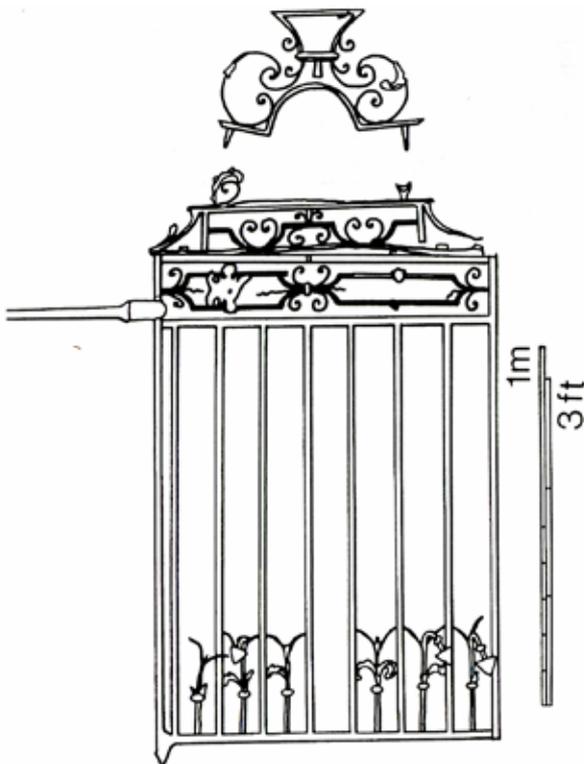




CLWYD BRANCH NEWS

Editor Glynis Shaw

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Colomendy Davies gate © Rosa Baker and Rosemary Jones

Colomendy Walled Garden

Colomendy prior to 1700 remains unknown, not even the site of the dovecote which gave the estate its name has been identified. The property belonged to an ancient Welsh Jones family and was inherited by Catherine Jones (1701-86).

Catherine benefited from local lead finds in the 1760's and this funded improvements to the estate, including the landscaping of the parkland and the original development of the walled garden which dates from this time. Catherine also funded the rebuilding of the Llanferres church in 1774.

Catherine's first cousins included Sir George Wynne of Leeswood and the celebrated Welsh landscape artist Richard Wilson, founder member of the Royal Academy, who often visited Colomendy where he spent his last year and died in 1782. Two ancient Scots pines at Colomendy became recognized motifs in a number of Wilson's paintings.

Sir George Wynne spent a fortune from the lead finds of Halkyn mountain landscaping Leeswood. He employed Stephen Switzer who pioneered *Rural and Extensive Gardening* providing for profit and pleasure: long views were combined with a ferme ornée and a kitchen garden, incorporating

production as part of the aesthetic of landscape design. Both cousin's aesthetic tastes are likely to have influenced Catherine's garden design.

Catherine's walled garden is rectangular in design, divided into four areas traditionally planted with crop rotation. The walls were of varying height - the highest on the west allowing frost to exit the garden. An original gateway in the west wall, since blocked, would have had a spectacular vista across the Allyn valley.

The kitchen garden is an unusual 'crown' garden with frost pockets in the corners. Tender plants were grown at the centre of the garden which was relatively frost free.

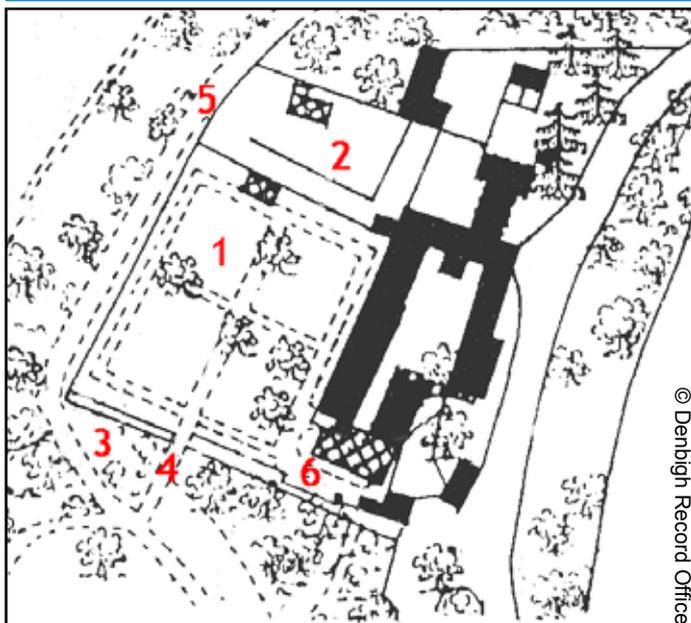
There are two gates associated with this garden: a Davies gate from Mold parish church paid for by Sir George Wynne which was hung in an arched entrance in the north wall of the garden. (*The Davies brothers were blacksmiths based at the Croes Foel forge at Bersham - the Chirk gates are an outstanding example of their fine wrought iron work.*) Another gate came from Llanferres church which was hung in the south gateway in the early nineteenth century.

