

October 2010

Number 43



South and Mid Glamorgan Branch Newsletter

Branch AGM 2010

The Annual General Meeting was held at the National Roman Legionary Museum, Caerleon, on Sunday 25 April 2010. We actually met in the room overlooking the new garden. The weather was kind but we were again disappointed in the turnout, just 21. **We desperately need your support.**

Jean Reader, our Chairman, welcomed everyone, especially Val who was recovering from a serious accident. She also thanked Mark Lewis, the Curatorial Officer at the Museum, who had recently been awarded his PhD'

In her report Jean began by thanking the committee members by name for their particular contributions throughout the year. Nominations for new committee members would be welcomed to bring new ideas and energy.

Jean reiterated one of the principal aims of the WHGT 'to identify and monitor sites whose future appears precarious and may be worthy of protection'. She made specific reference to Ruperra. Members Pat Jones Jenkins and Elaine Davey have major roles via the Ruperra Trust, and Judith Martin-Jones represented the WHGT at the Public Inquiry which opened on 21 April 2009. The Welsh Assembly Government has now dismissed the appeal against refusal of planning permission by Caerphilly County Borough Council. The Branch continues to monitor the controversial Bute Park bridge and road scheme in Cardiff which has serious implications for this Grade I site. Both Elaine and Judith are now members of the Wales Conservation Committee of the WHGT under the chairmanship of Elisabeth Whittle from Cadw.

Jean mentioned the arrangement with the local organisers of the National Gardens Scheme who had agreed to hand out WHGT leaflets at their open garden days in exchange for our publicising the work of the NGS at our events. Yellow booklets were accordingly made available to all present.

Sales of *Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan* had made a substantial contribution to Branch funds. Jean gave especial thanks to Dan Clayton-Jones for the interest free loan which had now been repaid.

The Treasurer's report showed that the Branch had £132.90 in its general account and £782.13 in the publications fund, which is close to the £1000 target set for each Branch.

The officers and committee members were all re-elected unopposed.

After the business meeting there followed a fascinating illustrated talk by Mark Lewis on the subject of Roman Gardens with particular reference to the evidence at Caerwent and elsewhere. Mark discussed the archaeological decisions that had informed the design and content of the garden at Caerleon. Elaine Davey proposed a vote of thanks to Mark and members then enjoyed tea and a walk around the garden.

Val Caple



Members arriving in the Roman garden

Dan Clayton Jones, OBE

We are delighted to congratulate Dan on his award in the Queen’s Birthday Honours. As Chairman of our Branch from 2003 to 2007 Dan initiated and supported two major projects, namely the creation of the Cowbridge Physic Garden and the publication of *Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan*. The ‘groundwork’ for the Cowbridge Physic Garden was undertaken by Dan and your Branch Committee before the formation of the CPG Trust; the Historic Gardens publication was, from start to finish, a Branch project.

Dan was the inspiration for these projects, and he invested vast amounts of time in seeing them through to completion. Congratulations Dan. Your award is a well deserved recognition of your many activities in the voluntary sector and we would like to underline our thanks to you for your long, active and continuing involvement with our Branch.

Hilary M. Thomas

The Laskett Gardens, 18 May 2010

This was a memorable and thoroughly enjoyable visit. Glorious sunshine enhanced the journey to Much Birch where most of the group gathered at a local hostelry for lunch – good food eaten on the terrace in the sunshine. A short walk along a lane brought us to The Laskett where we were greeted by a member of Sir Roy Strong’s staff, given a brief introductory talk and then provided with an informative illustrated map of the gardens and allowed to wander at will. The gardens, entirely the creation of Sir Roy and his late wife



Sir Roy Strong with Hilary

Julia Trevelyan Oman, commemorate in design and content the careers, achievements and interests of the couple and are a living autobiography *in horto*. The strong architectural structure, incorporating dramatic vistas and secret enclosures, is complemented by imaginative plantings and a range of ‘ornaments’ as diverse as a Lion from the Houses of Parliament, the Cecil Beaton Sundial, a Triumphal Arch and the Muff Monuments (commemorating the Strongs’ favourite cat).

The whole garden is a delight, and we lucky visitors had the whole afternoon to explore its many facets. Sir Roy returned to The Laskett from an engagement in Hereford shortly before our departure, giving us the opportunity to thank him personally for sharing his garden with us.

Hilary M. Thomas

Summer Tea Party at Yr Hen Felin and Swallow Barns, Dyffryn, 27 June 2010

This was a well-attended meeting on a brilliantly sunny afternoon. We were warmly welcomed to Yr Hen Felin by our host, Rozanne Lord, who gave us an introductory talk about her colourful, productive and immaculately maintained garden before leading us on a guided tour of it and that of her immediate neighbours. Both gardens have been created by their owners within the last fifteen years and incorporate natural, formal and informal features including the old mill stream a wildflower meadow, cottage and kitchen gardens.



Tea at Yr Hen Felin

Enjoyment of the gardens was enhanced by the wonderful tea prepared for us by Rozanne to whom our thanks were expressed and a small gift presented.

Good company, beautiful gardens, delectable food, sunshine ... look what you missed if you didn’t join us!!

Hilary M. Thomas



The Wye Walk from Chepstow to Lower Wyndcliff, 19 June 2010

In March this year 'Overlooking the Wye', an organisation supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, held an event to mark the re-opening of the 'Piercefield Walks' along the River Wye. The conservation work cost £2.8 million and at the launch it was clear that the organisation had been forced to address some of the perceived and actual conflicts of restoring features in a designed historic landscape. Such issues included the reinstatement of historic vistas where, as a result of plant growth, there is now no view at all, as well as how to manage the viewpoints themselves. The opportunity to walk the Wye Valley from Chepstow to Lower Wyndcliff, following the route devised by Valentine Morris of Piercefield in the eighteenth century, proved a temptation too difficult to resist and one Saturday in midsummer, a group of twenty WHGT members and friends saw for themselves what the route is like in the twenty-first century.

