

# The struggle to save the Vaynol

by Michael Tree

As many of you are aware, the Vaynol estate, near Bangor, is one of the cultural and heritage glories of Wales with its historic house and ancient thousand-acre park closed in by a massive stone wall, wonderfully set on one of the banks of the Menai Strait, with spectacular views towards Snowdon. In essence it represents the full achievement of the eighteenth century concept of the arcadian idyll that has influenced gardeners and landscapers the world over. It is widely recognised by scholars as one of the very finest examples of the genre.

But as you will know from previous issues of the Bulletin a large book distribution depot and huge parking area for outdoor functions has already breached the integrity of the park, to the dismay of heritage bodies including WHGT. Now it is under severe threat once more on account of the possibility of yet more office buildings to be put up in prominent positions within the park—the latest of which, The Centre for Advanced Scientific Technology, is situated alongside the back drive, and so strongly lit at night as to give the appearance of being floodlit. But this impact could be reduced by appropriate tree planting, amongst other items.

It is precisely because we recognised that, if things proceed as they had begun, we will effectively lose Vaynol as a cultural/heritage asset, that Sheila Roberts and I agreed to represent the WHGT on a steering committee with the Gwynedd County Council and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA). The Committee was tasked with securing an independent strategy report from an outside firm of consultants (BDP of Chester). The purpose of the report, for which the Council and the WDA paid well over thirty thousand pounds, was to inform the County Council of the importance of Vaynol and to detail strategic proposals for its proper stewardship in the long term. This was thus intended to guide the Council's proposals in their forthcoming Unitary Development Plan (UDP) proposals, so we had every reason to hope that our efforts would contribute to securing the long term future of Vaynol in an informed, perhaps even exemplary, manner.

We now have the report, and an excellent thing it is too in the main. Sadly though, things have not turned out as planned: the County Council published their UDP proposals without reference to the draft of the report (so we were told), and without reference to advice concerning the extreme heritage



*The CAST building dominates the parkland.*

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sensitivity of the site. These proposals, if acted upon, would connect the office development site with the main core of the estate, and probably include it in the long run. All this of course is quite contrary to the provisions of the specialist long term strategy report.

The WHGT are therefore now faced with the need to attend the forthcoming Public Enquiry into the UDP proposals if we are to try to head off what we believe could be a cultural catastrophe for Wales. But, as we see it, there is here a fundamental on-going problem of two great departments of state running parallel, but ill-harmonised policies. On the one hand there is Cadw running a whole raft of fine policies aimed at preserving and enhancing the proper stewardship of our built heritage, yet on the other hand, as we can see at Vaynol, the WDA is taking action that is profoundly damaging to that self-same heritage. We are pursuing these issues with vigour, as you would expect. I must record thanks to the indefatigable Dr Sheila Roberts whose assistance and support in these matters has been exemplary.

Incidentally we are mindful of the need to avoid what Roy Jenkins said of Churchill in the thirties: 'He was an alarm clock, but he was a rasping one, which made most listeners more anxious to turn it off than to respond to its summons'. Thus if any of our members think that they can help in any way, then perhaps they could let me know.

*Cofion, Michael Tree  
Chairman, WHGT.*

# The Importance of the Vaynol

by Sheila Roberts

The greatest asset of this country park must be its spectacular and unrivalled setting between the Menai Strait and the mountains of Snowdonia. Views to the west from the estate look across Anglesey and are protected by the purchase of Vaynol land by the National Trust in order to preserve the setting of Plas Newydd which stands on the opposite shore. To the east are the breathtaking views of the mountain ranges of the Carneddau and Snowdon, most beautiful between November and March when snow-capped peaks may catch the afternoon sun. This is the vista from the New Vaynol Hall from which, in the later nineteenth century, the family could claim to own all they surveyed.

The park has a sheltered micro-climate warmed by the Gulf Stream and the estate planting benefits from this protection. The 1770 estate map shows woodland and covert which still exists today, and the ancient woodland has been supplemented by the planting of the perimeter belt, woods and coverts of the landscape park, mainly with trees grown in the estate nursery. Much of the landscape has been undisturbed for many years and its varied habitats provide for a wide range of plants and animal life. Varied landscape features have been added over the centuries and include a duck decoy with ornamental planting, the unique terracing of the Tudor garden adjacent to the Old Hall, the exotic planting of the grand drive, a lake, fishponds and, lastly, a rose garden and a balustraded water garden aligned to focus on the summit of Snowdon. The rarity of the landscape is recognized by the Grade 1 listing in the Cadw/ICOMOS Register of Parks and Gardens particularly for the quality of the park and Tudor garden.

