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Summer 2006

Gardening at Plas yn Rhiw

by Corrie Price

“Small, but full of treasures.” (Graham Stuart Thomas)

Plas yn Rhiw, a small manor house and garden, is one of the National Trust's lesser-known treasures and is situated roughly four miles from the tip of the Llyn peninsula in north Wales, not far from the popular seaside village of Aberdaron. The property sits snugly in the shelter of a wooded hillside overlooking Porth Neigwl - a wide bay with views as far south as St. David's head on a clear day. It is tucked away from the prevailing winds that frequently rock the village of Rhiw above it, and the consequent micro-climate, aided by the sea's proximity, affords planting possibilities not available to less fortunate gardeners on more exposed areas of the peninsula.

The Plas yn Rhiw estate consists of several Grade II listed buildings including the manor house itself, which is open to visitors, and a detached cottage immediately adjacent to the house

that earns its keep as a holiday let. A summerhouse is attached to the lower gable end of the cottage, next to what is now the toolshed. Several outbuildings nearby form the nucleus of what was a working farmstead until around 1840. Those still in possession of a roof are used as workshops and storage areas. Others, now ivy-clad ruins, lend structure and a romantic essence to the house and its surroundings. What remains of an old mill alongside a fast-flowing stream hints at the estate's importance during the seventeenth century, when it was granted Royal permission to grind its own corn. Records also exist of open court sessions held at Plas yn Rhiw during this period, which again highlights the significance of the property in the parish of Rhiw at that time.

The house's history dates as far back as the Middle Ages and the site of the original dwelling probably further, boasting royal descent from a ninth-century king of north Wales, a grandson of



Looking up through Lady Strickland's Garden towards the house.

© Corrie Price



© Corrie Price

The parterre in Lady Strickland's Garden, viewed from the terrace above it.

whom was the first of this line to settle in Rhiw. The Lewis family was responsible, during the late Stuart/early Tudor period, for building a large part of the house that stands today. The date 1634 and the initials I.L. are engraved on a window lintel at the north end of the house. The walls, built with enormous stones and measuring a depth of six and a half feet in places, were certainly built to last. Similar stones are used as gateposts and seats within the garden.

The house was extended upwards and outwards to include another wing and a third floor shortly after the marriage of Jane Ann Lewis, heiress of the estate, to Lewis Moore Bennett in 1816. They gave the front of the house a Regency face-lift, stuccoed the walls and added a verandah. This was the last serious phase of building to take place in the history of Plas yn Rhiw. The estate remained in the Lewis family until 1874, when it was put up for sale for the first time in its history. The new owner was Thomas Roberts of Aberdaron, known locally for his short temper and skilled horsemanship. When Mr Roberts died, the estate passed to his son, who never lived at Plas yn Rhiw but let the house and land to tenants. By 1922, after a long period of neglect, the house became unfit for habitation and was finally abandoned altogether.

Clough Williams-Ellis, architect and creator of Portmeirion village, somehow discovered the house and its plight some time later and made attempts to contact the owner with a view to purchasing the property on behalf of a relative. The cousin was willing to buy, but the owner remained 'incommunicado', to coin Sir Clough's expression, and it wasn't to be. In 1939, at long last, the owner put Plas yn Rhiw up for sale. Sir Clough's cousin had by now moved on, and was no longer in need of a house. Obviously touched by this lost property, Sir Clough clutched at yet another

straw and contacted the Keatings, friends of his from Nottingham who had settled in Rhiw and were looking for somewhere to live.

The Keating sisters, Eileen, Lorna and Honora were passionate conservationists and their interest centred on the landscape in this corner of the Llyn peninsula. Their goal, since settling in the area with their elderly mother, was to purchase as much of the land about them as possible, with the eventual aim of leaving it all to the National Trust. Consequently, when they heard that the Plas yn Rhiw estate had become available for sale, they initially viewed the purchase as a way to buy up a substantial amount of land. The house they considered beyond repair, until Clough Williams-Ellis came to have a look and voiced his respected opinion. On inspecting the roof, he is said to have exclaimed that it was better than his, and expressed his belief that the house would make a fine home after some extensive restoration work.

