

The Magnolia Society tour of Cornish gardens

On April 2, most of the fortunate forty-one members of the Magnolia Society sponsored tour of Cornish gardens gathered in the lounge of the Pedn-Olva Hotel in St. Ives for a welcoming reception hosted by the Cornwall Tourist Board. It was the start of a week that most of us will never forget. The anticipation had started earlier that day for some of us as we gathered at London's Paddington Station for the train journey west and south. Rolling through the singular English countryside, the right-of-way frequently covered in brilliantly blooming gorse, we discovered other Magnolia Society friends, and, before long, the journey took on the air of a festive occasion. And that it remained.

Cornwall is both blessed and cursed by its climate—and was alternately blessed and cursed by some of us, largely depending on the proximity and effectiveness of the nearest shelter belt. For indeed, the wind did blow! Beginning the tour at the western and southern most gardens, we worked our way northward and eastward, ending just outside Plymouth. As finally arranged, the gardens visited were (1) Trewidden—Col. and Mrs. Bolitho, Mr. Peter Horder, Head Gardener; (2) Trengwainton—Col. and Mrs. Bolitho and The National Trust, Mr. Michael Snellgrove, Head Gardener; (3) Tresco Abbey—Mr. Michael Nelham, Head Gardener; (4) Tregothnan—Viscount and Viscountess Falmouth; (5) Caerhays Castle—Mr. and Mrs. Julian Williams, Mr. Charles Williams, Mr. Peter Tregunna, Head Gardener; (6) Trewithen—Mrs. Galsworthy, Miss Elizabeth Johnstone, Mr. Michael Taylor, Head Gardener; (7)

Chyverton—Mr. and Mrs. Nigel Holman; (8) Lanhydrock House—The National Trust; (9) Hewton Trees and Shrubs, Mr. Nigel Timpson; and (10) Antony House—Mr. and Mrs. Richard Carew Pole and The National Trust.

Some general comments about the gardens are in order. First, they were all, by the standards of today, large. To carefully view the many treasures—not just magnolias—they contain would take many hours and multiple visits over an extended period of time. It was our great good fortune to see so much on our one visit. For this we must be thankful for the weather and for the wonderful planning of John Gallagher. Second, no two of these gardens are really alike even if they do showcase magnolias.

Since it was magnolias that brought us to Cornwall, it is necessary to skip over the great multitude of plants that accompany them in these gardens. The sheer number and diversity of rhododendrons, to name but one genus, was bewildering to one who lives in a climate not friendly to most species of this wonderful family. I can still see a spot at Trewidden where a large *M. campbellii* subsp. *mollicomata* was framed by huge rhododendrons covered with shining red blooms with a smaller white blooming rhododendron and a *Camellia* 'Cornish Snow' nearby.

George Johnstone, on his first acquaintance with *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta* wrote that "I do not hesitate to say that is the most beautiful of all the magnolias I have yet seen in flower." (*Shrubs for the Milder Counties*, 1948, p. 230) The Cornwall tour was in its first day

when we made the same amazing acquaintance. The tree was not the same, however, but the expressions of awe from those of us who had not seen this species in flower before were probably much the same. The *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta* at Trengwainton is an immense tree. Johnstone described it in *Shrubs for the Milder Counties* as "25 feet high and measuring 85 ft. round the ground it covers." This was no later than 1948. I can only record that it has grown in the succeeding forty years! It was possible, and we took great delight in walking within the branches that swept the ground, each covered with enormous blooms "looking" at us as we gazed. In the days that followed, this first sight of a mature, forest sized tree remained with us even as we became somewhat jaded by lesser mortals.

Certainly not to be included in the "lesser mortals" was the *M. campbellii* subsp. *mollicomata* at Trewithen. Of even greater stature, it framed a long vista from the house that included many magnificent plants. Or the beautiful *M. sprengeri* *diva* that backdropped a plant of *Rhododendron macabeum*, itself an imposing specimen. It was also at Trewithen that we had a close encounter with 'Lanarth', from which many of us have not recovered. The unique color of this magnolia would be welcome in a bloom of any size or shape. That it occurred in such a large, perfectly displayed bloom as on this plant was unforgettable.