The rarity value of the landscape is complemented by that of the buildings, notable the forty three listed buildings within the tall seven mile long estate wall, many of which are listed Grade 1 or 2\*. Many buildings are still relatively well preserved and represent a full range of estate buildings – The Old Hall began around 1533, the New Hall built around 1810, the lodges, the old chapel dated 1596, the great barn dated 1605, the mausoleum, folly tower, dairy, model farm buildings, glass houses around the kitchen garden, the bear pit in the garden of the butler's house and the grand stables. One mystery remains – the whereabouts of a recorded eleven-roomed gate house to the old hall.

The history of the park is manifest in its landscape where remains of ridge and furrow can be discerned in the winter shadows, and where old field names reflect the open field strips or "llains". The land was part of the Maenol holding of the bishops of Bangor and was purchased in 1533 by the Williams family of Cochwillan, one of the gentry families of Caernarfonshire. The earliest parts of the hall date from this time. In 1572 Thomas Wyn ap William was described as being of "Vaynol", the term Maenol



*View from the water garden towards the Old Hall*

© C.P.R.W.



*The parkland vista towards Elidir is compromised by the car park and a bund raised between the trees.*

© S.M. Roberts

or Y Faenol having been anglicised to Vaynol, which accounts for the variety of spelling in use today.

The estate was developed and extended during the seventeenth century when William Williams was appointed High Sheriff of Caernarfonshire in 1598 and created Baronet in 1622. However, in 1696 the then William Williams died childless and left his estate to the crown. Some years later William III gave the estate to John Smith of Cheshire, speaker of the House of Commons, who described it as "a tract of bogs and stones".

The succession of Assheton Smiths and Duff Assheton Smiths in the 19th Century saw the transformation of the neglected estate to parklands and gardens to meet their varying social needs. The money that fuelled these changes came from the slate industry which developed after 1809 when Thomas Assheton Smith took over the Dinorwic Quarry at Llanberis. In 1815 he agreed market prices for slate with the Penrhyn Quarry and together they dominated the slate market. This wealth enabled the family to develop the estate and New Hall, leaving the Old Hall and its associated buildings largely unaltered as the home farm. Thomas Assheton Smith inherited in 1828 and as a renowned fox-hunting man he opened up the parkland. He served as MP over many years and was very powerful in local politics. George Duff Assheton Smith inherited in 1869. He was keen on shooting, and stocked the park with deer and the semi-wild breed of Vaynol White Cattle which still survive as a rare breed today, offering the potential that at some time they could be returned to the park. He kept a menagerie of exotic animals which accounts for the bison hut, bear pit, lion house and seal pond which are still in existence. In 1904 he was succeeded by his brother Charles whose passion was for race horses. He had three Grand National winners and built for them a suitably impressive stable block. The gardens were developed by him in line with his use of the estate for grand entertaining.

After the First World War it became increasingly difficult to maintain an estate of this scale, but it was not until 1984 that it was put up for auction, and became subject to the multi-ownership which has resulted in piecemeal development without sufficient regard to the cultural heritage.

The continuity of ownership has preserved the diverse period character so that the landscape and its buildings have a high group value. The television programme "Restoration" gave high profile to Vaynol and portrayed the urgent need for conservation work, promoting an increased awareness of its significance and reflecting its national importance. The interest generated by the programme, together with the use of the park as the venue for the hugely successful Bryn Terfel Festival and the proposed 2005 Eisteddfod indicate the amenity value of this site, and this historic setting deserves to be more seriously preserved.

As Elizabeth Whittle (Cadw inspector of parks and gardens) concluded in the Vaynol Statement of Significance "It is an important part of the historic fabric of Wales."

## The North Wales Hospital, Denbigh

This hospital was created after the concerns raised by a report published in 1844 by the Metropolitan Commissioners on Lunacy. It opened in 1848 and those patients who were able to do so were employed in the hospital, grounds and farm. The farm played an important part in the life of the hospital until it was sold in 1958. The grounds were laid out in the contemporary manner of Victorian Parks with sections given over to producing both food and floral decorations. There was a bandstand for concerts in an area known as 'the airing courts' which was a fenced, secure area for patients who could not work. The grounds also had a bowling green, skittle ground and sports field.

The hospital closed in 1995 since when it has lain dormant, with no plans coming to fruition. It will probably become either a residential area or an industrial site.

