



International Oaks

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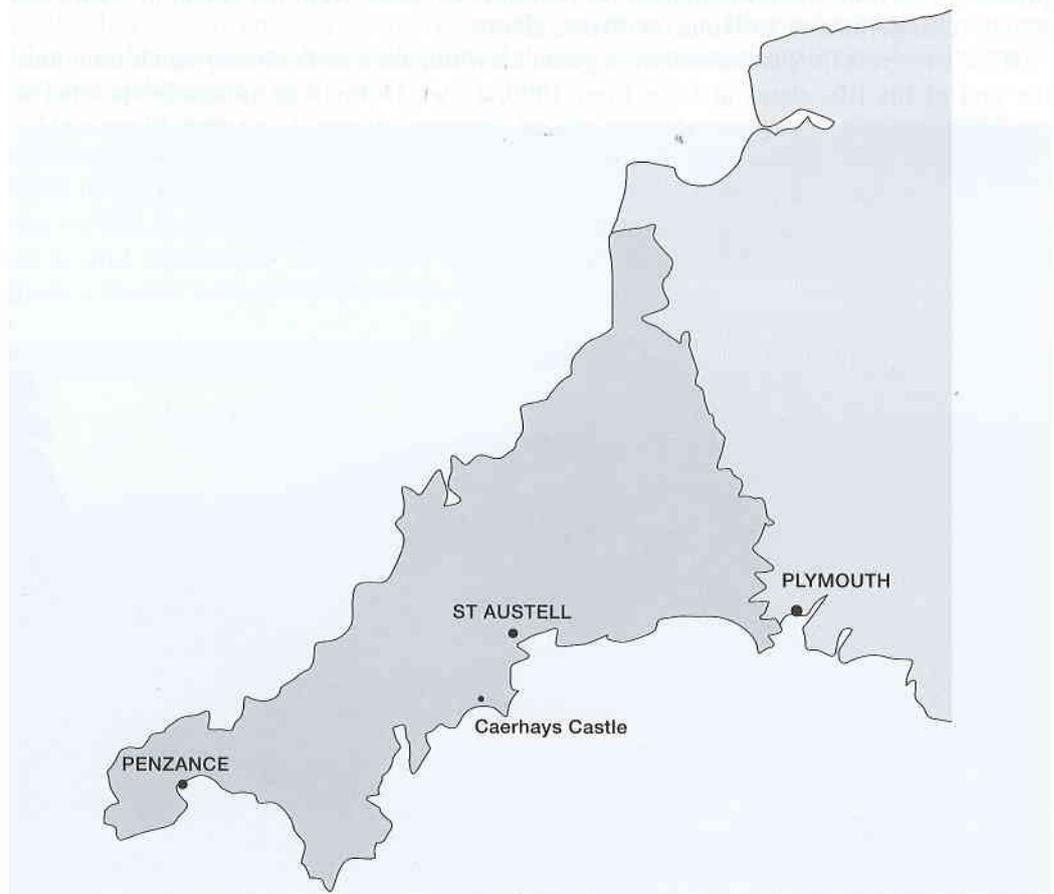
The History of the Fagaceae at Caerhays Castle

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Introduction

In September 2015, I was contacted by Charles Williams, who had prepared a review of the history of the oaks at Caerhays and thought, justly so, that it would be an interesting subject for this Journal. As I looked through the historical references I thought that indeed it would be exciting to visit Caerhays, and we agreed on the first week of June 2016.

The gardens at Caerhays Castle in Cornwall (UK) are first and foremost recognized for the Magnoliaceae¹, *Rhododendron*, and *Camellia* collections, from both a horticultural and historical point of view. Breathtakingly towering over Porthluney Cove on one side and dominated by the gardens that spread out over 50 hectares on hilly woods on the other, the Caerhays Estate is currently owned by Charles Henry Williams. His great-grandfather, John Charles Williams (or JCW as he was called), who inherited the Caerhays Estate in 1880, is at the origin of the gardens at Caerhays. According to Williams et al. (2011) the purchase by JCW in 1885 of Werrington Park, with its large greenhouse used for orchid propagation, is perhaps what sparked his interest in gardens and in plants, as well as in the business that could be developed with them. His first successful endeavor was with daffodils, of which he produced hundreds of new varieties, becoming a major producer at a time when the market for daffodils exported from the island of Scilly had grown from 68 tons to 197 tons (Williams 1998).