There were many great trees at Caerhays. Many. To see a woodland so filled with marvelous plants as this is, as Ferris Miller reminded us all, for "the magnoliaphile, Mecca." The great tree magnolias thrive at Caerhays as perhaps at no other place. To enter a clearing in the embracing woods and walk among *M. campbellii* in its various forms, *M. sprengeri* *diva*, *M. sargentiana* var. *robusta*, and even the still

tightly budded *M. × veitchii* is to be transported to as near their native habitat as most of us will ever experience, uniquely wedded to the Cornish native and introduced wildflowers and shrubs that carpet the ground. One magnolia that we all looked forward to with much anticipation was *M. 'Caerhays Belle'*. Unfortunately, it had been frosted but still showed the rich color for which it is justly renowned. Easily taking its place in our attention was 'Kew's Surprise'—a true surprise when compared with 'Charles Raffill'. I thought the color much more pleasing and the flower form very much better. Granted, I don't remember seeing an unfrosted 'Charles Raffill' in any garden. No matter, 'Kew's Surprise' is wonderful. Shown only as cut flowers, *M. sprengeri* *diva* 'Burncoose,' a very dark form, should also, when available, make an exciting addition to the ranks of hardy magnolias.

Several of the visited gardens are far from the woodland style of Caerhays in their design. Notable among the more "tamed" landscapes were Trengwainton (indeed, the old enclosed wall gardens there contained some gems of the magnolia and closely related tribes), Tregothnan, and Trewithen. More formal still in their lay out were Tresco and Lanhydrock. Antony House contained some of the best of both worlds with very separate gardens, part wild and part formal—and what vistas! Or the beautiful long walk at Tregothnan that varied along its length from open vistas to enclosed intimate areas, beautifully furnished with garden ornaments, to naturalized areas planted with the ubiquitous rhododendrons and camellias. It was here that some of the most beautifully sited specimen trees seen on the tour were found. Also probably the best examples of *M. grandiflora*. Not notably happy in the cool climate of southwestern England, the specimens on the lawn

fronting the summer house were handsome in their place. Most other good examples of *M. grandiflora* were espaliered as at Antony House and Lanhydrock. I think that several of the group that hail from the southern United States no longer take *M. grandiflora* quite so for granted as before. Another plant at Lanhydrock must be mentioned. A putative hybrid of *M. cylindrica* and *M. × veitchii*, 'Albatross,' created quite a stir. No doubt not the least because it had the possibility of hardiness for most of the United States. A very large pure white magnolia, it makes a shapely tree, open grown, and appears a very good choice for widespread trial.

One garden that has not yet been mentioned is Chyverton. In many ways unique, it also seemed to encapsulate all the others. Aside from the named cultivars that have originated there—'Chyverton', 'Buzzard', 'Hawk', and 'Treve Holman'—the garden abounds with other gems. Gems like the *M. campbellii alba*, in full bloom, that topped a brick wall like a frothy icing. Or *M. nitida*, a small gem, but the first for many of us. It was a pleasure to see that the garden is being expanded, as were several of the others.

This fawning review cannot close without thanking the many owners and gardeners who received our group and made the visiting of the gardens such a pleasure. Their hospitality was most appreciated. It would also be remiss not to thank Mr. and Mrs. Evans and their most helpful staff of the Pedn-Olva Hotel for their many courtesies. And John Gallagher, who hereby joins a great pantheon of tour organizers: John, we cannot thank you enough. With a success like this, there must be another! *Gaudeamus igitur*.

Members attending: from England; John Gallagher, Maurice and Rosemary Foster, David Clulow, Tom Ridley, Mrs. Jeanne Holgate, and Lady Anne Palmer, from West

Germany; Richard Reuter, from Eire; Mrs. Patricia Cockburn, from Korea; Chong Mun Yong and C. Ferris Miller.

From Switzerland; Karl and Birgitta Flinck, from Italy; S. Lupo Osti, from Belgium; the Vicomte Philippe de Spoelberch, and from the United States; Lola Koerting, Bob and Donna Adams, Harry and Irene Elkins, Dick and Anita Figlar, Frank and Millie Galyon, Harry and Donna Heineman, Joe and Ruth Hickman, Ray and Lorrie Tessmer, Phelan Bright, Mrs. Howard Bright, Roy Krug, Jesse Quintana, Larry Langford, Jayme Irving, John Allen and Margaret Smith, Paul Meyer, and Ray and Sandie Sutton.

Overleaf from center top: D. Todd Gresham Award plaque; Miss Elizabeth Johnstone and Dick Figlar; S. Lupo Asti with the Carew Pole family and gardener for the National Trust, Antony House; Phelan Bright with Mr. and Mrs. Nigel Holman; John Gallagher and head gardener of Lanhydrock; Lord Falmouth with the Repton 'Red Book' for Tregothnan; Julian Williams and Dick Figlar; and Col. and Mrs. Bolitho and Karl Flinck. Center: Dick Figlar with Neil Treseder.