*Daphne Goodwin*

## Hafodunos Hall, Llangernyw

This handsome grade 11\* listed building by the eminent architect Sir George Gilbert Scott was in the news on October 14 because of a devastating fire which gutted it. This compounds the damage due to neglect which has happened over the years because of its uncertain future and mixed past which included its use as a school. It had been bought to be converted into a luxury hotel with cabins in the ground, but even before the fire the building was in a dilapidated state, and the grounds uncared for. The site was once a monastery, of which there are now no traces. The gardens, which were developed with the house during the 19th century, had terraces and borders laid out near the house and walks further afield. Traces remain in the shape of overgrown rhododendrons and other plants. Objections had been raised against the proposed erection of ninety holiday lodges, in the gardens. As a result of this further destruction the future for Hafodunos looks very bleak.

*Daphne Goodwin*

## Gwrych Castle, Abergele

Another desolate site, where the house is a roofless shell, but with more going for it than the others in that there are several interested parties involved, and a feasibility study is being undertaken to consider its future. No concrete plans for its future have yet been formulated.

*Daphne Goodwin*

## Nanteos, Aberystwyth

The mansion and its remaining grounds including the lake have recently been sold and are to be used as a language school for Japanese students of English. The former owner planned but failed to convert the very grand stable block into residential units owing to planning restriction upon the type of letting which would be an appropriate use. Large stretches of the wall of the walled garden have fallen and have not been repaired and much investment in both house and garden is urgently needed before losses become irrecoverable.

*Caroline Palmer*

## Trawsgoed, Aberystwyth

The gardens have been severely neglected and irretrievable damage has been done to some of the trees in the Victorian arboretum. Unaccountably, the exceptionally fine multi-trunked Hiba (*Thujopsis dolabrata*) has been cut back to a single stem. The house appears to be once again on the market, but the conversion of the Victorian wing and new house-building in the vicinity of the walled garden has reduced the privacy and integrity of the core property and is likely to reduce its appeal to the sort of wealthy owner which it needs.

*Caroline Palmer*

## Garden with a Future

### The Cowbridge Physic Garden.

Members of the South and Mid Glamorgan Branch of the WHGT have enthusiastically formed a new charitable trust, The Cowbridge Physic Garden Trust under the chairmanship of Branch Chairman Dan Clayton Jones. Its purpose is to recreate a Physic Garden on the site of an enclosed garden within the medieval town walls of Cowbridge, which was formerly part of the gardens of Old Hall, the home of the Edmondes family for some 200 years.

The Edmondes family rose from the ranks of estate stewards and lawyers to the status of local gentry and included a number of prominent 19th century clerics. Old Hall remained in the family until the 1920s. However the house then became an adjunct of Cowbridge Grammar School and the site was used as a school kitchen garden and later as a Council Tree Nursery, before becoming an overgrown wilderness after years of neglect.

The Cowbridge Physic Garden initiative is particularly well-timed since it coincides with the 750th anniversary of the first

Borough Charter. It has attracted enthusiastic local support and also the attention of HRH the Prince of Wales, who visited Cowbridge on St David's Day 2004. Leases and planning permissions have been successfully negotiated and approaches made to the appropriate funding bodies.

The design of the garden, by landscape designer Anthony Jellard and garden historian Robin Whalley, will re-instate the paths and parterres of the 19th century garden and incorporate a raised walkway from which the garden may be viewed and a water-staircase eyecatcher at the margin adjoining Old Hall. The plantings will be designed in consultation with the Chelsea Physic Garden and other institutions. The garden will be open to the public and increase the amenity of Cowbridge and the public appreciation of the curative properties of plants. It is envisaged that the project will take about two years to complete.

A fuller account will appear in a future edition of *The Bulletin*.

*Hilary M. Thomas*

# A.G.M. at Leeswood, Near Mold

## Saturday, 12th June

This year's A.G.M. was held in the splendid surroundings of Leeswood Hall near Mold, Flintshire by the kind invitation of Pierre and Elizabeth Bartlett. The mansion and its magnificent grounds, one of the great treasures of North Wales, were the splendid creation in the 1720s of George Wynne, his architect Francis Smith of Warwick and his garden designer Stephen Switzer.

In the morning we gathered in the house, (which although still large is but a fraction of what was once built), for the prosaic business of the day. This was admirably chaired by our former Vice Chairman, Michael Tree now enthusiastically confirmed by all as the new Chairman, stepping into the shoes vacated by Tom Lloyd. We were guided swiftly but also comprehensively through a list of many important gardens in Wales and their problems and successes. This was followed by an encouraging report from the Treasurer who emphasised though that the WHGT is a campaigning body not a grant-giving one and we finished with an open question time. The meeting was followed by our guest speaker Mirabelle Osler who spoke delightfully about her own garden in Ludlow and a lifetime's gardening experiences. This was totally ad libbed without notes or slides and was a lecture that was a sheer pleasure to follow, filled as it was by her enthusiasm and lively sense of humour. It was a hard act for Pierre to follow but he held us enthralled with his individual look at the history of the house and a meandering through the intricacies of the restoration since he and Elizabeth came to live there 25 years ago. His enthusiasm for and love of the place were quite apparent.