As the work on the house progressed, the Keatings decided against retaining the Regency façade and opted instead to remove the stucco and reveal the original grey stone walls. This unravelling of history proved to be worthwhile - it restored a sense of vernacular to the house, which complemented both the buildings adjacent to it and the surrounding landscape. Once the house became habitable again, the sisters and their mother moved in and, satisfied with their efforts in this department, their attention turned to the garden. The mass of brambles was cleared, under which they discovered box hedges and the outline of a formal parterre on the terrace below the house. Bit by bit, they uncovered further clues and were left with a fairly distinct impression of the garden that had existed before neglect and nature took over.

Local legend tells of a Lady Strickland, a tenant of the house for long summers at the end of the nineteenth century, who was

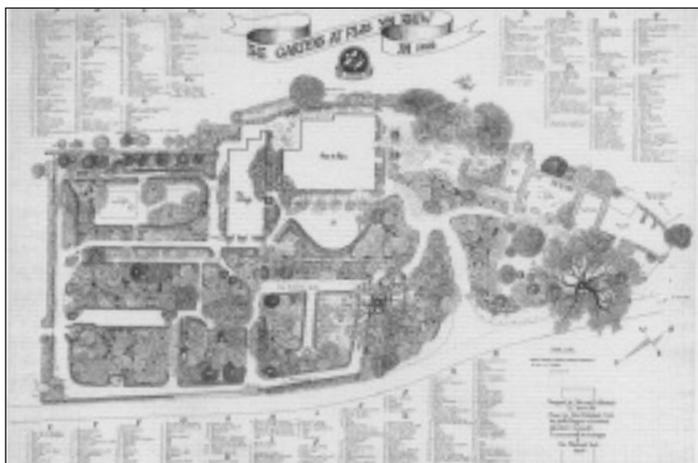
instrumental in setting out the initial design of the garden. This consisted of the parterre directly below the house, along with several other rooms, or compartments, each reached by a maze of narrow, box-edged paths and all surrounded by beds and borders, again edged with box. Lady Strickland is said to have travelled regularly to Italy and it is supposed that she was keen to re-create ideas she had picked up from gardens she saw there.

The parterre at Plas yn Rhiw is still referred to as Lady Strickland's Garden. No records exist to support this theory of the garden's conception, but the reliability of tales passed down through generations of local families, has proved fairly consistent in the past. As it is all we have to go on, we must trust in it being at least partly factual. A 25 inch Ordnance Survey map of 1889 shows the garden detail as being very similar to today's layout. It is very possible that the house was already being let by this time, adding strength to the Lady Strickland story.

The garden covers an area of just under an acre. It enjoys a sloping south-easterly aspect, an advantageous micro-climate, and good, workable soil. Box hedges abound, some in better condition than others. The planting has suffered some losses over the years, but efforts are being made to re-introduce original varieties. Mildred Eldridge, an artist and the wife of poet R.S. Thomas, produced the earliest known planting plan in 1966. The couple lived in a cottage on the Plas yn Rhiw estate and knew the Keatings well. No subsequent planting records were made until 1994, when a much more thorough plan of the garden was drawn by John Hubbard, a garden designer and consultant based in Aberdaron.

