphic – or water-retaining - adaptations. He also suspects that the degree of succulence depends on the precise composition of the leaf cell walls. The details of his project are a bit hard to follow for a



non-scientist like me, but here's my understanding of what he's doing:

Plant cell walls are made from polysaccharides – most commonly from what we know as cellulose. However, the cell walls of different plants are made from polysaccharides of slightly different compositions. Previous research has shown



that different polysaccharides affect how quickly and efficiently water can move in the leaf. This is because most of the water moves within the cell wall. This was news to me as I thought it moved through the cells. Apparently not: most water moves through the apoplastic route as shown in the diagram:

Research seems to have shown that in *Aloe* the polysaccharide composition also determines the degree of succulence and the response of the leaf tissue to drought. Therefore, Marc's work is looking at whether the same applies to *Crassula*: is there any connection between the conditions in which the plant is found and the composition of its cell walls?

With this in mind Marc visited my collection in January with one of his colleagues to take leaf samples of a variety of *Crassula* species. These were taken carefully using tweezers, taking samples from a number of plants within the same species and then putting them into Falcon tubes. They were stored in a coolbox before being transported back to Kew. The next day samples were tested to determine the polysaccharide composition of the cell walls of the different species. The method used is known as Comprehensive Microarray Polymer Profiling (CoMPP), and is a technique well-suited to processing large numbers of samples. I don't pretend to understand the details of the process – Google it if you wish to know more - but don't ask me to explain it.

All I know is that the samples are prepared by freezing and then putting them into a vacuum to extract the water – freeze drying. This dries out the leaf samples



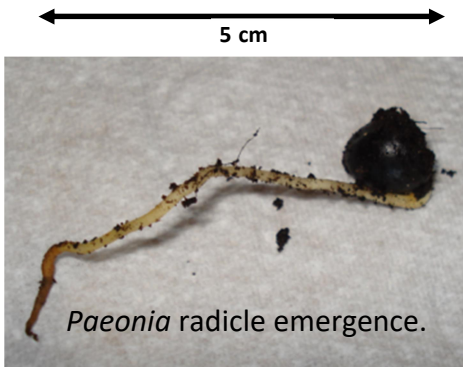
without melting the ice and thus preventing cell wall damage. This fascinates me as I have had experience of a number of *Crassula* species freezing. I was caught out once by a sudden overnight frost and lost many plants that I had left outside in containers. The leaves of *Crassula* do not withstand freezing conditions and the stench of rotting leaves as the ice melted was quite revolting.

My tiny leaves are now being examined and tested. In the meantime I can't tell you how excited I am or what a pleasure it was to have somebody take my collection of plants as seriously as I do. I can't wait to find out the results.

**Amanda Whittaker, National Collection Holder**

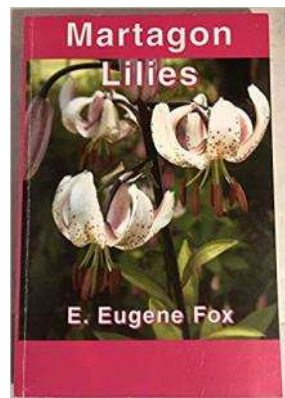
## Speeding up germination of seeds with Epicotyl Dormancy using the Tarlton Method for the Martagon Lily

You may have sown a seed in spring and noticed that it takes over a year for a shoot to appear. What may be unseen below ground is that the root has developed in the first year prior to the shoot emerging in the second year. Several well-known plants, such as many species of *Lilium* and *Paeonia*, exhibit this 'double' dormancy whereby seeds need to overcome two or more primary dormancies in order to germinate. In the case of *Lilium* and *Paeonia* the technical term for this is Epicotyl Morphophysiological Dormancy.



In nature the seed requires a period of warmth for the under-developed embryo within the mature seed to fully develop. After this the radicle root emerges during the warm period (late summer/autumn). A period of cold stratification is then required (winter) followed by a second period of warmth, after which the Epicotyl shoot emerges (from late summer into winter).