We then adjourned to the other half of the ground floor for a delightful relaxed lunch followed by a guided tour of the gardens in the afternoon. Much of this is still un-worked on but this is hardly surprising considering the sheer scale of the original layout. There were though oases of restoration, acres in



*Members returning from the White Gates.*

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their own right, which are a great accolade to the Bartletts' vision and energy and a foretaste of what will happen to the rest in due course. In particular the extensive walled gardens have been beautifully brought back to life, their ancient tall brick walls lovingly repaired and set off by beautifully manicured lawns and luxuriant flower beds. Much effort and money has also gone into the 18th century vine house, recently restored with its many thousands of tiny panes of glass reinstated.

The party then embarked on a guided tour or should I say expedition, through the rest of Steven Switzer's thoroughly overgrown pleasure grounds. We felt like intrepid Amazonian explorers as we crept Indiana Jones like through what appeared to be impenetrable jungle. Without a machete between us, Pierre skilfully guided us around fallen trunks and over toppled branches and boughs and pointing out original features of the garden invariably cloaked in a screen of creepers, uttering magical throw-away lines such as "Oh yes there is another temple under there or at least what is left of it". After passing the circular lawn, now a mass of overgrown Victorian rhododendrons encircled by giant yew tree remnants of a former hedge, we finally emerged at a fence on the edge of the wooded area to look out over the lower park and the Black Gates. Threading our way along an ancient path we rejoined the old carriage drive and returned to the tamed open parkland before the house where we were able to gaze again on the highlight of the layout – the 100 foot screen of the White Gates flanking the road. Whether by Davies of nearby Wrexham or Bakewell of faraway Derbyshire they are a *tour de force* to rival anything at Chirk or Eaton. It was highly memorable afternoon and leaves one wondering whether perhaps Switzer's garden is best left in its current state.

*Jeremy Rye*



*The superbly restored vine house.*

© C.D.P.

The committee apologises to the members for a hiccup in the regular appearance of *The Bulletin* in the past year. As with so many voluntary organisations, the load tends to be carried by a gallant few, and those may find themselves overstretched. Our thanks go to Bettina Harden, who has edited recent editions, but has been undergoing eye surgery which prevents this sort of work. The committee has now appointed Dr Stephen Briggs, of the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales to edit *Gerddi*, and I have resumed the post of Bulletin Editor after an absence of almost three years.

My vision for the Bulletin is that it should be topical, reporting on Trust activities and pre-occupations and giving members advance notice of events planned by the Branches. However I feel it should also provide a platform for short pieces of original descriptive research by members of the Trust. There

are many members who have unique knowledge of at least one Welsh garden – who built it, what are the characteristic plantings, what is its present condition, and what fortune or misfortunes now attend it. 800-1000 words and a couple of pictures is sufficient to throw fresh light upon many a worthwhile but little-known garden, and serves to increase awareness of our garden heritage. I appeal to all the Branches to delegate a member to submit such a description of an interesting garden on their patch.

Looking further ahead, the Trust very much hopes that eventually every Branch may publish a book in the style of the volume recently produced by Ceredigion (see review p.7). An excursion into writing up a single garden for *The Bulletin* could form the prototype for just such a venture.

Caroline Palmer

## Trust Events for 2005

Saturday 25 June

### Hafod, Ceredigion. A review of the work of the Hafod Partnership.

Hafod, when drawn to the attention of members by the newly-formed WHGT, was a commercial Forestry Commission upland in which the foundations of Thomas Johnes' mansion stood fenced off from the parkland, and the once-famous paths through the landscape were for the most part impassable.

Twelve years and around £1,000,000 later, paths and bridges have been sensitively re-instated and it is now possible to explore the routes described by late 18th and 19th century travellers, on or close to their original courses. Forest Enterprise also has made great strides in designing its harvesting and afforestation strategy to ameliorate the blockish impact of 20th century plantings.

