The prospect of seeing such old plants is tremendously exciting. Will there be something I recognise, or will there be something new?

The double white, recently pruned to a mere 4m, was recognisable as ‘Alba Plena’. The deep pink one was huge, 5.5m high with a spread of 8m, and I had never seen it before!

Sometimes there is only one chance to collect data from a particular camellia so you need to make sure you collect everything you need; hence the check sheet. The following is the check sheet for what I have called Ashburnham 2.

The data fields and options are essentially the same as the spreadsheet that is being formulated by the Spanish team, so the data is transferable. Once all of the information has been assembled, the next step is to transfer it onto the datasheet on the computer and to add the various photographs, taken where appropriate against a grid.

Then the really exciting stage - the search begins to try to find possible identifications.

I have compiled a photographic database of ancient camellias using the original 19th century illustrations. The database contains well over a thousand pictures and, in many cases, descriptive text as well, searchable for all forms and all colour combinations, together with a spreadsheet of all cultivars available in the UK in the 19th century, weighted rather crudely in terms of popularity, that is, by recording the number of nurseries that stocked any particular one.

While I appreciate that these illustrations and descriptions are not without errors, and variations occur for a variety of reason, they are the only primary source material for those historic cultivars.

Overleaf is the datasheet used to collect the information on Ashburnham 2, together with the possibilities for its identification.

To quote Sherlock Holmes,

“...............when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

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When the camellia bloom

by Elizabeth W. Marshall

Brave, they seem
Beauty in the cold
Bold, they bloom
Bringers of hope
Bouquets of art in ash

Brave, they are
Bracing their blooms in the arctic winds
Braving the elements
Bringing merciful glory to a garden
Bunched or singular
Buglers of tomorrow’s new
Bastions of grace amid green foliage
All will be well with my soul,

When the camellia bloom.