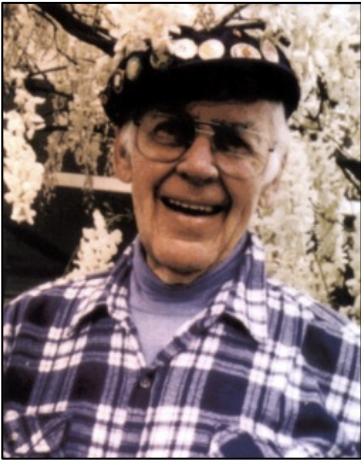




The Man Behind the Wirlinga Camellias

Thomas James Savige, 11 November 1913 - 19 December 1999

Compiled by Barry Di Salvia (Hume Camellia Society)

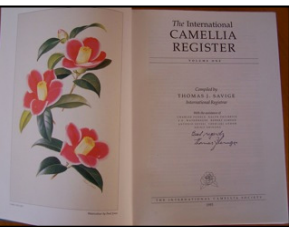


Tom is probably best known, world-wide, for "The International Camellia Register"—a list and description of some 32,000 cultivars and 267 species of the genus *camellia*, published in 1993, with a supplement in 1997. Neville Haydon (NZ) has been working hard to ensure the release of the second supplement in 2010.

Tom's clear and logical thinking made him ideal for assisting Professor E. G. Waterhouse with his work in clarifying the naming of camellias, many of which were known by different names in different countries. Tom is also well known for his small, cluster-flowering "Wirlinga" hybrids.

With the death of the professor in 1977, Tom continued with the many years of arduous work necessary to produce the 3 volumes. This was done in his spare time until 1982, when he retired as manager of Battenfeld Engineering, Albury, where he supervised the making of injection moulding machinery. His work was done before, and in the early days of computers, each cultivar with its own hand-written file card. This information was later put

onto dozens of floppy disks—I think it was using an early "Dick Smith" computer. We await the promised CD version which will be much easier (for many of us) to use and make information easier to find. An up-to-date "online" version is now



available through <www.camellia-international.org>.

Tom was well known in international circles. He belonged to every known national camellia society on the planet, was on the founding committee of the International Camellia Society in 1961 and, as well as many other conferences, in 1985 he attended the international conference in Holland on Classification of the genus *camellia*. Tom contributed numerous articles to horticultural and camellia publications world wide.

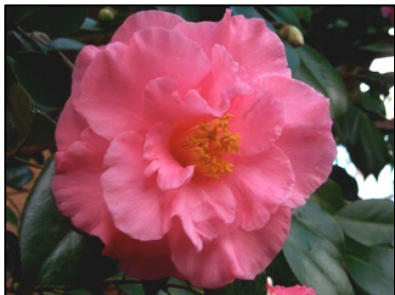
Tom was also very active in the Australian Camellia Research Society. 1966-1969 he was president, later to be made a President Emeritus, a Fellow and a Patron. He had also been National Secretary and the editor of "Camellia News". He was awarded the E. G. Waterhouse Medal by the A.C.R.S. in 1970, previous recipients being E. G. Waterhouse, Walter Hazlewood and Fred Tuckfield. The citation read *"The Council of the ACRS has awarded the EG Waterhouse Medal for 1970 to Tom Savige who has just relinquished the office of President of the Society—an office that he filled with great distinction, whilst at the same time doing Editor's job as well. Tom has a genuine love of camellias. The time that he has given to Society affairs, his knowledge and ability to impart it to others for the good of camellias and the Society, certainly puts him in line for the award which is made for notable contribution to the development of camellias in Australia."* It is relevant to note that the Hazlewood Award was not instituted until 1974, separating the different types of service to the camellia world.



Tom was a founding member of the Hume Branch A.C.R.S. in 1976 and was also an active member of The Albury Horticultural Society and Friends of the Albury Botanic Gardens. The Albury Botanic Gardens have planted a collection of camellia cultivars which originated in that region—most of them from Tom. It's no wonder that Olive has referred to him as "a professional amateur".

Tom had opened Camellia Shows in Narrandera in 1975 and 1977, but that was before we had more than a casual interest in camellias. It was in 1981, when we finally took a couple of our 'Fashionata' blooms to the Narrandera Show and won the Championship, that we became "hooked".