The day will be hosted by Jenni Macve, administrator of The Hafod Trust and author of the newly-published guide *The Hafod Landscape*. Members will be greeted with coffee, an introductory talk and a visit to the old kitchen garden followed by a buffet lunch and a guided tour of parts of the restored walks. Those eager to explore all the walks are advised to secure accommodation locally and return to the estate on Sunday, for there is more than can be seen in a day.

Price approximately £20 to include lunch. Booking form will be circulated in March.

9-11 September

### Study weekend:

#### Water and Ornament in the garden.

The venue will be in North Wales but details are not yet firm. The details of the programme are still being worked out. A good team of speakers has already been recruited and there will be visits to gardens where water features are an important part of the landscape.

## Branch News

Some branches hold meetings only in the summer months and for this reason have little to report at present. It is hoped that all branches will supply fuller information in the next edition of *The Bulletin*. For further information see Branch Contacts listed on page 8.

### Brecon and Radnor

**3 March:** AGM at Penpont, Brecknock, followed by a talk by Pat Mosely of the Ruperra Trust, and buffet supper. £8.00

**16 April:** Visit to Ruperra. Bring a picnic.

**10 July:** Summer Garden Party, with afternoon tea at Treberfydd, Brecon, by courtesy of Lt. Col. D P Garnon-Williams.

**17 September:** Study Day at the Welsh National Botanic Garden.

**20 October:** Autumn Lecture in Llandrindod Wells. The speaker will be Helena Attlee, talking about some aspects of Italian gardens.

**Carmarthen** The Branch has recently been re-started after several fallow years. A programme is being worked out.

**Ceredigion:** The Branch has had a very active year publishing and promoting the book *Historic Parks and Gardens in Ceredigion*. A new programme of garden visits will be finalised in the spring.

**Gwent:** Sadly this Branch has disbanded.

### Gwynedd

**15 March:** AGM at Sieont Manor Hotel, Caernarvon.

**April:** A study day on the theme of walled gardens.

**30 April:** Annual Plant Fayre at Crug Farm Nursery.

**11 May:** Garden visit to Aberartrro Hall, Llanbedr, followed by tea at Las Ynys, near Harlech, home of Ellis Wynn, of 'The Sleeping Bard'.

**July:** Garden visit to Ceredigion.

**September 16-18:** Excursion to Harrogate Flower Show and Harlow Carr.

**September 29:** Michaelmas Lunch.

### Pembrokeshire

**17th January:** Richard Gilbertson to talk on Statuary gardens, and Gerry Hudson, Branch Recorder, on local research findings.

**21st February:** Stephen Briggs to talk on Archaeology of Welsh Gardens.

**22nd March:** Tom Lloyd to talk on The Settings of Pembrokeshire Houses. All meetings at 7.30 pm at the Rising Sun, Pelcombe Cross, Haverfordwest.

**South and Mid Glam.** The Cowbridge Physic Garden project progresses.

## W.H.G.T. Excursion to Breconshire Saturday, 10th July

The WHGT in conjunction with The Georgian Group in Wales organised a visit to two private gardens near Brecon on Saturday 10th July. The first of these was kindly opened for us by WHGT members Mr and Mrs Michael Evans of Fwllgrychlh. The large stuccoed Regency house was an Italianate essay by Robert Lugar, better known for his work at Glanusk Park and Maesllwch Castle. The house is set amongst fine mature trees in about four acres of garden filled with lawn, a large walled garden and mature shrubs. It is blessed with a magnificent outlook on to the Brecon Beacons, part still in the ownership of the estate. Much appreciated by all was the lovely woodland walk up the side of the stream which emerged from an atmospheric darkened canopy of mature hardwoods and flowed across the garden in front of the house. For those who ventured upstream, the rewards were worthwhile, for the stream had been made to flow over rocky waterfalls, while the path, which has been carefully restored by the present owners, winds backwards and forwards across it. The paths then led up into a large sixty-acre wood.

After a quick look around the cathedral church, we retreated for lunch to the restaurant in the basement of the buildings attached to Brecon Priory where we were well feasted. This was followed in the afternoon by a visit to Abercamlais, one of the two old Williams family houses side by side between Brecon and Sennybridge, where the current owner, Mrs Susan Ballance, welcomed us. Still the centre of a large thriving estate, like its sister house Penpont only a few hundred yards away, the two properties have been in the same family's ownership since the 16th century. Once again we enjoyed an ancient Welsh mansion sitting amongst mature deciduous trees in a

beautiful position but with the added attraction of being able to cast a fly from the back bedroom windows into the River Usk – pure bliss for any fisherman. The garden, which merges into a small park on the south side, extends around the house and the traditional whitewashed Brecknockshire estate buildings, and down to the river. This is spanned by a magnificent 17th century stone bridge (for those more adventurous there was a rather fragile looking 19th century metal suspension bridge too) which leads to the early walled garden. A particular highlight of the grounds is a magnificent tall 18th century stone tower straddling a stream, which served both as a pigeon house and outside latrine. The square lower portion was pierced by opposing arches to serve as a bridge but also supported the massive masonry of the upper octagonal section on oak beams. Sadly an earlier restoration had stripped out the pigeonholes. I doubt very much if the environment agency would allow its use as a latrine any longer!