JCW's interest in *Rhododendron*, a genus to which he was to devote much time until the end of his life, dates at least from 1899, as we learn from an article devoted to



Photo 1/ A view from the garden overlooking Porthluney Cove.

1. *Magnolia*, and the genera formerly known as *Michelia* and *Manglietia*, now synonymous with the former.

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Table 1/ Original Wi

Caerhays written by a mysterious “V”, that appeared in the November 18, 1899 issue of *The Garden* (in Williams 2016): “The happy owner has a fine notion of wild gardening with such things as Azaleas, Hydrangeas and he would like to plant Rhododendrons on a large scale if seedling plants could be got in sufficient quantities.” In 1903, “the happy owner” had bought his first 25 Chinese rhododendrons from Veitch Nursery (Exeter) and by 1906, the records of the Caerhays garden show that 50 new species of rhododendrons were being planted (and many of these plants are alive and well at Caerhays today).

Where were these plants coming from? And how did they end up in this Cornish garden? In the answers to those questions lies the root of the extraordinary adventure and historical importance of this garden: JCW was a major sponsor of the botanical expeditions of one of the most important plant hunters of all time, E.H. Wilson. Though this name is most often associated with the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, Mr. Wilson began his plant hunting working for Veitch Nursery (with whom JCW collaborated closely) and even when Wilson eventually left for the United States and his new employer, the ties between Wilson and Caerhays were never severed. It is likely that all of the new plants discovered by Wilson were trialed by J.C. Williams at Caerhays. At the end of the description of *Rhododendron williamsianum*, Wilson writes in *Plantae Wilsonianae*, “This species is named for Mr. J.C. Williams of Caerhays Castle, Cornwall, England. The first amateur to appreciate the value of the Rhododendrons of western China; in his garden the best collection of these new introductions is now to be found.” (Wilson and Sargent 1913, 538).

One would think that it was luck enough for one person interested in gardening to have had the occasion to collaborate with E.H. Wilson, but JCW was apparently not a man to leave things to luck, and when George Forrest – another of the great plant hunters of the first half of the 20th century – left for China in 1912 for what was to be one of his most successful expeditions, he had one sponsor: John Charles Williams, who continued to finance Forrest’s expeditions until the end of his career.

ORIGINAL COLLECTION NUMBER	CURRENT NAME
4506	<i>Acer caesium</i> subsp. <i>giraldii</i> (Pax) A. E. Murray
498	<i>Aesculus chinensis</i> var. <i>wilsonii</i> (Rehder) Turland & N. H. Xia
304	<i>Catalpa duclouxii</i> Dode
4116	<i>Magnolia dawsoniana</i> Rehder & E. H. Wilson
914	<i>Magnolia sargentiana</i> Rehder & E. H. Wilson
204	<i>Prunus pilosiuscula</i> (C. K. Schneid.) Koehne
4257	<i>Rhododendron decorum</i> Franch.
1250	<i>Rhododendron oreodoxa</i> var. <i>fargesii</i> (Franch.) D. F. Chamb.
4255	<i>Rhododendron hanceanum</i> Hemsl.
10955	<i>Rhododendron morii</i> Hayata
1810	<i>Rhododendron orbiculare</i> Decne.
291	<i>Styrax hemsleyanus</i> Diels
313	<i>Trochodendron aralioides</i> Siebold & Zucc.

Table 1/ Original Wilson introductions surviving at Caerhays today (adapted from Williams et al. 2011).



2a



2b



2c



2d

Photos 2/ From Forrest's collections: (a) *Rhododendron stamineum* and (b) *Magnolia doltsopa*; From Wilson's collections: (c) *R. davidsonianum* and (d) *R. oreodoxa* var. *fargesii*.