Our group was fortunate in being led by Ken Murphy, Director of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust, whose knowledge of the Wye Valley is extensive. We had been warned that, although most of the route would be fairly flat, there were a few steep parts. We encountered the first of these as we walked from Chepstow to the newly-restored vantage point called The Alcove, with its view across the Wye to Woodcroft on our left and Chepstow on our right. At this point the complexity and dangerous nature of the project that had been undertaken became apparent to us because the restoration had revealed that the foundations of the vantage point were much larger than had originally been envisaged.

Next it was on to The Grotto viewpoint where the restorers had taken the decision to do little more than conserve what existed. It was at this point that we began to understand just what difficult decisions have to be taken by restorers of historic landscapes. The view across to the Lanacut peninsula was very limited because of excessive tree growth and a proliferation of shrubs. The Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) was rampant and there was much muttering about its invasive qualities and how it must be killing off native plant species until it was pointed out that it may have been introduced as a deliberate part of the design.

One of the joys of having Ken Murphy as our guide was that our progress was slow because he kept pointing out features that most of us would never have noticed or understood if they had not been brought to our attention. Perhaps the most memorable event of the day was created by the place Ken selected for the site of our picnic lunch: close to the terrace just below Piercefield House. We tried to imagine it in the glory days of Valentine Morris with the magnificent views far across the Wye and Severn Rivers and debated between ourselves the likelihood and possible costs of restoration.

Next came two viewpoints which illustrated the very different decisions that had been taken by the restoration team. At the Giant's Cave much had been reinstated on the basis of the evidence that had become available and it was a memorable point for us all, although perhaps particularly for the person whose mobile phone sprang to life whilst he was in the cave and, much to his amazement, found that he was able to carry on a conversation with someone in London! At Lover's Leap the restorers had taken the view that the historic fabric was beyond conservation and that it should be allowed to decline in its own time whilst giving safe access to the view.

If you weren't able to be with us on this trip and decide to walk the route yourself look out for a free Map & Guide to the Wye Valley, available from information centres in the area. Alternatively, you might like to go the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website:

www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

The map will guide you safely along the route we took – the only problem for you will be that it's highly unlikely that you will be able to locate the final surprise Ken Murphy had in store for us: an eighteenth-century Cold Bath!

Jean Reader



Members and friends with Ken in the Cold Bath



Evening Visit to Brocastle, near Bridgend, 14 July 2010

Disappointingly few members joined this evening excursion organised by our member Judy Keenor who is on the committee of the Hafod Trust which administers the site now occupied by a purpose-built Care Home and residential properties, with the old Brocastle house functioning as a restaurant and social venue.

Some eight years ago, when house and gardens were still in private ownership, members of this Branch undertook a survey of the gardens. George Haynes, a member of our Branch and one of the survey team in 2002, prepared and circulated a

detailed and very informative historical survey of Brocastle in advance of our visit which gave us a preliminary insight into the property. So, on this cool summer evening in July, we came to Brocastle wondering whether the landscape would have been drastically altered since 2002.

While the 'model farm' building which originally adjoined the gardens have now been absorbed into the residential complex, and former grassed areas to the west of the house are now occupied by the Care Home, the main area of the garden and the major features noted in our survey in 2002 have survived. An acceptable compromise between 'history' and present usage of the site seems to have been achieved. The garden is maintained in immaculate order by Cliff the gardener who accompanied us on our tour, after which we assembled in the house where Donald Moore, in the unavoidable absence of George, gave an impromptu talk on the history of Brocastle and the mystery of the 'castle' element in its name.

N.B. The Branch AGM will be held at Brocastle on Sunday March 27th 2011

Hilary M. Thomas

Craig y Parc 18 August 2010

Nineteen WHGT members attended an exclusive visit around the grounds of Craig y Parc. The exquisite Arts and Crafts property is normally closed to the public as it is now owned by the charity Scope and run as a school for children with cerebral palsy. House and gardens (Grade II*) were designed as one complementary whole and the gardens still retain many original features, as does the house. The tour was led by Jacky Thorne, a Branch member, and Chris Winston, an employee of the school. Chris's invaluable contribution highlighted the adaptations made to the garden, by Scope over the last few years.

Of the changes, the addition of a sensory garden and outdoor classroom have given the gardens a new lease of life for the children who attend the school. Craig y Parc is one of the gardens featured in *Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan*, edited by Hilary M. Thomas who was also with us. The combination of the three tour guides made for a stimulating visit.

Jacky Thorne

In Search of Gardeners

You will have read in the latest issue of the WHGT *Bulletin* that we have challenged all Branches of WHGT to identify some of those 'lost heroes' of garden history - the hands-on gardeners. If you have any information (letters, notebooks, photographs, family reminiscences etc.) please contact Hilary at the address below. While we are suggesting a preliminary cut-off date of 1920, information on gardeners of the later twentieth century will be gratefully accepted and will be added to our research compilations.

Hilary M. Thomas, Brookside Farm, Llandough, Cowbridge CF71 7LR

Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan is available from Val Caple, Milestone, Penllyn, Cowbridge, CF71 7RQ for £25 to include postage and packing. Cheques should be made payable to WHGT.



The garden at Brocastle

Members at Craig y Parc



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