



Oxenhope

Gardening Club News

May 2025

Welcome to the May newsletter.



Over the bank holiday weekend, myself and my daughter travelled around Scotland's west highland coast where we visited two remarkable gardens. All three gardens were linked by their connection to the great plant hunters of the late 19th and early 20 century. The first garden we visited was Larachmhor (Làrach Mòr)

Larachmhor is situated close to the village of Arisaig, on the road to Mallaig on the west coast of Scotland. It is a woodland garden of outstanding horticultural interest planted by John Augustus Holms from 1927. The garden is like something I imagine the Lost Gardens of Helligan would have appeared when first discovered. Although the paths are there, much of the 28 acres is overgrown and some areas are obscured by scrub. However, around each bend you come across stupendous examples of rhododendrons and magnolias and other exotic trees: The whole place has a magical atmosphere.

John Augustus Holms, a Glasgow businessman, was also an art connoisseur, collector and authority on the fine arts, porcelain, silver and carpets, but his great love was gardening. He had previously established a garden and park at Formakin, near Bishopton, Renfrewshire where, in the early 1920s, he developed an extensive collection of Rhododendrons. He was also a founder member of the Rhododendron Society. Eventually, his collection outgrew the garden so he searched for a site on which to further develop his collection. The west coast, with its proximity to the Gulf Stream, offered the ideal conditions and in 1927, he acquired the lease of 28 acres of the Arisaig Estate. This was comprised of a woodland which included some large broadleaf trees and a stream. This generally natural setting offered the necessary protection and habitat for Rhododendrons.



Rhododendron Sinogrande

Holms moved a large number of specimens from Formakin to Larachmhor and added continually to his collection from elsewhere. He set out to obtain every available species from nurseries and private collectors throughout Britain. Plants were delivered by rail to Arisaig and sent onwards to the garden by road. Each specimen was catalogued with its species name, collector's number, provenance and price. Holms planned the garden and experimented with different methods of shelter necessary to protect young plants from the cold and wind, until they became established. The

garden took priority. Although Holms started to build a house, it was never finished. Despite the difficulties of travel, accommodation and labour, Holmes assembled one of the largest and finest collections of *Rhododendron* in an incredibly short time – less than ten years. In 1933, a prime coup was the first flowering, in April 1933 of ***Rhododendron sinogrande*** – one of its first outdoor flowerings in Scotland.

Since the 1960s, a programme of renewal and management has secured the future of this important collection which is now looked after by the Larachmhor Garden Association. These are a mixed group of professional specialists and volunteers and are closely linked to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. Other specimen trees that are growing in this garden are magnolias, crinodendrons, euchryphas and hoherias.

Ard Daraich Hill Garden



Ard Daraich on the romantic Ardnamurchan peninsular was the next garden we visited. The 8 acre garden is tucked away on the Fort William Loop road, a narrow, often single track road. With stunning views overlooking Ben Nevis and Glen Coe, Ard Daraich is a mainly hillside garden with an important collection of Rhododendrons, Acers and other rare trees and shrubs.

It was the former holiday home of Constance Spry, a famous society 'floral decorator'. Her most famous commission was to mastermind both banquet and flowers for the Coronation of Elizabeth II. David Austin named his first repeat

flowering English rose, Constance Spry after her. The garden has been owned and gardened over the last 50 years by Anna Raven and her partner, Norrie Maclaren. Anna is a passionate gardener from another eminent gardening family – her father

was the classicist and amateur botanist John Raven and one of her sisters is gardener and writer Sarah Raven

For the last 50 years a collection of ericaceous plants including over four hundred Rhododendron, species and hybrids, Acers and Sorbus trees have been developed - a collection that has been noticed by specialists including the International Dendrologist Society. This collection was established with the help of plantsmen friends from the woodland gardens at Crarae, the alpine garden at Inshriach, Aviemore and the founder of the Chollipo Arboretum in South Korea. Many of the beautiful, mature and often rare trees and shrubs at Ard Daraich were grown from seed sent as a gift from Chollipo. Specimens include *Stewartia pseudocamellia* and (*Styrax japonica*), as well as a collection of nearly 700 rhododendron and swathes of *Lilium nepalense* that 'come back religiously every year'.

Speaker for May: Jacqueline Iddon



Jacqueline is the owner of Iddon Hardy Plants in Bretherton, Lancashire.

The one and a half acre garden at Iddon Hardy Plants has a hardy plant nursery with a wide selection of perennial plants of interest to the keen gardener & flower arranger. Jacqueline will be bringing a range of plants for sale.

Plant of the Month: Himalayan May Apple: *Sinopodophyllum hexandrum*



The Himalayan May Apple is an herbaceous perennial plant in the family Berberidaceae, It includes only one known species, *Sinopodophyllum hexandrum*, which is native to Afghanistan, Bhutan, northern India, Kashmir, Nepal, Pakistan, and western China (Gansu, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Tibet, Yunnan. Its other common name is Indian May apple. *Sinopodophyllum hexandrum* is an ornamental, low growing plant with glossy green, drooping, lobed leaves on its few stiff branches. It bears a pale pink flower followed by a bright red-orange bulbous fruit. The ornamental appearance

of the plant makes it a lovely addition to woodland-type gardens. It is very tolerant of cold temperatures, as would be expected of a Himalayan plant, but it does not tolerate dry conditions.



Himalayan May apple has a long history of medicinal use in traditional Indian and Chinese systems, dating back to ancient times. It was introduced to Western medical traditions in 1787 and has been used in the Pharmacological Department of the USA since 1820. The plant's roots and rhizomes contain bioactive compounds, most of which have anti-cancer properties. The higher amounts of podophyllotoxin found in the Himalayan species, however, quickly shifted

pharmaceutical manufacturers' interest to Asia and so today, far from being the "abundant" and "plentiful" plant promoted by British colonial administrators, Himalayan May apple is an endangered species.

Plant Sale. Thursday June 5th

We hope you have all been sowing seeds and dividing and splitting plants to donate to our plant sale that takes place on Thursday June 5th at 7.30. Please can our lovely members who are donating plants arrive by 7pm and have their plants labelled. The selling of plants will begin, and definitely not before, 7.30. We are always grateful to members who make cakes for the sale, they are always delicious!

Garden visits.

Stillingfleet and Breezy Knees, Tuesday, August 5.

There will be a morning visit to Stillingfleet at 11am, where Vanessa Cook will give a 15 minute presentation. Cost £7.50. Teas and coffees are available. Members will need to pay at the May meeting.

In the afternoon, at 1.30, we have arranged a visit to Breezy Knees where you can pay on the day and lunch and teas are available at their cafe.

We would like members to arrange car sharing. At the May meeting, can members who are willing to share, make themselves known and thereafter make their own arrangements.

Garden Events

NGS Shipley gardens Sunday, June 8th 11-4pm.

Shipley Open Gardens: June 14 and 15 June

Tea and Coffee: We always welcome volunteers to help with teas and coffees!

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