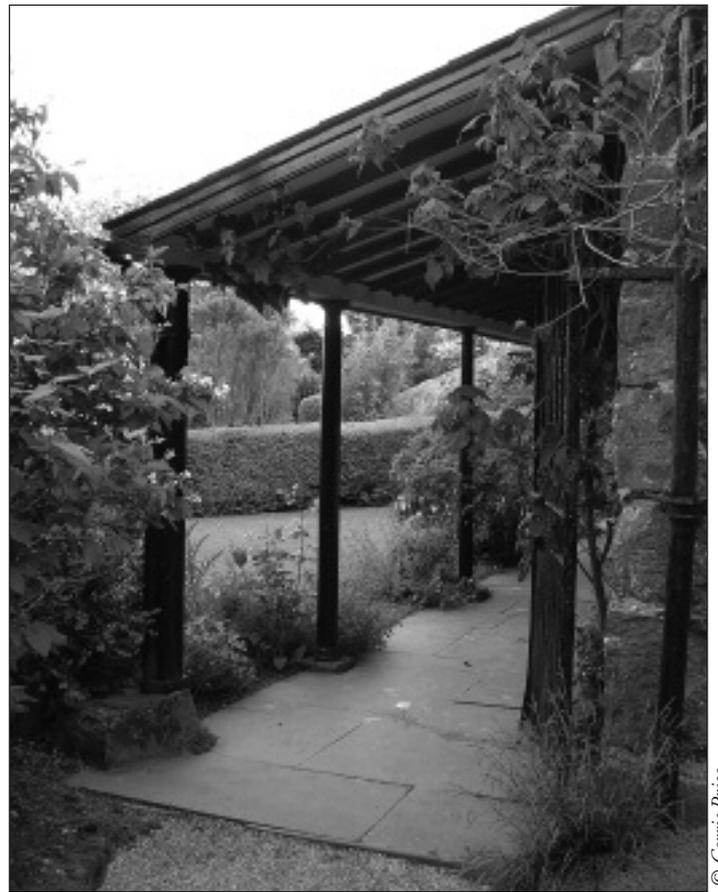
The conservation plan for the garden at Plas yn Rhiw takes into account the individual style and personalities of the three sisters who restored and developed the garden for over twenty years before placing it in the care of the National Trust. We know, for instance, that Honora Keating, the keener plantswoman of the three sisters, derived great pleasure from introducing new and unusual varieties, sourced from abroad and from her contacts at gardens such as Penrhyn Castle and Bodnant. A *Magnolia campbelli* var. *mollicomata*, planted in 1947 by Honora, was one of the very few recorded planting activities carried out by the sisters.

The parterre is a key focal point – two rectangular beds contain herbaceous flora typical to the cottage garden. Specimen plants such as old roses, *Leptospermum*, and *Grevillea* supply structure and form. A delightful carpet of self-seeded wild flowers completes the picture. Snowdrops, Bluebells, Forget-me-nots and Campion, to name but a few - they are all here in abundance. The area to the south of the garden is dedicated to larger beds, or shrubberies, in



© National Trust

Garden plan drawn in 1994 by John R. Hubbard, garden designer.



© Corrie Price

View through the verandah, looking south towards the shrubbery terraces.

which several fairly rare species can be found. Along the path edges, as if to light the way, the golden Welsh poppy, *Meconopsis cambrica*, has merrily self-seeded – another happy accident.

The careful balance of native and cultivated plants in this garden is vital to the overall effect – its cottage garden mantle dictates that it must never be too tidy, but if one's back is turned for just a fraction too long, nature takes over and an air of neglect is quickly apparent. It is this very balance that makes the garden unique. The Keating sisters were fiercely protective of the wildlife within their garden, and they expressed a deep desire to safeguard its protection after the National Trust took over. Plas yn Rhiw is now one of but a handful of NT gardens to carry the organic flag, although it has not sought official organic status as yet.

The sisters dedicated Plas yn Rhiw to their parents, John and Constance Keating. A slate plaque outside the entrance to the garden displays their details, along with the poignant epitaph, "There is no death while memory lives". This message fulfills the legacy of these three incredible sisters whose strength of character made such a difference not only to Plas yn Rhiw, but to the landscape of the Lley Peninsula.

Corrie Price trained in Cardiff and subsequently worked as a gardener for Cardiff City Council's Parks Department. She has been the Gardener-In-Charge at Plas yn Rhiw since April 2005 and lives on site.

DAYS/HOURS OF OPENING:

May 31st to September 30th Every day except Tuesday – 12-5

October 1st to 22nd Weekends Only – 12-4

October 23rd to 29th Every day – 12-4

Cost of entry to non-NT members: House & Garden £3.40

Garden Only £2.20

AGM at Monaughty – Saturday 24th June 2006

Enjoying a day of warm sunshine, nearly ninety people congregated for this year's AGM, hosted in Radnorshire's finest 16th century house, Monaughty which nestles in the hills near Knighton.

