



South and Mid Glamorgan Branch Newsletter



Members exploring the Spring garden at Brocastle



Branch AGM 2011

The Annual General Meeting of the South and Mid Glamorgan Branch was held at Brocastle, near Bridgend, on Sunday 27 March 2011 at 2.30 pm. The turnout was exceptional, with 9 members of the Committee and 21 other Branch members present.

Mrs. Jean Reader, as Chairman, first welcomed members and thanked them for their attendance.

Chairman's Report

Visits: Jean reported that the Branch has had a successful year with most of the events being very well attended, including the coach trip to Highgrove, the visits to The Laskett Gardens and Yr Hen Felin (with tea) and the Wye Valley walk. The evening visit to Brocastle was less well attended.

Committee: Jean thanked the committee members for their particular contributions throughout the year. New members are always welcome.

National AGM at Fonmon Castle on Friday 3 and Saturday 4 June:

The draft programme for the events was circulated.

Conservation Study Day: A national study day is being planned by the national WHGT for October and will probably be held at Gregynog.

Gardeners in the Vale: Hilary is still interested in receiving any information on local gardeners.

Autumn Events: The Committee would be happy to receive any suggestions for events later in the year. They are planning a visit to Dyffryn Gardens for 'Light up the Night' and have discussed holding lectures.

Ruperra Castle: Pat Jones Jenkins reported that the Castle is currently on the market. The Ruperra Castle Trust is concerned about the deterioration of the site, the lack of security and the damage by metal detectors (only the ground the Castle is built on is protected). The Trust is applying for grants to make an offer for the site. Jean congratulated Pat and the Trust for the amazing job they are doing. Pat thanked the WHGT for their support. Thanks to supporters, Ruperra was voted 2nd in the top 50 essential places to visit in the South Wales Valleys.

Grants: Gerry was able to announce that important rooms in Dyffryn House will be restored using grants from the HLF and Welsh Assembly. There will be opportunities to see experts at work before the opening for Christmas 2012.

Biodiversity: Elisabeth Whittle (Cadw) has expressed concern about the challenge at Stackpole and other sites of balancing the options of replacing plants with native species or with the original historic species.

Treasurer's Report

Copies of the statement were circulated. The Branch had £2305.78 in its General Fund on 31st December 2010. The increase from £915.03 on 31st December 2010 was due to book sales and the success of the events. The number of Branch members is now 77.

Election of Officers

All the Committee were willing to stand for re-election, including Rebecca Exley who was co-opted onto the Committee during the year, and were unanimously re-elected.

AOB

Rookwood Summer House: A member expressed concern about the deterioration of the Summer House. Jean responded that the Committee are very aware of the problem (see opposite page).

The AGM was closed at 3.00 and was followed by tea. George Haynes then gave an interesting and very informative illustrated talk on



the history of Brocastle house and garden from the discovery of a Neolithic axe head through successive centuries, highlighting the de Reigny family, the Thomas family of Llanmihangel and Brocastle, and outlining subsequent tenants and owners up to the C20th when the property was bought by the by the Welsh Development Agency. Unfortunately, only one image and few maps exist of the house and garden as they developed and the Branch found little of historic significance in the garden to record when they surveyed it in 2002.

After the talk members were encouraged to discover what still remains of the Edwardian Garden.

Val Caple

Summerhouse and Underground Vaulted Chamber, Rookwood Hospital, Llandaff, a Grade II listed building

Members view the structure regularly and are talking to interested parties from Cadw, Cardiff City Council, the Health Board, the Victorian Society, the Georgian Society, the Llandaff Society and the Friends of



Insole Court. Rookwood Hospital is still functioning and no planning applications have been submitted for its future use.

Elisabeth Whittle of Cadw has told us that the structure cannot be moved to a more suitable location.

Val Caple



Before and after—July 2000, 2003 and 2009. *Photos by Hilary Thomas and Jean Reader*

Thomas Mawson and the Restoration at Dyffryn Kitchen Garden

To the 'soul attuned to sympathy' no pleasure exceeds that of being able to wander round a prim walled in garden, enjoying the fragrance of the blossom in Spring, and watching the setting of the fruit and in its various developments through the successive seasons until the gathering in.

- Thomas Mawson 'The Art and Craft of Garden Making'

Thomas Mawson recognised the importance of the walled kitchen garden as both a provider of food and as an area of the garden to be visited and enjoyed by the garden owners and their visitors. In his book 'The Art and Craft of Garden Making' he devoted a chapter to his thoughts on the site, size, layout, structures, paths and walks and embellishments of the walled kitchen garden and another to vineries and glasshouses.

Aesthetic value, Mawson wrote, could be brought to the kitchen garden without reducing its productivity by including herbaceous borders growing fresh cut flowers for the house, espalier fruit trees lining the paths and fruit walls to give vistas and enclosure. Normally utilitarian potting sheds and tool sheds could be made attractive and, along with fruit rooms and glasshouses when correctly placed, help make the productive garden pleasing to the eye.