ORIGINAL COLL
25184
25156
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24190
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26509
24214
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24183

Table 2/ Original For
J.C. William

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ORIGINAL COLLECTION NUMBER	CURRENT NAME
25184	<i>Acer pectinatum</i> subsp. <i>taronense</i> (Hub.-Mor.) A. E. Murray
25156	<i>Camellia saluenensis</i> Stapf ex Bean
27393	<i>Camellia reticulatum</i> Lindl.
24190	<i>Cinnamomum glanduliferum</i> (Wall.) Meisn.
25197	<i>Camellia sinensis</i> (L.) Kuntze
24030	<i>Lindera communis</i> Hemsl.
26509	<i>Magnolia nitida</i> W. W. Sm.
24214	<i>Magnolia campbellii</i> Hook. f. & Thompson
26506	<i>Magnolia insignis</i> Wall.
26580	<i>Magnolia doltsopa</i> (Buch.-Ham. ex DC.) Figlar
24183	<i>Quercus lamellosa</i> Sm.

Table 2/ Original Forrest introductions surviving at Caerhays today (adapted from Williams et al. 2011).

J.C. Williams' interest in Fagaceae

In the Caerhays Castle library can be found a copy of Vol. 23, No. 151 of the *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society*, which contains the second part of "An Enumeration of all the Plants known from China Proper, Formosa, Hainan, Corea, the Luchu Archipelago, and the Island of Hongkong, together with their Distribution and Synonymy" (Forbes and Hemsley 1886). It includes the Quercineae of the Cupuliferae, and the text is annotated by J.C. Williams, showing that these plants were lighting a new fire of interest for him.

The situation with oak planting at the beginning of the 20th century in the UK is fairly well summed up by Bean (1915, 299): "Perhaps no genus of trees is so extensively represented at Tortworth² as *Quercus*. Unhappily it has long ceased to be the fashion to plant exotic oaks and owing to this neglect nurserymen do not find it worth while to stock representative collections such as one might have found in older days....Mr. Vicary Gibbs has got together an extensive collection at Aldenham, but many are yet comparatively small. And at Kew there is a collection (of trees) unequalled as far as I know...but the Kew soil is too light and dry for oaks as a whole." Four years later, in 1919, Mr. Gibbs published an article in the *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* about the oaks of Aldenham, that begins: "Just seventeen years ago, namely in 1902, I was in Dresden. Having heard of a fine tree nursery some thirty miles to the east...made an expedition...to visit it. I found there, among other interesting trees, a great many out-of-the-way oaks, and...secured a number of them...Although arboriculture is in much greater vogue than it was when I first started to collect...yet oak-growing is necessarily such a slow business that any comprehensive gathering of the order Cupuliferae is still, and is likely long to remain a rarity." (Gibbs 1919, 155).

According to Charles Williams, Mr. Gibbs' article may have been what prompted his great-grandfather's interest in oaks. This seems quite plausible given the reputation of the gardens at Aldenham House, particularly renowned up until the mid-20th century. "There are few gardens which command attention from every point of view: gardens which contain numerous exquisite pictures in the natural style, yet in parts are formal; gardens in which trees and shrubs are used lavishly to produce fine landscape effects, and yet are treated as individuals of botanical interest, forming collections which embrace the

2. The arboretum at Tortworth Court, was created by the 3rd Earl of Ducie. Today the property is a hotel (the De Vere Tortworth Court) that boasts one of Britain's finest arboretums with 300 rare and protected trees.



ia doltsopa;



3a



3b

Photos 3/ (a) *Rhododendron keysii*; (b) *Magnolia wilsonii*.

retained his interest in between magnolias and rhododendrons. From October 11, 1920: "The villages and towns of Cornwall all lack water in many places as never before, but things like evergreen oaks, magnolias and the smaller rhodo's [sic] in well dug and well mulched beds look very well indeed." By 1921 Caerhays was home to at least 26 evergreen oaks and 28 deciduous oaks (Williams 2016) and a Garden Diary entry from that same year tells us that planting was underway: "We have just finished the big rookery clearing except for the planting of five evergreen oaks."

To the modern oak lover, "evergreen oak" evokes images of *Cyclobalanopsis*, along with some of the Mediterranean and, of course, the more tropical species. In JCW's time, the distinctions between *Lithocarpus*, *Castanopsis*, and *Quercus* had not been clearly defined, and many, many species that today are part of the genus *Lithocarpus* were at that time classified as *Quercus*. Most, though not all, of the evergreen oaks referred to as such by JCW were, as far as can be surmised from existing records, *Lithocarpus*.