Jane left Colomendy to her goddaughter and cousin twice removed, Catherine Jones Garnons. The fruit garden, an extension at the north of the walled garden and the grotto with a sunken path - the picturesque developments around the walled garden were added between 1810-20 when the house was substantially rebuilt.

Entry to the kitchen garden is via a short path which leads to shallow rustic steps up to a small stone arched entrance. Inside the gateway the path crosses a clapper bridge over a sunken pathway to a grotto where a limestone tunnel led to a dramatic view towards Moel Famau.

Outside the kitchen garden a lower west wall buttresses the original wall, some 3.5m high (which has been raised by about a meter at some stage - perhaps to accommodate mature fruit trees), when a new drive was excavated in the mid C19th. This created a raised view walk. This would have afforded tremendous views across the Allyn valley. Originally the path through the grotto continued over the drive and down to Loggerheads. There was no path to the view walk - to get there you had to scramble.

The lodge on this drive dates from 1840. However the lilacs giving the name 'Lilac drive' were not planted until 1920. There is some debate about when the south wall and its arched entrance with the



© Denbigh Record Office

OS 1871 25 inch map

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1 Original walled garden | 4 Clapper bridge |
| 2 Fruit garden (North extension) | 5 Lilac Drive |
| 3 Grotto and defile | 6 Annexe |

clapper bridge was first established.

A long thin plot up the steps from the house was also established for vegetables so the walled garden was kept primarily for fruit and flowers and conceived as an ornamental garden.

In 1865 the Garnons line died out and the estate passed to Bryan George Davies-Cooke, second son of the Gwysaney and Owston family. In 1920 Miss Gwendolen Davies-Cooke was responsible for the garden and planted the lilac drive. The lilacs were replanted several times as the soil proved unsuitable.

When Davies-Cooke's widow Judith died in 1922, Colomendy was sold to James Taylor, a retired business man from Frodsham, who paid £19,000 for the estate and as much again to modernise it. The Loggerheads Inn was sold in 1926 and the Liverpool Crosville Bus Company bought 74 acres of the Colomendy pleasure park and developed the tea gardens for their day visitors. (In 1974 this was sold to Clwyd County Council and became Loggerheads Country Park.)

Frank Tanton, one of nine children born at Ty Draw Cadole 1905, was a gardener at Colomendy between 1919-37. Frank began work aged 14 at Plas Hafod, Gwernymynydd on six shillings a week and then at Curzon Park near Chester. Three years later he became one of the five gardeners at Colomendy working six days a week from 7.30-5.30 except on Saturday when they finished at 4.30. Frank recalled the high maintenance of the garden in Taylor's time. The gravel drive swept fortnightly took three days and the defile to the grotto was swept once a week where the large yews were regularly clipped.

Frank believed the garden was crowned in the middle because tons and tons of manure from the farmyard was put on it. However, the fertile soil in the walled garden is said to have originally been brought in from the Cheshire Plain.

The walled garden was opened in 1934 in support of the Queen's Institute of District Nursing. A visitor describes going

"along a walk shaded by overhanging boughs of ancient yew trees, past an imposing plantation of bamboo canes to the bewitching sunken walk which skirts the west wall of the gardens. Entering through a grotto of fossil stone, a glorious border of antirrhinum and nicotiana edged with nepeta greets the eye."