Mawson did not expect the walled kitchen garden to meet all the fruit and vegetable needs of the house. He thought one and a half acres to be sufficient for most households. This would not allow for main crop potatoes or for orchard trees. He recommended gardens had a separate reserve garden where fruit and vegetables could be grown in a less showy manner. An orchard away from the main kitchen garden would provide a 'romantic' peaceful, secluded place, with rambler roses climbing up the fruit trees and spring bulbs and meadow flowers growing through the long grass.

The walled kitchen garden at Dyffryn precedes Mawson's 1906 design. It is marked on the Ordnance Survey map of 1821 but is thought to be much older, perhaps dating back to the seventeenth century. The arrangement of a large garden with a display house, then a smaller one with the sheds and bothies are found in eighteenth and nineteenth century walled gardens. Mawson's plan for the garden shows the upper and lower gardens as they are now, plus a reserve garden that no longer exists, in the now west garden. However, Mawson's influence can be seen in the detailing. Above the archway between the two gardens is a





decorative urn similar to some shown in his book. The photo, of Dyffryn's walled kitchen garden in 1915, shows such urns over the arch between the two gardens and at the gate to the west garden.



The walled garden in 1915. *Photo Glamorgan Archives*

Mawson's ideas of fruit walls and espaliers lining the paths are being incorporated into the restoration of the lower garden. The use of wooden posts with a finial knob and wooden top rail combined with wires below for training the trees along the central paths follow his recommendations as does wiring the west and east walls to grow apricots, plums and

pears. In the upper walled garden a cut flower border has been planted with perennial plants along the central axis running from the garden's main entrance on the double herbaceous border to the glasshouse.

Ceridwen Davies, Dyffryn Gardens' Walled Garden Supervisor



The walled garden (left) in July 2010 and (right) March 2011



The new greenhouse, which is currently under construction in the Walled Garden, has been designed using images of the original greenhouse which was replaced in the 1960s. For ease of maintenance the new design includes modern materials.

Plans for the Enhancement of the Formal Gardens at Bryngarw Country Park, Bridgend

In February 2011 Bridgend County Borough Council appointed Bronwen Thomas Landscape Architect to prepare an enhancement scheme for the formal gardens at Bryngarw Country Park. Funding for the project comes from the Visit Wales Sustainable Tourism fund under the 'One Historic Garden' scheme. Running parallel to this project is the Environmental Improvements, Phase 1 study for the whole of the Country Park carried out by Mackley Davies Associates with funding from WAG

Environmental Improvements Grant and BCBC Special Regeneration Fund.

The Grade II formal gardens were laid out by the Traherne family between 1910 and 1918. They consist of terraced lawns to the south front of Bryngarw House (currently for sale),

woodlands on the steep valley side to the east, and the oriental or 'Japanese Garden' running along the valley floor.

Having changed hands in the 1940s, Bryngarw was acquired by the local authority in 1960. In the 1980s, when it was designated a Country Park, the Japanese garden was recovered after years of neglect. Scrub was cleared, a network of paths, both original and new, were put in, and the current vaguely Japanese-style tea house and bridge were constructed.

Over the intervening years little attention was given to the horticultural maintenance, apart from grass cutting, and the gardens have settled into gentle decay. Nevertheless, the Japanese garden continues to be a delightful sequestered spot. Plenty of visitors stroll here, especially in spring and autumn to take in the colours and scents of the Rhododendrons, cherries, maples and magnolias, to rest in the tea house and admire the reflections from the Japanese bridge. This is the essence of the garden that the scheme seeks to enhance.



The pre-1980s bridge, one of the original garden features *Photo Bridgend CBC*





View from the proposed new viewpoint at the top of the garden. Compare with the old photograph. *Photo Bronwen Thomas*

The emerging master-plan addresses the need to balance the historic significance with ecology, visitor expectations, legislation and restricted funding, and future management and potential changes. The concentration of proposals relate to the Japanese Garden.

Work is already starting with clearance of some of the bamboo. The splendid old rhododendrons and other original ornamental plantings are to be assessed and work carried out to get them in good heart for the future.

The tea house and bridge need repairs. A ramp into the tea house is planned, and more substantial railings to the bridge will keep to the oriental style. Handrails, resting places and surface repairs will make the paths more accessible, and new stepping stone paths will encourage further exploration of the gardens. A new viewpoint-cum-focal feature will overlook the main pond, bridge and tea house at the point where the original path from the House opened up to the garden.

An entrance feature is planned at the lower end, with an outlook along the length of the ponds and rill. With some judicious clearance in the woodland, a tantalising glimpse of this area will be gained from the visitor centre.

There are pressing issues however relating to river erosion – the Garw is attempting to intrude into the Japanese garden. Also there is the very real threat of Phytophthora which is rampant in the larch forests further up the valley.

Current funding covers only a first phase of these enhancements. It is hoped that, with a master-plan in place, other funding can be sourced to prepare these gardens for the next quarter century and beyond.

Bronwen Thomas, 7th April 2011

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