3. Started in 1897 by J.C. Williams this Garden Diary has been kept alive with no interruption by four generations of the Williams family: J. C. Williams, Charles Williams, F.J. Williams, and Charles H. Williams, with an entry for nearly every day. Charles H. Williams, who continues to make entries nearly every day, has had all of the entries since 1897 transcribed (an enormous task) and they are available on the Caerhays website (<http://thediary.caerhays.co.uk>).

newest and rarest species; gardens which have the area of great public parks and yet have the distinction and refinement of the best private places; such a garden exists, however, a few miles from London. In the whole history of garden art, long and remarkable as it is, there has been no achievement more admirable, more satisfying, than that which has been accomplished at Aldenham House, in Hertfordshire." (Gothein 1928, 372). The estate was sold in 1932, after the death of Vicary Gibbs, and most of the plant collection, reputedly larger than the one at Kew, auctioned (Le Lievre 1986).

After spending much time reading through Caerhays' records, Charles Williams has come to the conclusion that "...while many rhododendrons came to Caerhays from Forrest's 1921/2 expedition, very few did so from his 1924/5 expedition. JCW's interest and emphasis in the garden had moved on." (Williams 2016). In the Caerhays Garden Diary³, started in 1897 by JCW, there are entries as

early as 1920 indicating that oaks

Two entries by J. one dating from 19 Warburg and Warbu Isles, indicate that "situation had appare the "network" of oa Mr. Bean (Kew, Tor Headley... and Caer (Warburg and Warbu North America and what was called at been able to ascerta

NAME GIVEN
dentata
acuta
phyllireoides [sic]
engelmanni [sic]
densiflora
marilandica
agrifolia
glabra

Table 3/ From the Garden that arrived at Caerhays *edulis*.

FORREST'S COLLEC
21200
21115
24122
24189
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26010
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27431

Table 4/ From the Garden epithets are indicated ex

Two entries by J.C. Williams, on loose sheets of paper tucked into the Garden Diary, one dating from 1922 and one from 1927/1928, list the oaks planted in those years. Warburg and Warburg (1933, 176), in an article on the oaks in cultivation in the British Isles, indicate that "...many rare species from Eastern Asia are growing at Caerhays." The situation had apparently changed significantly since Bean's 1915 article, because by 1933 the "network" of oak enthusiasts in the UK included, in addition to those referred to by Mr. Bean (Kew, Tortworth, and Aldenham), Wakehurst, Woburn, Borde Hill, Westonbirt, Headley... and Caerhays, where both *Q. championii* and *Q. augustini* are listed as growing (Warburg and Warburg 1933). In addition, most of the oaks cited by Bean (1915) are from North America and Europe, with the only two Asian representatives being *Q. glauca* and what was called at the time, *Q. vibrayeana*, (today, *Q. myrsinifolia*). From what I have been able to ascertain, today *Q. championii* is not in cultivation anywhere.

NAME GIVEN	CURRENTLY VALID NAME	ORIGINS
dentata	Unchanged (author: Thunb.)	Edinburgh RBG
acuta	Unchanged (author: Thunb.)	Kew RBG, Dickinson's (Chester)
phyllyreoides [sic]	<i>Q. phillyreoides</i> A. Gray	Wakehurst Place
engelmanni [sic]	<i>Q. engelmannii</i> Greene	
densiflora	<i>Notholithocarpus densiflorus</i> (Hook. & Arn.) Manos, Cannon & S. H. Oh	
marilandica	Unchanged (author: (L.) Münchh.)	
agrifolia	Unchanged (author: Née)	
glabra	<i>Lithocarpus glaber</i> (Thunb.) Nakai ¹	Veitch Nursery, Wakehurst Place, Kew RBG

Table 3/ From the Garden Diary, a list of the oaks planted at Caerhays in 1922. The origin of some of the oaks that arrived at Caerhays before 1922 has been established by Williams (2016). 1. Very probably *Lithocarpus edulis*.