In Frank's day there was a 15ft hornbeam near the greenhouse which displayed gloxinias, plumbago and heliotropes. A sundial dated 1865 stood at the centre of the garden with herbaceous borders of rich mauve and blue radiating to all four points of the compass.

"with their profusion of sea-holly, dahlias, lavatera, nepeta, phlox, and borders of violets, wallflower, edged with purple clematis and the roses."...

The garden produce included celery, runner beans, and brassicas with a border of sea kale for winter forcing. The cellars of the house were used for forcing rhubarb.

The Bothy was the building to the left of the cart shed where the farm workers and the gardeners ate their dinner. There was great rivalry between the staff for available funds - Mrs Taylor loved her garden whilst her husband and daughter Mrs Peyton loved the Dexters!

Frank also remembered the two greenhouses in the small eastern annexe which had figs to the left and vines on the right. A path was laid in front and between the greenhouses and the south wall was Mrs Taylor's fernery - *'a place she dearly loved and spent much time there'*. The herb garden was a semicircular shape on the north side bordered by eucalyptus, chrysanthemums and winter flowering specimens.

The garden's eastern side is walled by a range of farm buildings, all windowless in Frank's time, the present windows were probably added when the property was taken over by Liverpool.

Simon Kane lived at Colomendy as a child - his father worked on the estate from 1952. In 1954 the kitchen garden was bulldozed to lay the drains needed to reinstate the derelict farm buildings (reducing and damaging the original 'crown' design). The arch between the north and south gardens was demolished to provide bulldozer access. This arch matched the arched entrance which survives today at the south end of the garden. The gate was re-erected in the south east annexe entrance opposite the vinery. Now the ruined remains of the Davies

gate are said to lie in a Colomendy cellar.

Simon remembers espaliered pears on the east face of the west wall. Espaliered pear and apple trees were planted inside along the perimeter walls and there were rose arches over the central path. Along the east wall were morello cherry trees which took weeks to tie in and had to be netted.

A freestanding greenhouse seen on the 1871 map in the north fruit garden, was heated by a circulating air system and used for pomegranates. There were also fruit cages and hot beds by the greenhouse.

The unheated glasshouse against the north wall in the main garden was used for the spring roses and this was destroyed by a hurricane in the 1970s. The stone wall was faced with a bluish brick also used for the plinth, marked 'W.HANCOCK'.

By the 70's the west glass house in the annexe was already derelict but the east glasshouse survived until 1987 when the top courses of the wall fell through its roof. Simon's father had been responsible for feeding the pot bellied stove overnight when frost threatened.

Colomendy was sold again in 1936 after Mrs Taylor's death. In 1939 The National Camps Corporation obtained the estate by compulsory purchase. They built the wooden huts in the parkland as a camp for evacuees and Colomendy was leased to Liverpool City Council who purchased Colomendy in 1957. Glan Alyn School, designed by Colwyn Foulks and Partners was built in the 1960's and the walled garden fell into disuse.

Liverpool still owns Colomendy but the 106 acre estate is now run as a centre for outdoor education activities managed by Kingswood on a 30 year lease.

It is encouraging news that there are now plans to reinstate Colomendy's walled garden as an educational facility. It will be great if young children are involved in a productive and beautiful kitchen garden whilst visiting Colomendy.

We are indebted to Rosa Baker and Rosemary Jones who researched Colomendy 1993-5. Their documentation included an archaeological survey of the walls and the grotto. They also met Frank Tanton and Simon Kane. In recent times Gareth Owen Ellis has been involved in maintaining the walled garden at Colomendy.

Branch News

A warm welcome to all new members. We hope to see you on our visits and study day.

We are delighted to learn that Sara Furse, founder of the Clwyd branch and former Chairwoman has agreed to join the Trust Council.

Any items for the next issue please contact Glynis: glynis@castell-photography.co.uk 01745710261

Cestyll visit Wed May 25th



Cestyll is very much a secret garden owned by Wylfa Power Station. This 1920's garden is normally only open to the public twice a year.

The Hon William Walter Vivian bought Cestyll in 1918 as a gift for his favourite niece Violet Vivian, maid of honour to Queen Alexandra between 1901-1925. Violet and her twin sister Dorothy were friends of Princess Victoria, daughter of Edward VII, who often visited Cestyll. Violet developed the garden from 1922 and Victoria designed its lower south west corner.