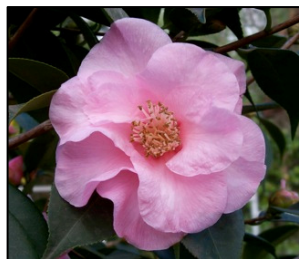




Although the Narrandera Garden Club had joined Hume Branch A.C.R.S. in 1982 we did not meet Tom until 1986 when we attended a Hume meeting in Wagga Wagga. We had

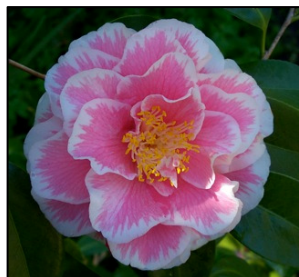
been warned about how threatening Tom was, but when we met him we found him to be quite the opposite.

A few months later the Hume meeting was at Tom's and Olive's at Wirlinga (between Albury and the Hume Weir) and Tom produced the rootstock, scions, rubber bands, etc. and showed us how to graft. Denise grafted 'Harem' (which turned out to be 'Turkish Delight' when it bloomed) and I grafted a 'Wirlinga Cascade'. If we had stopped then, we would have had a 100% success rate. Denise still has, but mine has dropped markedly! Later Tom gave us a graft of 'Night Rider', soon after its arrival in Australia. It is still growing well! He demonstrated grafting at the Wagga Wagga Camellia Show one year and that's where we obtained our first plant of 'Hakuhan-kujaku' (which also did well for many years—but that's another story). Tom was always only too willing to share his seeds, seedlings and encouragement with other growers and potential growers.



I'm told that if Tom had favourites among all his camellia plants they would have been 'Nicky Crisp' and 'Valentine Day', though the miniature cluster-flowered varieties were certainly held in very high regard in later days.

His many talks about the meanings and origins of cultivar names will be remembered by our members for years to come. The story of the "Brilliant Genji", the "Shining Prince", the Genji Hikaru (the bloom



being 'Hikarugenji') is told in *Camellia News*, March 1988. Others will remember Tom for his involvement in the breeding of new cultivars and for the splendid support Tom & Olive gave to local camellia shows.

Although born at Bonalbo in the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales, Tom grew up on a cattle farm at Thorpdale in Victoria. He studied engineering at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, becoming an aircraft draughtsman. For two years he worked at Yeovil (England) for the Westlands Aircraft Company, returning to



Melbourne to work at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation as chief draughtsman during World War II. Tom's interest in horticulture, especially camellias, was aroused in 1946 while on an aircraft-buying visit to

San Diego, U.S.A. for Trans Australia Airlines. Returning to Canterbury in Melbourne, Tom (with Olive) began planting and raising camellias, becoming a member of the Australian and New Zealand Camellia Research Society in 1957, the New Zealand Society later honouring him with life membership. During this time Tom & Olive had three daughters—Hilary, Andrea & Bronwen.

In 1970 Tom & Olive moved to Wirlinga, N.S.W. where their very large block of land was soon packed with hundreds of camellias of many species, his



glasshouse containing perhaps thousands of seedlings and grafts with which he was working—a camellia lover's delight for many months of the year! After 30 years at Wirlinga, in late 1999 (Tom then aged 86) the garden was reduced to a more manageable size by a move to a small "suburban" block at Thurgoona, just a little closer to Albury, but still with a delightful country outlook over the golf course. Tom passed



away shortly afterwards. I think Olive now has more camellia prints inside the house than camellia plants outside. For many years





the N.S.W. Camellia Research Society has annually presented the T. J. Savage Award for Service to their Society, and in 1994 the Hume Branch A.C.R.S.

commissioned the painting of 'Wirlinga Bride' for the "Tom & Olive Savage Perpetual Trophy for the best cut of cluster-flowered miniature hybrid or species at the Albury Camellia Show." We won it in 1999 as there was no Albury Show that year, so it was competed for at Narrandera.

Back to June 1994, Tom was awarded the honorary degree of Master of Science in Agriculture by Sydney University, for "his work in bringing order into camellia nomenclature and for the compilation of the International Register", a copy of which was presented to the University's Fisher Library. The NSW Camellia Research Society hosted a welcome at Eryldene. Tom had already received, in 1987, an "Order of Australia" medal for his services to horticulture.