Later we were treated to a view of the interior of the principally 18th century house, lined with Georgian panelling and still containing much of the original contents, unlike its sister house Penpont which was stripped of its much finer contents in a Sothebys house sale in the early 1990s. Mrs Ballance very kindly gave us a guided tour, one of the highlights of which was a carved marble fireplace from Fonthill Splendens. A wonderful tea laid on in the dining room concluded the visit. The thanks of the Society go to Susan Ballance for all her effort and hospitality and to Michael Tree and Richard Gilbertson for arranging the day.

*Jeremy Rye*

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## The Gwynedd Branch Study Day and Tour of Glynllifon

This chance to look closely into the history of Glynllifon and the Newborough family was not to be missed, and a splendid group of members and visitors assembled on June 10 for our Study Day. Gwynedd Chairman Sheila Roberts, who lived for ten years at Plas Newydd on the Glynllifon estate, together with Olive Horsfall did an excellent job organising a memorable day.

We began the day in the new education/conference room in the Park with a lecture by local historian John Dilwyn Williams, whose researches into the estate go back to the Battle of Chester in 616 and the very beginning of North Wales itself, with the division from England of "Hen Gogledd". We were quickly fascinated by a succession of tough Welshmen who marked the beginnings of the Glynllifon family: Cilwyn Droddu and Tudur Goch among them. Eventually, the surname Glyn from Glynllifon was adopted: in the 16th century William Glynllifon became William Glyn, and the estate became known as Plas y Glyn. Over the years, these men greatly influenced other prominent families in North Wales, and in turn were greatly influenced by them, largely through marriage.

By the eighteenth century Lord Newborough was a man of influence, and the general belief is that the title took its name from Newborough on Ynys Môn. In fact, when Sir John Wynn was created the first Lord Newborough in 1776, he took the title from Ireland. He married twice, firstly Lady Catherine Perceval, sister to Spencer Perceval (the only British Prime Minister ever to have been assassinated) and secondly, Maria Stella Chiapini, an Italian girl of only 13, in 1786 when he was 50! He fathered two sons, the eldest, Thomas John, inheriting the estate when he was only five! Dr Samuel Johnson is said to have been a frequent visitor. Altogether a fascinating history.

Sheila then went on to trace the history of the estate itself: the woodlands were cut down for fuel in the 1700s, when the weather was poor, and with no wood for fencing, the sheep, goats and other

animals ate everything in sight. Records show that, in the 1820s, nearly five million trees were planted. Acquiring land for tree planting had become a major pre-occupation of the gentry, and local people became deprived of land by enclosures. When the famous nursery was created, trees were planted close together to withstand wind and rain, and thinned out when they touched, with the additional purpose of providing the village people with faggots for burning.

We followed these two excellent lectures with lunch in the Black Cat Café, and a short tour of those parts of the park still open to the public before what was surely the high spot of the day – something that was not on the original programme and was totally unexpected. Sheila had managed to get permission from the owner for us to visit the tree nursery planted by the second Lord Newborough in the 1820s. It was quite amazing, an enchanted forest that left us almost speechless. There, hidden away in the woods, said to include trees and plants from all over the world, was an idyllic little house, beside a round pond that gave its name, Pwll Crwn, to the house. Among the lines of trees was Lord Newborough's potting shed, still looking as good as when it was built. Small greenhouses, woodpiles and cleared pathways testified to the hard work put in by the owners during their years there, but now the house and nursery was up for sale, and we all felt greatly privileged to be able to see this huge slice of Gwynedd history before a new owner took over.

The house, multi-sided but not quite hexagonal, was built for the third Lord Newborough before 1840. The existing garden/nursery covers nearly eight acres, and there are still other delights to be found, including the 1918 maze, sections of which have been discovered. Thanks are due to Sheila and Dai Roberts for making it possible for us to visit the "secret nursery", and to owner Mrs Tilley for welcoming us so wholeheartedly.

*Mary Garner, August 2004*

## Historic Parks and Gardens in Ceredigion

by Caroline Palmer with Penny David and Ros Laidlaw.