The vast stone U shaped mansion dating from circa 1560 was built by the Price family who were local landowners and also courtiers supporting Sir Phillip Sidney (whose arms, together with those of Elizabeth I, are painted on wall of the Great Hall). Two generations later, the last major alterations in 1638 bankrupted the Prices and the house slumbered in gentle decline little altered and wholly un-modernised as a tenanted farmhouse. On the point of collapse in the mid 20th century it was saved only by an early Historic Buildings Council grant and then by its purchase in the early 1970s by our hosts Douglas and Sophie Blain. With their experience with the Spitalfields Trust and SAVE Britain's Heritage they have spent the last 35 years lovingly bringing the house and gardens back to life.

The AGM took place in the enormous ground floor hall with its oak armorial carved screen beneath a heavily beamed compartmented ceiling, its thick stone walls and flagged floor retaining much of Radnorshire's previous winter's chill. We were thankful indeed for the warm day outside, which brought a glimmer of light into the gloom and also a small trickle of warmth to help the struggling fire. Here the mandatory business of the day was started with Michael Tree, our Chairman, talking about the year's events and challenges. He dwelt particularly on the Public Inquiry at Vaynol where the local council, the WDA and local developers seem intent on destroying one of Wales's most ancient parks, containing numerous listed buildings, by intruding not one but two light industrial estates. The WHGT has linked up with the National Trust at the Public Inquiry and there is a feeling that we have done our very best. We await the outcome.

The Treasurer then reported that, in spite of increased costs, in

editing the Bulletin and an honorarium for the Secretary, the growth in reserve funds is still being maintained (13% up on the previous year) and the finances were therefore healthy. He also congratulated the Chairman in negotiating with the National Trust to pick up most of the costs of the Vaynol inquiry, with a bill to WHGT a fraction of what it could have been.

The formal part of the day was then rounded off with

Tom Pritchard offering a vision for the future, which included building on the Gateway success with more access for disadvantaged groups and others we would not normally get to our gardens, together with bringing in younger supporters. He also emphasised the need for us to become a statutory consultee in the planning process.

Our guest speaker, Sir Roy Strong then talked to us for 20 minutes about the preservation movement in general, of which he of course has been a prime mover. Although he saw the 20th century's main threat was to the country house, that of the 21st



Jeremy Rye, Michael Tree and Ros Laidlaw in the west garden.

© Jeremy Rye



The elaborate oak trellis finials rear above exuberant planting outside the east garden.

© Jeremy Rye

century he saw as a threat to the churches, whose survival he believed would become, in our increasingly agnostic society, evermore fragile; redundancies could be in the thousands and a means to support the best of these without butchering or re-developing needed to be found. He then went on to congratulate the WHGT on its work and for its obviously thriving membership of nearly 700 drawn predominantly from Wales. This he contrasted with national conservation groups such as the Georgian Group or the Victorian Society with a UK wide membership stable at around 3000. He congratulated the Trust on the progress it had made since the early, difficult years when he had served as a Trustee.

The last item before lunch was a wonderful slide show (run via power cable from the only socket within the house) gently compered by Sophie Blain. Emphasising the garden, she took us stage by stage through the history of the property and the ethos of its restoration and transformation since the 1970s. Here again was another example of how the survival of the garden was totally dependent on the survival of the house. Although the house survived relatively unscathed with the garden it had been a different matter. Over the last 250 years it had been virtually levelled flat by grazing sheep and farm animals, but there were enough hints in the ground to suggest where the present terracing and footpaths had been.

Additionally, the setting had been compromised in 1965 by the embanking of the A488 to the east of the house and the demolition of virtually all the 17th century farm buildings and the farm mill to the south, which were replaced by the first large-scale cattle shed in Radnorshire largely paid for by a Government grant! Both these problems have been admirably dealt with, first by extending the garden up the bank to the road edge and secondly by constructing a new range of traditional-looking buildings to obscure the view of the shed. The best of these is a Piranesiesque barn with cast concrete columns of cyclopean proportions. As with all the work at Monaughty the attention to texture and detail is faultless.