"Wirlinga" is an aboriginal word meaning "meeting of the trees". Apart from the camellias, Wirlinga is also known for its army base. Tom's first registration was the first of the small cluster flowering varieties, which he named 'Wirlinga Belle', 1973 - rosiflora x williamsii. Registration No. 156. Soft pink single, 4.6 cm diameter, blooms early to mid season, spreading to open growth and blooms fall easily. Mid green leaves 7 x 3.2 cm.



Next was 'Wirlinga Princess', 1977 - 'Tiny Princess' x rosiflora. Reg. 204. Single to semi-double flowers in mid season,



4.5 cm diameter, 9 crinkled petals with pale pink edges, fading to white in the centre, with a deeper pink on the reverse. White filaments with some petaloids. Pale to mid green leaves 5



x 2.5 cm on an open, spreading bush. Steve Clark of Camellia Grove loved it, and it was in their catalogue until recently. Olive planted a 'Wirlinga Princess' in the now extinct Narrandera Camellia Garden. Bob Cherry's plant is quite spectacular!

'Star of David', 1980 - a chance japonica seedling. Reg. 256. An 11 cm red, semi-double bloom with 12 petals which sometimes form a shape of one triangle over another as in the Star of David. Mid green leaves 11 x 5.5 cm on a plant of upright, spreading growth. Apparently Jenny Hayter saw one with the obvious two triangles and commented "It looks just like a Star of David" and the name was given!



Olive described Len Bray as a "Sydney Jolly". He'd had military training and "did not suffer fools lightly". Peter & Margaret Levick were only young at that time "and he seemed rather formidable. He was National Secretary from 1965-72, and received the first Walter Hazlewood Award posthumously in 1974. With a dynamic personality and sporting a handsome handlebar moustache, he was an impressive and stylish gentleman. He made camellias fun, though for him it was also a serious hobby. He had hilarious discussions with Jim Fisher, then owner of Camellia Grove at the NSW meetings. One of his frequent sayings for under performing camellias was "over the back fence with it" which, by the way, is now the expressway leading to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Len managed the NSW Show display in the Blaxland Gallery at Farmer's Department store in Sydney mid city. He did this with great aplomb and style. Both the National and New South Wales camellia societies were much the poorer by his untimely death." 'Len Bray',





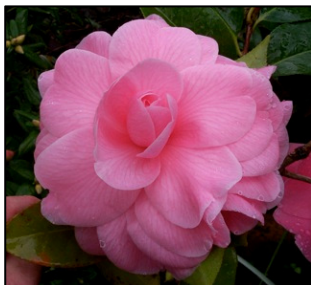
1980 - seedling of reticulata hybrid 'Barbara Clark'. Reg. 257. 10.5 cm, pink blooms with a fuchsia tinge. Compact, upright growth. An upright, dense plant, 10 x 5 cm leaves. Mid-season to late flowering.



'Imperial Splendour', 1980 - a chance japonica seedling. Reg. 258. 12 cm diameter bright red semi-double to incomplete informal double blooms with bright golden yellow stamens. The spreading, bushy plant has 10 x 7 cm

rotund, deep green leaves. Blooms mid-season to late. An appropriate name with its bright red and golden stamens. A splendid example of **'Imperial Splendour'** was exhibited at the Hahndorf (South Australia) National Show in 2000.

'Simpatica', 1980 - a chance reticulata seedling. Reg. 259. An upright, open plant with 10 x 6 cm mid green leaves. Deep rose, formal double blooms 12-14 cm diameter, blooming mid to late season. Their second daughter Andrea named this one. "Simpatica" is Italian for "Very Beautiful".



'Wirlinga Gem', 1981. Tom thought this one was just that—a Wirlinga gem! 'Tiny Princess' x rosiflora. Reg. 268. 4 cm diameter palest pink flowers deepening at the edge, 8-9 petals. White filaments with pale yellow anthers. Dense, spreading to pendulous plant with 5 x 2.5 cm leaves. Early blooming.