What is the relevance of this to gardeners? By understanding the germination requirements of the seed we can 'cheat' and replicate the periods of warmth and cold required but in a shorter space of time. I am trying this for the first time with seeds of *Lilium martagon*, recently received in December from a seed exchange. I'm using Eugene Fox's 'Tarlton





Method<sup>1</sup> because it uses a jam jar and you can see what is happening (great fun). Here is what has happened so far.....

1. Seeds were soaked in a dilute (10%) solution of bleach for 10 minutes at the beginning of January. They were then stuck around the edge of a sterilised jam jar whilst still wet. (Add an inch of water and microwave on full for a couple of minutes to sterilise the jar – no lid).

2. The jar was carefully filled with fresh potting compost so as not to dis-lodge the seeds and this was watered with a solution of general purpose fertiliser, so it was just damp. Do not compress the compost as oxygen is needed. The lid was added, and the jar placed on a



*Lilium martagon*  
seed stuck to side  
of jam jar

White radicle  
emerging from the  
seed

windowsill above a radiator (room temperature).

3. After 2 weeks the first seeds showed signs of a radicle root emerging from the pointed end – now I know which way to align the seed if I do it again! Others have taken 4 weeks for the radicle to emerge, and some seeds have done nothing.

4. After a further 2 weeks the first signs of a tiny bulb have appeared on the radicle. These are slowly growing. I've wrapped a black plastic bag around the jar recently, to simulate being underground although this isn't mentioned in the Tarlton Method! I am contemplating taking the lid off briefly to exchange the air but this may allow fungal spores to sneak in.



Little bulb developing on the  
radicle – 3mm x 6mm on 9<sup>th</sup>  
February

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1 The Tarlton Method was published by E.Eugene Fox in his book 'Martagon Lilies' (2006). The method is abridged on-line at [plantlilies.com](http://plantlilies.com).

5. In another 2 weeks (8 weeks since sowing) I will check if the bulbs are still increasing in size and keep checking up to the 12 week point. When the bulbs stop growing, or at 12 weeks, whichever is earlier, I will stick the jar in the fridge (5 degrees centigrade) for 4 weeks. The 'Tarlton Method' states 3 months in the fridge but as the seeds were quick to produce a radicle, I will try a reduced time. I can always stick them back in the fridge if nothing happens.

The fridge will simulate the cold stratification period and will be followed by a further period of warmth on the windowsill when hopefully the epicotyl shoots will appear.

I'll keep you posted!



*Becky Getgood*

## GOODBYE WARNFORD - HELLO SHAWFORD!

It has been noted that getting to Warnford Village Hall for monthly evening meetings has been difficult for those members not living to the South East of Hampshire. To be fairer to all members the location of meetings will move to a more central location that is accessible from the main roads.



A plot of members' postcodes indicated the centre of mass to be just south of Winchester.

Future meetings will take place at **Shawford Parish Hall**, Pearson Lane, Shawford, SO21 2AA. This is accessible from Junction 11 of the M3. It has a car park for 15 -20 cars with additional parking on Pearson Lane. It also benefits from WiFi.

We hope to see you there on 19 March 2020 for our first meeting in the new location.

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# Sparsholt College: RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2020

## The Natural Kalendar

The year 2020 marks the Tercentenary of the birth of Gilbert White (1720 – 1793) of the Wakes, Selborne, who undertook detailed observations of the world around him, noting both natural changes in the wider countryside and within his own garden: a true hero of Hampshire and the natural world. His observations and studies enlightened people as to the changing seasons and species activity. This became the basis for the modern studies of ecology and phenology.

Our display within Discovery at RHS Chelsea 2020 encapsulates features from his garden, including the ha-ha, the wild flower meadow, the wine pipe seat (spinning for all-round observations), the alcove, fruit wall, melon frame and six quarters. In the eighteenth century “quarter” meant an area of land rather than one fourth.

The display intends to highlight the changes in seasonal timing from his lifetime to the present day, and the potential impact on the future survival of plant species. This directly relates to the adjustment of growing conditions and seasonal changes that is being experienced currently.