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Available from the publisher, Ceredigion Branch WHGT, Coed Glantawe, Esgairdawe, Llandeilo SA19 7RT Price £10 including postage.

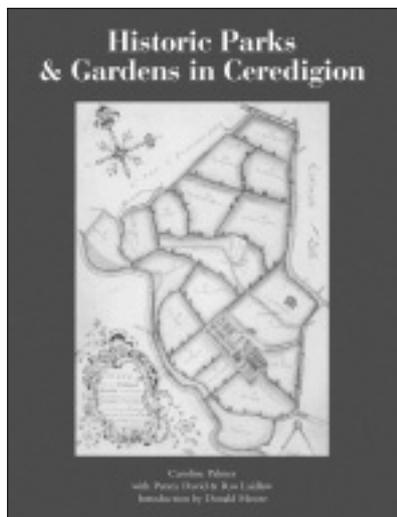
Historic houses and their gardens and parks in Wales have suffered more from neglect than those in most counties of England. There are economic and social reasons for this. It is only very recently in Wales, as also in Ireland, that the legacy of country houses has been accepted as a source of pride and pleasure. Another reason for their neglect has been ignorance of their quality and value. Apart from Tom Lloyd's *Lost Houses of Wales* there has been no comprehensive study of Welsh country houses. Gardens have fared better. The Cadw/ICOMOS Register has set standards which, deplorably, England and Wales have not attempted to attain.

It is inevitable, however, that the Register deals only with the minority of very important gardens. In Ceredigion the Register lists eleven parks and gardens. In this splendid book Caroline Palmer and her colleagues have described not just these eleven, but also a further twenty various parks and gardens. They are well aware that many other equally interesting gardens remain to be investigated and researched. Nonetheless we have admirable descriptions of gardens which were previously little known.

These descriptions contain a great deal of new information researched by the Ceredigion Branch of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust. Even in well-recorded gardens such as Hafod, there is fresh information and new insights. An additional pleasure of the book is the care with which historic illustrations and estate plans have been selected. The article on Llanaeron for instance has some delightful drawings by Mrs Pearson, who was presumably Mrs Lewis' sister. It is perhaps not well-known that Mrs Lewis of Llanaeron's nephew inherited the great nineteenth century prodigy house of Harlaxton in Lincolnshire.

Caroline Palmer, her colleagues and the Ceredigion Branch of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust have put us all in their debt. The book is produced to a very high standard and at a reasonable price. It is greatly to be hoped that other branches of the Trust will emulate Ceredigion. It would be wonderful if all Wales was to be covered by similar books.

*John R.E. Borron*



## How accessible is your garden?



From this October the Disability Discrimination Act will require all service providers, both public and private, to ensure access for disabled people. Not surprisingly, many owners of gardens and houses which open to the public are concerned that to continue to operate within the law could mean costly modifications.

However, there is a proviso, you are only expected to make "reasonable adjustments". The problem is knowing what constitutes 'reasonable' when the natural features of the garden or buildings are not user-friendly for disabled visitors.

Guidance to the Act states that: "Service providers should consider whether their services are accessible to disabled people, and anticipate their needs and the adjustments that may have to be made for them, rather than waiting until a disabled person wants to use a service."

It goes on to say: "If it is impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service, the providers of that service may be required to: take reasonable steps to change working practices, policies or procedures; or provide a reasonable alternative method of making services available to disabled people. Reasonable steps to provide an auxiliary aid or service (if that would enable or make it easier for disabled people to use the services) must be taken."

The Act expects service providers to make 'reasonable adjustments' in order to better meet the requirements of disabled people, subject to a number of key factors. These include taking the resources of the organisation concerned (financial, human and physical) into account. For example, the National Trust or a stately home may be expected to respond differently to the requirements of their disabled visitors compared to the owners of a private garden that is occasionally open to the public.

However, this does not mean that small operators can ignore the requirements of the legislation – but it does indicate that the law recognises the need for different approaches which reflect the size and nature of a particular enterprise. It is also important to recognise that the law does not expect you to have to respond to unreasonable requests.

At the same time the guide defines 'reasonable adjustments' as being any measures that can help disabled people enjoy the service as much as a non-disabled person. Like so much new legislation there are grey areas which will only become clear when there have been test cases in the courts.

The Disability Rights Commission has a code of practice which, while not the law, can be used by the courts to determine cases. The code states that service providers must anticipate the likely requirements of disabled visitors and not just respond to requests from individuals.