'Coral Chalice', 1981 - a chance japonica seedling. Named because of its cup shape. Reg. 269. A deep pink, cup-shaped, formal double 9-11 cm diameter, with a bud centre. It has a spreading habit with 2 types of leaves, 9 x 5.5 cm & 5.5 x 3 cm.



Dr Theodor Bellman is a notable German industrialist and visited Battenfield Engineering in Albury,



which Tom had developed and was managing. Theodor is a keen gardener and loved the bloom when he saw it in Tom's garden. Hence the name. **'Dr Theodor Bellman'**,



1981 - a chance seedling from japonica 'Yobekidori'. Reg. 270. Pale pink, 10-11 cm hose-in-hose semi-double blooms with 16-18 pointed petals, and a slender stamen column. Plant is open and spreading, inclined to weep, with mid-green leaves 9 x 3.5 cm. Mid-season to late.



Celeste Olivia is Tom and Olive's first grand daughter, the daughter of Hilary (Tramonte). **'Celeste Olivia'**, 1983 - a chance japonica seedling. Reg. 305. Deep pink with fine veining, 10.5 to 14 cm diameter formal double with 60-70 petals. The upright, open plant has dark green leaves 8 x 4 cm. Blooms early to mid-season.



Nicole is Tom and Olive's second grand daughter, daughter of Bronwen. Nicole likes the fast growing cultivars. **'Nicole'**, 1983 - chance japonica seedling. A fast and tall grower - like Nicole. Reg. 306. 12-14 cm formal double with bud centre opening to a confused centre. Soft pink, heavily striped, splashed and dotted with crimson. Early to mid season flowering. Spreading open growth with





glossy mid-green leaves 10 x 4.5 cm.

'Bogong Snow', 1985 - 'Tiny Princess' x *fraterna*. Reg. 337. Flowers are white with a slight flush to fuchsine pink on the reverse. Miniature, anemone form flower

with 7-9 outer petals and a centre group of small, spatulate, twisted petals & petaloids; short stamens, filaments white with brownish-yellow anthers. The spreading, weeping plant has mid-green, 6 x 3 cm leaves. Blooms early to mid-season. The original plant was given to Di Waldon (Wodonga) and some cuttings to Edgar Sebire.

Edgar wanted to sell it. Di Waldon named it after Mt Bogong, the highest mountain in Victoria.

'Wirlinga Cascade', 1987 - chance seedling of *Wirlinga Belle*. Reg. 350. Cluster flowering

hybrid, pink, 6 petalled single 4.5 cm diameter. Tall, upright, open plant with long pendulous branches. Matt green leaves 6 x 3 cm.



Olive loved the incurved petals of this chance japonica seedling.

Harry Churchland said it should be called **'Sweet Olive'**. Reg. 392, 1990. 6.5 cm diameter incurved formal double flowers of 70-90 petals. Flower has 8-10 rows of petals, the outer 4

rows being pink, while the inner rows become blush to white as the flower ages. Flowers mid to late season on a medium growing, erect open plant with mid green leaves.

'Wirlinga Bride', 1992 - (*tsaii* x *cuspidata*) x *fraterna*. Reg. 410. Cluster flowering miniature (2.5 cm) white with creped petals, flowering early to mid season, flowers shed whole. White filaments with golden anthers. Glossy green wavy



leaves 3.5 x 1.7 cm. A vigorous shrub with arching fern-like branches which flow like a bridal veil. Extremely floriferous.



'Thomas Walter Savage', 1995 - a chance japonica seedling. Tom named this seedling after his father, as it first flowered on the day he died. Reg. 460. A red informal

double to anemone form of 25-30 petals and 35-45 petaloids, 12 cm across. Petals are large, round and veined. Filaments are scattered among the central petaloids which have white streaking. Some small twisted petals amongst the petaloids.



Flowers mid-season to late on a vigorous growing, spreading plant with deep green semi-matt leaves 7 x 5 cm.

'Wirlinga Rosette', 1996 - a chance seedling of 'Tiny Princess'. Reg. 472. A soft semi-double bowl-shaped flower of 12 petals, 45 mm x 30 mm. Flowers floriferously mid-season on an average-growing erect plant. Leaves dull-green, matt, 50 mm x 25 mm. Petals rounded.



Filaments scattered and central. Flowers shed whole. A cluster-flowering hybrid, with flowers a regular bowl shape, with colour fading towards centre.