FORREST'S COLLECTION NUMBER	NAME GIVEN	CURRENTLY VALID NAME
21200	fenestrata	<i>Lithocarpus fenestratus</i> (Roxb.) Rehder
21115	delavayi	Unchanged (author: Franch.)
24122	concolor	<i>Castanopsis orthacantha</i> Franch.
24189	lamellosa	Unchanged (author: Sm.)
24758	caudata	<i>Castanopsis eyrei</i> (Champ. ex Benth.) Hutch
25330	tribuloides	<i>Castanopsis tribuloides</i> (Sm.) A. DC.
26102	henryi	<i>Lithocarpus henryi</i> Seemen
26010	lamellosa	Unchanged (author: Sm.)
26563	tribuloides	<i>Castanopsis tribuloides</i> (Sm.) A. DC.
26612	hystrix	<i>Lithocarpus hystrix</i> (Korth.) Rehder
26600	hystrix	<i>Lithocarpus hystrix</i> (Korth.) Rehder
27431	augustini	Unchanged (author: Skan)

Table 4/ From the Garden Diary, a list of the oaks planted at Caerhays between 1927 and 1928. Only specific epithets are indicated except for the entry "caudata", that is followed by the word *Castanopsis*.



Photos 4/ *Craibiodendron yunnanensis*

The Fagaceae at

With some notable
of Fagaceae that arrived
before 1939 from oaks
and lithocarps have
and lithocarps have
search for the Fagaceae
that include, in addition
Meliosma beaniana and
Craibiodendron yunnanensis

a) *Mature specimens*

Entering the garden
across secondary paths
Lithocarpus pachyphyllus
sure attracts even the
and lovely leaves. No



Photos 5/ The “stone fruit”

healthy and vigorous
Nothofagus fusca and
phillyreoides growing
search of light. This
(Arboretum des Poul
off from this group of
an extraordinary mu
girth of 1.77 m) plan

4. There are many paths on
ers that are not named). Also
along with the garden map,

The Fagaceae at Caerhays today

With some notable exceptions, nearly none of the original Wilson or Forrest collections of Fagaceae that arrived at Caerhays are still alive today, and many of the plantings from before 1939 from other sources have also disappeared. Nevertheless, planting of oaks and lithocarps have continued into the 21st century. Admittedly, in this garden one has to search for the Fagaceae and not be distracted by all of its other marvellous inhabitants that include, in addition to the magnolias and rhododendrons, *Meliosma alba* (labeled as *Meliosma beaniana*), *Stewartia pteropetiolata* (one of Forrest's original collections), and *Craibiodendron yunnanensis* along with a great many *Enkianthus*.

a) Mature specimens

Entering the garden by the "Red Route"⁴ (that we followed for a bit, eventually cutting across secondary paths to join up with the "Blue Route"), we are greeted by a magnificent *Lithocarpus pachyphyllus* (a UK Champion Tree, planted in the early 1920s) that I'm sure attracts even rhododendron and magnolia lovers with its incredible "stone fruit" and lovely leaves. Not far, there is a group of four (though there used to be six) very



Photos 5/ The "stone fruit" of *Lithocarpus pachyphyllus*.

healthy and vigorous *Q. myrsinifolia*. A 36-year old, not-very-often-seen-in-collections *Nothofagus fusca* attracts my attention, as does a very beautiful *Q. dentata*. A *Q. phillyreoides* growing in the midst of a few *Q. acuta* snakes its way up to the sky in search of light. This is not a tree that grows very vigorously in my arboretum in France (Arboretum des Pouyouleix) so it was a pleasure to see one with such a gust for life! Set off from this group of trees though not very far, is one of the *Quercus* stars of the show: an extraordinary multi-stemmed *Q. acuta*, also a UK Champion Tree (14 m tall with a girth of 1.77 m) planted in the 1920s.

4. There are many paths one can take to visit this garden (the Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow Routes, plus numerous others that are not named). Along the "colored" routes, many plants are labeled and information about them can be found, along with the garden map, in the Caerhays Castle Garden Guide that can be bought in the shop at the garden entrance.



Photos 6a-b/ *Quercus acuta*

Within this group of trees, there is one that is not labeled that I think is *Q. aliena*. In the records that exist, *Q. aliena* var. *acuteserrata* is listed as having arrived at Caerhays, but the tree that I saw seems more like the type, based on the size of the leaves and the absence of greyish pubescence on their undersides. The brown spots on the leaves are apparently the result of salt spray – the price to pay for having such a spectacular view!