Until there is clearer guidance as to how the law will be interpreted it has to be a case of using your commonsense. Some local authorities have a disability officer who can provide guidance, alternatively you could employ the services of a professional access consultant or auditor to assess your property.

Whatever changes you make to your premises to comply with the new act make sure that they are included in your property insurance and check that you have sufficient public liability cover. A chat to your local NFU Mutual agent, who has knowledge of local requirements, can ensure that you and your property are properly protected.

For further information

The Disability Rights Commission can be contacted on 08457 622 633 (Monday to Friday – 08:00 to 20:00) or by e-mail: [enquiry@drc-gb.org](mailto:enquiry@drc-gb.org)

Details of access consultants can be found on the National Register of Access Consultants web site: [www.nrac.org.uk](http://www.nrac.org.uk)

NFU Mutual has a range of insurance policies for small businesses and country homes. For more information or to find the nearest of NFU Mutual's 598 local agents call 0800 975 0600 or visit [www.nfumutual.co.uk](http://www.nfumutual.co.uk).

## Gerddi-WWW.

The sites featured in this issue are closely related to the work of the WHGT:

<http://www.archivesnetworkwales.info>

Archives Network Wales. A searchable index to archives held by Record Offices in Wales, currently being compiled (Anglesey and Conwy fully covered, other areas: major collections only at present). Includes archives, located in various places, on historic houses and gardens.

<http://www.cbhc.gov.uk/coflein>

Coflein, the National Monuments Record of Wales online database contains details of historic gardens with selected images. The database contains fewer sites than the CARN database, but is 'prettier'.

<http://cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk>

The website of the Cowbridge Physic Garden Trust, which was established and sponsored by members of the South and Mid Glamorgan Branch of the WHGT. See p. 3.

Val Caple, Milestone, Penllyn, Cowbridge, CF71 7RQ  
Phone 01446-775794 e-mail: val.t.caple@care4free.net

## And also visit <http://www.pulham.org.uk/>

Claude Hitching is currently researching the lives and work of the Pulhams with a view to producing a book, provisionally titled *The Pulham Legacy*, about them. The firm, which specialised in garden rockwork, was formed in the early 1800s and flourished under four generations of James Pulham, until its demise c.1939.

Claude's interest stems from the fact that no fewer than five of his ancestors – including his grandfather and great-grandfather – all used to work for them as 'Rock Builders'.

Wherever economically or practically possible, Pulhams would always prefer to construct their rock gardens from natural stone, but, if this was not available, they would literally 'build their own' by making heaps of old bricks and rubble, and coating these with cement. The craftsmanship of their workmen was in their ability to sculpt the surfaces of these 'rocks' to simulate natural stone – hence their quite literal job description of 'rock builder'.

In the 1840s the second James Pulham moved to Broxbourne, where he built a new house for himself, and a 'manufactory' in which he produced a wide range of garden ornaments – vases, fountains, balustrading etc. – from his own 'Pulhamite' cement and terracotta. These became extremely well known and sought after, and he won a number of medals for his work at the 1851, 1861 and 1862 Exhibitions in London and Paris.

The late 19th century was their most prolific period, and one of their most spectacular projects in Wales was the recently re-discovered 'Hidden Gardens of Dewstow,' near Newport.

The company records do not survive, so Claude is most eager to hear of any examples of the firm's work which is known to members. The Ceredigion Branch, for example, can reveal that at Trawsgoed the formal fish pond is ornamented with urns and balustrades marked Pulham of Broxbourne.

Do visit Claude's most excellent illustrated website, and send him any snippets of news by E-mail: [claudio@hitching.net](mailto:claudio@hitching.net) or by post: 11 Asquith House, Guessens Road, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6QA. Telephone: 01707 323391

Caroline Palmer

## Garden History Society Tour of Northwest Wales Gardens

Seven nights in single en suite accommodation at University of Wales Heritage Holiday Centre, Bangor with full board, packed lunches. Arrive Wednesday 30th March, leave Wednesday 6th April 2005. Gardens to be visited include Bodnant, Portmeirion, Brondanw, Bodysgallen, Bryn Eisteddfod, Nanhoron, Gwydir Castle, Plas yn Rhiw, Penrhyn Castle, Bodelwyddan. Several splendidly restored mansions with Jacobean and Georgian interiors with Victorian overlay.

Cost is £500 all inclusive. A few places are still available.

Apply to Col R. H. Gilbertson, Coed-y-Ffynnon, Lampeter Velfrey, Narberth, Pembrokeshire.

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For information, details of the Guide to Historic parks and Gardens of Wales, and news see our website <http://gardensofwales.org.uk>



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