'Spring Fanfare', 1998 - ('Kuro Tsubaki' x 'Tiny Princess') x *tsaii*. Reg. 496. Miniature pink single with 5 fluted petals, first petal is white on reverse, 25 mm diameter. Vigorous, spreading, upright growth with deep green leaves 9 x 3.5 cm. A



floriferous cluster-flowering hybrid. Flowers late season. Olive cannot remember anything about this one, doesn't even recognise the name.

'Wirlinga Snow Drift', 1998 - a chance seedling of sasanqua 'Plantation Pink'. Reg. 501. The semi-double flower of 10-13 crinkled petals is white with pink margins on the petals, 100 mm x 28 mm. Flowers early in the season on a fast growing, bushy open plant. Leaves





dark green, glossy, Small leaves for flower size. Petals



rounded, occasionally two centre petals erect. .

'Wirlinga Garland', 1998 - a chance seedling of sasanqua 'Red Willow'. Reg. 502. The deep pink semi-double, 95 mm x 30 mm flowers of 10-12

petals, appear early in the season on a very pendulous, open plant of average growth. Leaves mid-green, 85 mm x

28 mm. Flowers shed whole.



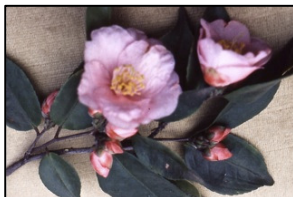
'Wirlinga Jewel', 1998 - a chance seedling of 'Tiny Princess'. Reg. 503. The light pink to pink, informal to formal double flower of 12-18 outer petals and 6-12 smaller twisted inner petals, 55 mm x 25 mm, appears early in the season on

an open, bushy plant of medium growth. Leaves mid-green, 70 mm x 35 mm. Petals rounded. Filaments and anthers rare. Flowers shed whole. Sometimes opens as a bud centre formal with three rows of petals, maturing to informal double. Petals lightly veined deeper pink.



'Wirlinga Ruffles', 1998 - a chance seedling of 'Tiny Princess'. Reg. 505. The light pink to pink, semi-double flowers with 16-18 petals, 55 mm x 25 mm, appear early to mid-season on a tall, open, vigorous growing plant. Leaves dull green, 70 mm x 40

mm. Petals ruffled. Flowers shed whole. Petaloids rare, filaments in a cluster. Small flower with considerable ruffled petals. Cluster flowering developing with age of bush.



'Wirlinga Plum Blossom', 1999 - rosiflora x fraterna seedling. Reg. 530. A miniature single, soft pink flower, 6-8 petals, 60 mm x 25 mm.

The

miniature cluster-type hybrid flowers floriferously early to mid-season on a fast growing, tall, open plant. Leaves mid-green, matt, 70 mm x 35 mm. Petals round, slightly crinkled. Filaments as a central burst. Flowers shed whole.

Noela Merkel lived next



door to the Saviges at Wirlinga. Their cats lived between both properties. Noela used to have to leave meetings "early" to milk the cows. Tom laid out 5 sasanqua seedlings in front of her one afternoon and said "Which one do you like best?" Hence the name

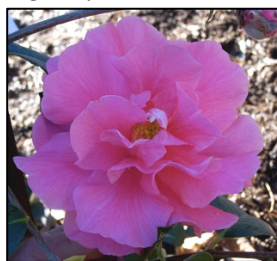


'Noela's Pick', 1999 - a chance seedling of hiemalis 'Showa Supreme'. Reg. 531. Bright pink medium, semi-double with 15 - 17 petals, 85 mm x 20 mm, flowers moderately early in the season on an upright, bushy plant. Leaves mid-green 63 mm x 40 mm. Centre variable, sometimes short twisted stamens, sometimes mixed with small twisted petals. Petals heart shaped. Flowers shatter.



Hilary is Tom's & Olive's oldest daughter, mother of Celeste Olivia. She most likes the small to medium formal doubles like 'Desire'. So Tom named this big and blousy camellia after Hilary. It was registered after Tom's death. **'Hilary Tramonte'**, 2002 - a chance reticulata hybrid seedling. Reg. 545. A large, dark pink peony form flower of 25 petals shading deeper at edge of petals with a loose

arrangement of stamens among the petals, 150 mm x 75 mm. Flowers floriferously mid-season on an open upright plant of medium growth. Leaves dark green, 100 mm x 55 mm. Spent flowers shatter. A large, attractive, flamboyant flower.