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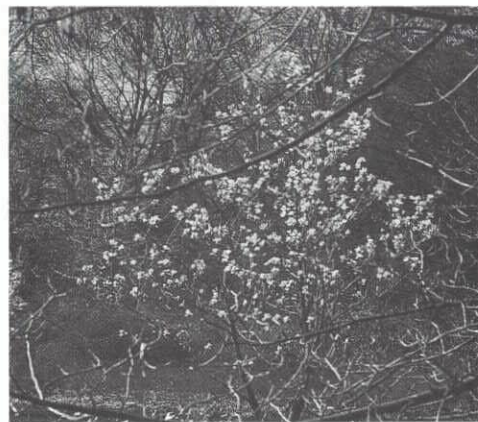
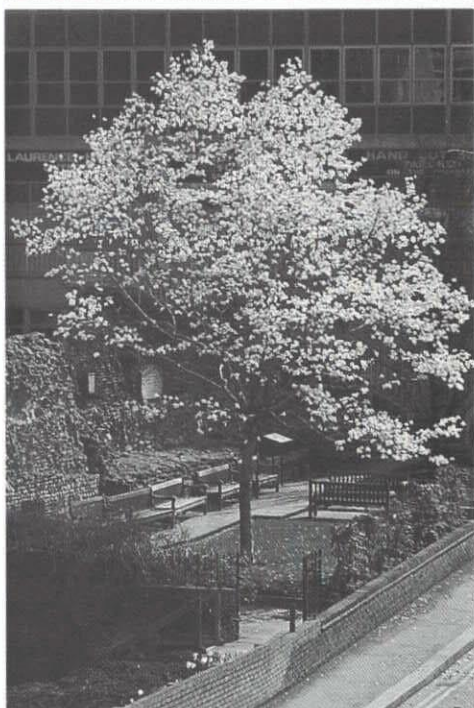
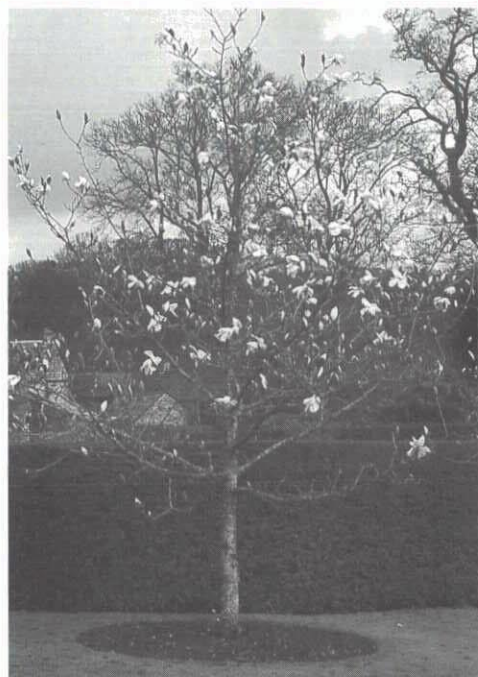
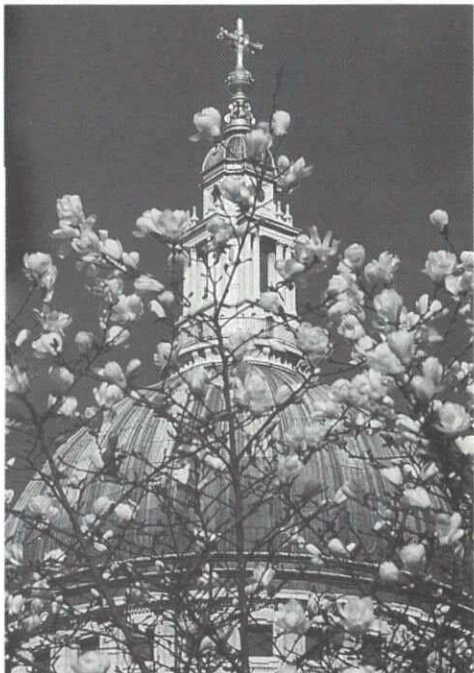
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Left top to bottom: *Magnolia campbellii* subsp. *mollicomata* at Trewithen; *M.* × *'Albatross'*; *M.* × *'Charles Raffill'*; right: *M. stellata* and *M. kobus borealis*.