The garden was sited a little way west of the house in a small ravine on the River Cafnan near Cemaes. Violet was assisted by 12 gardeners who moved tons of soil into the garden for the trees and shrubs. Experts at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew helped select species for the garden's coastal conditions. Top soil had to be carried by hand to the rock slab on the prominent west escarpment, seen as you walk towards the mill (owned by the National Trust). This was once carpeted with 3,000 bedding plants each year providing a dramatic show after following narrow paths through rock gardens and shrubberies along the rocky valley following the stream towards the sea.

Cestyll was originally a summer house but Violet eventually settled permanently and became a local character with a penchant for a succession of orange and black cars. She later planted a fir shelter belt to protect the garden from the east winds.

When Vivian Violet died in 1962 at the age of 83 Cestyll was left to her niece Lady Astor and sold to the CEBG in 1983 on condition that the garden continued to be maintained. In 1991 the house was demolished but the abandoned and impenetrable kitchen garden still remains.

Most of the original landscaping still remains and the unusual and varied planting which thrives in Cestyll's micro climate will be at its best in May.

Forthcoming Events

Crocus Display, Dolhyfryd, Lawnt

Denbigh LL16 4SU From March 1st

Virginia Cunningham has kindly invited members to see the acres of crocuses originating from a 100 bulbs planted in 1840.

To enjoy the crocuses turn up on a sunny day - no need to go to the house. You may also like to explore the beech woods and snowdrops above the house. A walk further along the Afon Ystrad past Dr Johnson's cottage takes you to Dr Johnson's monument which caused him to remark

"Mr Myddleton's erection of an urn looks like an intention to bury me alive."

Beatrix Potter wrote about getting caught in a thunderstorm whilst picnicking at this very same spot.

Branch AGM March 12th and talk on

Edward Kemp by Elizabeth Davey at Gladstone's Library, St Deiniols, Hawarden 10.30

Kemp's planting at Birkenhead Park as well as his writings including 'How to Lay out a Garden' 1850 which was expanded into a second edition in 1858 had a wide influence on garden design. Trained under Joseph Paxton as a garden apprentice at Chatsworth, Kemp became a great plantsman. He became a freelance landscape designer skilled at integrating the house into the landscape. Kemp also designed parks and cemeteries and was one of the judges who chose the Olmstead and Vaux design for Central Park in New York .

Kemp lived in the Italian Lodge at Birkenhead Park until he built himself no.74 Park Road West so much of his work was undertaken in Cheshire and the North West.

£8 including coffee.

Crocus display at Dolhyfryd



Anglesey Gardens Wed 25 May (joint visit with Gwynedd Branch) **Cestyll, Wylfa and Plas Cadnant**, a 'Picturesque' style garden developed in the early 1800's which has been restored by Anthony Tavener over the last 15 years. Meet at Wylfa Power station visitor centre 10.00 am £13.50 including lunch, tea and admissions. (£8 if bringing a packed lunch) Plas Cadnant from 2.00pm (afternoon only £6.00)

Teddy Bears Picnic Thurs June 2nd 2.00-4.30

Kindly hosted by Virginia Cunningham at Dolhyfryd Lawnt . Fun for bears and everyone with treasure hunt and games. Adults £3, Bears £1, Accompanying Children Free.

National AGM Saturday 4th June at Fronmon Castle. A coach trip has been arranged from North Wales -see flier.

Study Day on Garden Archaeology

Saturday 11th June Theatr Twm o'r Nant, Denbigh

Strawberry Tea June Sunday 26th

kindly hosted by Sinah Harrison-Jones at Wigfair Isaf, St Asaph. this is a joint fundraiser with Breast Cancer Care. £5

Visit to Eaton Hall Sunday 24th July

Deputy Head Gardener Jan Lomas will give a guided tour.

Music by the Lake at Pontruffydd Hall

Wed 10th August 7pm - kindly hosted by Bill and Sally Glazebrook. (please note that this date has been brought forward from August 17th)

For bookings and more information, please contact Elizabeth Bartlett 01352 758023