Tom also named seedlings after his other two daughters. 'Andrea Ramirez' is a small to medium, red



formal double and I believe that 'Bronwen May' is a small pale pink semi-double. Plants of them do exist, somewhere. During a Congress visit to Rhodoglen Nursery I did see a large flowering plant of 'Andrea Ramirez'. Another of Tom's hybrids is 'Wirlinga Star'—a miniature, soft pink double, being grown and sold by some nurseries and which is only now being registered.

Tom's friendly manner, his blooms, his unmatched knowledge of camellias and his willingness to





assist wherever possible is missed, especially by those of us from Hume Camellia Society, as Tom was a part of every meeting programme.

(Thanks to Olive Savige, Margaret Levick, the Camellias Australia Image Library, *Camellia News*, ICS Journals and Harry Churchland for assistance with the personal information and additional photographs.)

Tom Savige – Camellia Highlights

1962 Foundation member & Director of the International Camellia Society.

1962 Author of “Camellias In Australian Gardens”.

1966-1969 President of Australian Camellia Research Society, later to be made a President Emeritus, a Fellow and a Patron. He has also been A.C.R.S. Secretary and the editor of “Camellia News”.

1970 Awarded the E. G. Waterhouse Medal by the A.C.R.S.

1972 Author of the text of “The Camellia” (paintings by Peter Longhurst).

1973 Registration of the first of 27 cultivars.

1974 Vice-President International Camellia Society.

1976-1980 First President of Hume Branch A.C.R.S. (now Hume Camellia Society)

1977 President of The International Camellia Society, later to become their Registrar.

1983 Made an Honorary Member of The Chinese Camellia Society.

1987 Awarded the “Order of Australia Medal” for services to horticulture.

1992 Awarded the Gold Veitch Memorial Medal by the Royal Horticultural Society.

1992 Certificate of Commendation from American Camellia Society.

1993 Release of “The International Camellia Register”.

1994 Awarded Master of Science (Agriculture) (Honoris Causa) by Sydney University for his work on “The Register”.

1994 Elected a Fellow of The American Camellia Society.

1997 Release of the first supplement to “The International Camellia Register”.

Garden Reports 2009



1. A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF ERYLDENE, GORDON, NSW

The Garden Council has been active over the past year in a number of different areas. Most important has been the ongoing care and maintenance of the gardens for the presentation to the many visitors who come to enjoy Eryldene. Now, at camellia time, the gardens look particularly beautiful and are worth a visit.

Work on cleaning out and preparing the Shade House for some upgrades is underway. We hope to repair and redesign some of its infrastructure to better suit our present day needs.

The Council has been very occupied on a major upgrade of its Maintenance Schedule, that is nearly complete. As well as bringing the old schedule up to date it will also contain material on a number of different but related topics. These include our overall aims for the garden, and the philosophy of the garden (written by Prof I. Waterhouse). As well, climate change, the watering system, historical notes and an extensive explanation of the garden's visual focal points have been included. These focal points have been analysed and guidelines for how they and their plants should be pruned (with photographs) are all in the process of documentation.

Finally, the major Catalogue Project of all the camellias is at the stage of committing the collected data to its computerised database. The information collected on each individual plant includes catalogue number, identification, height, width, condition, location, historical notes, and photographs of flowers.

At our open days in the next few weeks we are selling plants from Eryldene including *C.hybrid* 'Eryldene Excelsis' and variegated, and also *C.japonica* 'Oki-no-nami'.

Rosemary Potts, Eryldene Garden Committee Member

2. E.G. WATERHOUSE NATIONAL CAMELLIA GARDEN, CARINGBAH, NSW

The last twelve months have seen a few very important new projects commenced by the Garden management Committee. Water quality has been improved in the main duck pond by the repair of a pump in the top duck pond and the installation of a new pump in the creek.

At the June 2009 Management Committee Meeting, Sutherland Shire Council's Tourism Officer outlined the increased promotion of the Garden, including a prominent advertisement in the 2009-2010 Shire Information Booklet. The Committee also