Photos 7/ *Quercus aliena*

At least three plants of *Q. glabra* are recorded as having been planted at Caerhays, one of which survives today as a vigorous side shoot. Today this plant is considered a member of the genus *Lithocarpus*, but the question is: *L. glaber* or *L. edulis*? My opinion, shared by others, is that it is *L. edulis*. The fact that *L. edulis* is not recorded as having been planted at Caerhays is not conclusive proof for we do not know if what was received as *Q. glabra* was correctly identified to begin with (see Bean 1973).

Lithocarpus is not a genus that one generally finds well-represented in collections in Europe but here at Caerhays there are many splendid specimens that I have never seen in cultivation. These include, in addition to the above-mentioned *L. pachyphyllus*: *L. uvariifolius*, with its hand-sized, wrinkly textured leaves,



Photos 8/ *Lithocarpus*



Photos 9/ (a) *Lithocarpus*

Champion Tree. I see its leaves although already apparent in...
Three unlabeled...
opinion is that the



Photos 8/ *Lithocarpus edulis*

L. cleistocarpus, with its dainty, red, new growth, and *L. henryi* and *L. hancei* both planted in the 1920s. A more recently planted tree, labeled *L. corneus*, with long, slender leaves and bronze red new growth looks more like *Q. sessilifolia*.

A fine (and absolutely impossible to misidentify) *Q. lamellosa*, that pays tribute to Forrest's 1924 expedition to Burma and Yunnan (No. 24183), was waiting for us not far away. Though it suffers during even mild frosts and has often to be cut back, it is yet another UK



Photos 9/ (a) *Lithocarpus uvariifolius*; (b) *L. cleistocarpus*; (c) *L. corneus* or *Q. sessilifolia*?

Champion Tree. I was surprised to see that the tree had already dropped nearly all of its leaves although we were only at the very beginning of summer, but new growth was already apparent in many spots.

Three unlabeled trees, obviously Fagaceae, give us reason to stop and ponder. My opinion is that the first one (see Photo 11) is *L. variolosus*, also obviously suffering



Photo 10/ *Quercus lamellosa*



Photo 11/ *Lithocarpus variolosus*



Photos 12a-b/ *Quercus augustini*

from salt spray; the second perhaps *Q. augustini* (see Photos 12 a-b); the third remains a mystery (see Photos 13 a-c): *Cyclobalanopsis* or *Lithocarpus*?

The morning was coming to an end as we passed by a very elegant *Q. ×libanerris*, and a medium-sized, as always very pretty, *Q. semecarpifolia* on our way to see a much sought-after rarity for oak lovers, *Q. oxyodon*. This one, planted before 1920, is alive and well, and still another Champion Tree for this garden – though today not the only mature specimen in the UK (the one planted at Nymans fruited abundantly in 2013 and the seed seems to breed true). A younger *Q. oxyodon*, planted in the 90s from seed collected by Tom Hudson in Vietnam, is also doing well. Although certainly one can find morphological differences between the two, both are well within the variability of the species. We know today, from various studies, including the recent sequencing of the entire genome of *Q. robur*, that, generally, genetic variation between two individuals of the same species of tree is significantly higher than between two individuals of the human species. Therein lies the



13a

Photos 13a-c/ *Cyclobalanopsis*

importance of seed and intraspecific variation doesn't look like



Photo 14/ *Quercus oxyodon*

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Photos 12 a-b);
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Photos 13a-c/ *Cyclobalanopsis* or *Lithocarpus*?

importance of seeing plants in their natural environment in order to grasp the scale of intraspecific variation...and to think twice the next time we feel like saying, "Oh no, that doesn't look like my *Quercus* (fill in the blank)."