On the west side of the house, the sensible garden of lawn flanked by two mature cedars (one sadly now deceased) and low clipped box balls gives little hint of the riot of manicured hedge and trellis on the east principal front. Based on what they found beneath the trampled soil, in conjunction with scholarly research and conjecture, the Blains have created one of the finest Jacobethan gardens anywhere. A formal medley of carefully laid stonework, clipped box and Irish yew, pleached trees, and roses rioting over wooden pillars, its crowning glory is the elaborate tall oak trellis screen with architectural openings, alcoves and figure and trophy finials derived from surviving pattern books of the period. It would provide the ideal backdrop to an Inigo Jones masque. Sadly due to the lifespan of such constructions none of the originals survive anywhere when they must once have been plentiful. This at Monaughty must be one of the largest recreation in the UK and all is made on what thirty years ago was no more than an overgrown sloping field. The whole is surrounded by further terracing, screen plantings and an enveloping yew hedge and oak palisade. There is also a reconstructed Victorian glasshouse, and a new knot garden. For those not exhausted there was escape to the more open informal recently-created wild garden criss-crossed with walkways and bridges down by the cooling waters of the river Lugg.

The house around which this wonderful garden is wrapped proved an equal fascination for us all. Its towering stone walls, leaded windows and stone-tiled roofs (with the most fantastic re-

created wood and lead 17th century guttering and downpipe system) formed a backdrop to the rampant flora outside. Tours of the inside, where no mains services are connected, (the Blains made an early decision not to try to live in the house) lasted all afternoon with even a wheel chair carried up the principal steep stair to the first floor Great

Chamber where the ribbed plasterwork ceiling has been beautifully re-created, complete with fake cracks and sagging, from a small surviving section. Endless stairs and corridors led to other rooms containing panelling and massive oak beams; each principal bedroom has its own garderobe, some even flushing with roof water into a still-extant Tudor septic tank. One room had been rather incongruously fitted out in early Georgian style with dado, cornicing and fireplace by the then landlord and owner for a hoped-for visit by the French philosopher Rousseau. Rising from beside the ground floor hall to the timber-topped Prospect Chamber, the principal stairs which had bankrupted the last Price summarised the two strands that were evident in the house. Courtly in its grand aspirations, its over-steep but broad steps suddenly narrowed to half width to fit around a masonry pier in a way that could only happen in Wales. It and the surrounding walls clearly showed though how close the house came to being lost. The heavy moulded handrail was deeply pitted from years of running water and an adjoining timber-framed wall looked on the point of collapse into the cellars due to massive overloading. However, in the last 35 years all has been stabilised, carefully stitched back together, with missing elements replaced. Any new work is carefully toned down back to the original unrestored finishes and the house is filled with wonderful pieces of untouched old furniture of the same massive proportions as the house. It feels as if the building has been left undisturbed since the last Price died, in debt, before the outbreak of the Civil War.

The atmosphere is one of seeming decay but held firmly in check. The cleaner's brush is sparingly used and the house boasts what must be the finest cobwebs in Wales; a film producers dream. Gwydir in Conwy invites comparison as does the feather touch of the National Trust at Chasleton in Oxfordshire. When the history of the fall and rise of the British country house and garden in the 20th century comes to be written, this will be one of the greats.

The WHGT are deeply grateful to Douglas and Sophie Blain for opening up what is a very private house and also allowing us to use their even more private home behind to receive members and as a base for the day's meals.



Formal yews in the east garden overlooked by the Prospect Chamber.

© Jeremy Rye

Jeremy Rye

A Visit to Piercefield

Reflections on the WHGT Study Day – Saturday 13 May 2006

I have a lifelong affection for the River Wye. As a boy I fished one of its most beautiful pools and in later years lived in a house close by the magnificent and romantic remains of Goodrich Castle. Over the years I have driven the roads which run parallel with the river in its lower and upper reaches and admired the rapidly breaking water, the steep, luxuriantly wooded banks and its rich water-meadows.