However, have things changed that much in 250 years?

The planting is drawn from Gilbert White’s writings and representatives of current species grown at the Wakes, together with a section of brand new introductions developed for the challenges of a changing climate.

Sponsorship is again being provided by Thompson & Morgan and includes plant entries into the RHS Plant of the Year 2020, and, new for this year, the RHS Plant of the Decade. We will be featuring two previous Plant of the Year winners: the 2012 *Digitalis x valinii* Illumination Series, and the 2018 *Hydrangea* RUNAWAY BRIDE SNOW WHITE (‘Ushyd0405’).

Plant examples will include: melon, *Cucumis melo*, ‘Black Rock’ (Syn. ‘Noir des Carmes’) 1787; runner bean, *Phaseolus coccineus* ‘Painted Lady’; *Agapanthus* POPPIN’ PURPLE; *Verbena bonariensis* ‘Royal Dreams’; and *Buddleja* ‘Butterfly Gold’.

**Chris Bird, Sparsholt College**





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<b>Doug Smith</b> <i>Chairman</i>	<i>Meon Orchard, Kingsmead, Wickham, PO17 5AU</i>	01329 833253 <a href="mailto:doug.smith@btinternet.com">doug.smith@btinternet.com</a>
<b>David Howells</b> <i>Treasurer &amp; Plant Fair contact</i>	<i>10, Coppice Close, Winchester SO22 5NQ</i>	01962 867519 <a href="mailto:dc.howells@btopenworld.com">dc.howells@btopenworld.com</a>
<b>Margaret Pallant</b> <i>Secretary</i>	<i>Abbotsdene, Crook Hill Braishfield SO51 0QB</i>	07784 773345 <a href="mailto:margaretpallant@btinternet.com">margaretpallant@btinternet.com</a>
<b>Rosie Yeomans</b> <i>National Collections Coordinators</i>	<i>113 Stoke Common Road, Bishopstoke, SO50 6DW</i> <b>Chris Kidd</b> (IoW) <b>Jennie Whitmore, Jill Wright, Tricia Newton, Tricia Olorenshaw</b>	023 8061 4171 <a href="mailto:rosieyeomans@gmail.com">rosieyeomans@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:chris.kidd@botanic.co.uk">chris.kidd@botanic.co.uk</a>
<b>Lynsey Pink</b> <i>Events Committee, Propagation and Plant Sales</i>	<i>2 Hillside Cottages, Trampers Lane, North Boarhunt, PO17 6DA</i>	01329 832786 <a href="mailto:landjpink@tiscali.co.uk">landjpink@tiscali.co.uk</a>
<b>Gill Sawyer</b> <i>Events Secretary</i>	<i>Rose Cottage, Church Road, Swanmore, SO32 2PA</i>	01489 894206 <a href="mailto:gill.sawyer12@googlemail.com">gill.sawyer12@googlemail.com</a>
<b>Chris Bird</b> <i>Education</i>	<i>63 Lavington Gardens, North Baddesley, SO52 9NR</i>	home 023 8073 4256 work 01962 776441 <a href="mailto:chris.bird@sparsholt.ac.uk">chris.bird@sparsholt.ac.uk</a>
<b>Juliet Bloss</b> <i>Newsletter Editor</i>	<i>7 Forest Meadow, Hythe, SO45 3RH</i>	023 8084 8085 <a href="mailto:sevenmeads@aol.com">sevenmeads@aol.com</a>
<b>Jeff Heaton</b>	<i>117 Winchester Street, Overton, Basingstoke, RG 25 3NB</i>	01256 770121 <a href="mailto:jeffreyheat@aol.com">jeffreyheat@aol.com</a>
<b>Becky Getgood</b>	<i>Beech Cottage, Mount Hermon Road, Palestine, Andover SP11 7EW</i>	07894 870630 <a href="mailto:r.a.schofield@btopenworld.com">r.a.schofield@btopenworld.com</a>