Photo 14/ *Quercus oxyodon*



Photo 15/ *Quercus griffithii*

1999, and had been pretty much left to their own devices since then. So on my second day at Caerhays Michael Levett took me to go and look for them. Michael is responsible for labeling and recording details of new plantings, as well as for propagation. Of the four species that were planted – *Q. acutifolia* (the plant grown under this name is

b) Younger trees

During the afternoon I went off on my own to check out an area that we had only passed along during the morning and where there were young, recently planted oaks. A specimen labeled *Lithocarpus* sp. 5956 is, I believe, *Q. griffithii*. *Quercus stenophylloides* (CMBS 640; planted in 2008) and *Q. morii* (CMBS 642; 2009), two Taiwan endemics, looking very healthy, can be found here as well as *Q. gilva* (CMBS 691; planted 2009), all three gifts from Allen Coombes. There were also several young Red Oaks, seemingly having a bit of a hard time, including *Q. velutina*, *Q. buckleyi*, and *Q. wislizeni*.

In Giddle Orchard, a part of the Arboretum that is not open to the public and that is near the ruins of a walled kitchen garden, a handful of Mexican oaks were planted in



Photo 16/ *Quercus grahamii*



Photo 17/ *Quercus candicans*, now known as *Q. candicans*, *Q. litoralis*, *Q. uxoris* – only the first is present, although the second is not in the very young trees generally. Some have been knocked over and from the north dozens of trunks have been produced. The new growth of this species, in the presence to me of the leaves and branches. When the disappearance of this species, a stroll further down from the top revealed a *Q. var.* to have its head in the ground nevertheless.

Behind Caerhays the bay, there is a Penvergate, also public, which Michael see after Giddle for a few oaks that planted there in 1999 indeed we were looking for a place, all of those

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 as well as Q.
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 Allen Coombes.
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 Q. velutina, Q.
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Photo 17/ *Quercus candicans*

now known as *Q. grahamii*), *Q. candicans*, *Q. lancifolia*, and *Q. uxoris* – only the first two are still present, although the *Q. candicans* is not in the vertical position that trees generally assume. It must have been knocked down by wind, and from the now horizontal trunk dozens of traumatic reiterations have been produced. The bright red new growth of the leaves, typical for this species, is what signaled its presence to me through the brush and branches. While we deplored the disappearance of the other Mexican species, a stroll further behind and lower down from the *Q. candicans* revealed a *Q. variabilis* struggling to have its head in the sun but alive nevertheless.

Behind Caerhays Castle, towards the bay, there is another area called Penvergate, also not open to the public, which Michael took me to see after Giddle Orchard, to hunt for a few oaks that were presumably planted there in the year 2000. If indeed we were looking in the right place, all of those seem to have gone



Photo 18/ *Quercus affinis?*

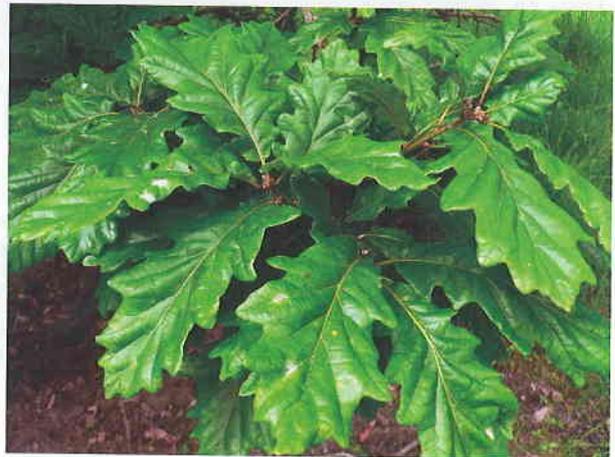


Photo 19/ *Quercus macranthera*

missing except for one brave little plant who has obviously been mowed over or chomped on more than once. It seems to me that this is a Mexican oak – maybe *Q. affinis*? In this same area there are several other mature oaks including *Q. ×hispanica* and what I think is *Q. macranthera* though it is labeled *Q. canariensis*.

Conclusion

The gardens at Caerhays, like any garden with such a long history, have been through many ups and downs. Amongst the latter, exceptionally cold winters, historic drought, devastating storms, and two world wars. Included in the former would be the uninterrupted line of enthusiastic owners who have inherited the estate and a passion for plants. Charles Williams believes that to be a great garden Caerhays must continue to provide an esthetic dimension that caters to the general public while continuing to preserve and propagate rare and unusual plants.

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Photographers. Photos 1-19: Béatrice Chassé.

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