I used to know an old managing clerk with whom I worked in a city law firm who told me that he had travelled in a little train which used to run in the lower Wye Valley. On occasion the driver would stop to allow passengers to alight and pick bunches of wild flowers which grew in abundance beside the track.

But times have changed, few salmon are taken from its waters, and the level of the river is now sometimes dangerously low due to extraction and drainage, and the narrow roads which approach the more popular beauty spots along its course are often choked with traffic.

So it was with some trepidation that I approached Piercefield, which I had not visited before. However soon after entering the deeply wooded valley near the car park at Chepstow Leisure Centre my preconceptions were shattered. We walked with barely a sight of the river, for several miles and hours before emerging into the car park at the other end.

Some of the pleasure of WHGT visits is the company of knowledgeable and enthusiastic members with whom one can share the exploration and the guidance of an articulate and erudite leader. This we had in spades with Ken Murphy, who had spent many weeks surveying this wild wood, often in dense undergrowth and on occasion perilously perched over precipitous drops, locating, mapping and identifying the many objects of our desire. These included viewing points, platforms for some purposes unknown, a grotto built into the perimeter of an iron age hill fort, a cave, a tunnel cut through the rock face and a plunge pool - a fair bag!

Piercefield, like Hafod and Downton was in its day a famous picturesque landscape based and built around its proximity to a wonderful river, but the irony of our visit was that the views that we came to admire are now wholly obscured in luxuriant growth.

We did emerge into the sunlight at one point on our journey to view the ruins of the mansion of which the splendid facade attributed largely to Soane survives surprisingly intact. This essential diversion enabled us to consider all that we had and were about to see in the context of the house and its rolling lawns.

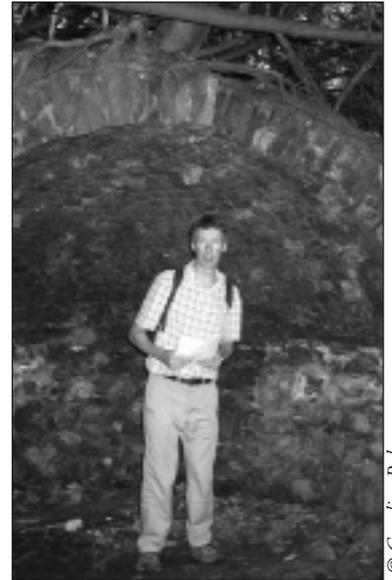
It is good news that the house has recently been bought and is to be restored as a boutique hotel. I have not said that the Park lies adjacent to Chepstow Racecourse so that a

successful flutter would enable a visitor to enjoy a sumptuous weekend in glorious surroundings.

It is difficult now to imagine that in the eighteenth century there was a substantial river trade with boats carrying goods and passengers plying up and down the river and across to Bristol. In those days it was easier to travel to Ross for an outing by boat than by coach and the house had the quaint custom of firing a strategically placed cannon when they wished to attract the ferry. As many of the thickly-wooded banks were regularly coppiced to produce charcoal, the views would have been altogether more open.

I sincerely hope that some of the inspiration and energy which has gone into the splendid restorations at Hafod might rub off at Piercefield. From a superficial inspection, it seemed to me that because of its inaccessibility this stretch of the Wye remains relatively unspoiled despite its proximity to Chepstow. Some carefully controlled and considered felling could restore the *raison d'être* of its conception.

John Hegarty



Ken Murphy in the dilapidated grotto.

© Caroline Palmer



The massive masonry platform, now hidden in the woods, was perhaps built as the setting for outdoor performances.

© Caroline Palmer

Vaynol – The Public Inquiry

June 7th 2006 saw the zenith of the WHGT activities with regard to this great estate on the shores of the Menai Strait, when we gave evidence at a Public Inquiry held in Caernarfon into Gwynedd County Council's proposed Unitary Development Plan. The Council proposed to extend the existing business park right up to the core of 43 listed buildings at the very centre of the estate.

The WHGT felt that the issues were so fundamental that it had no choice but to use every endeavour to resist these proposals, indeed one reason the Trust was formed was to protect properties such as this.

We were very glad to have formed a team with the National Trust (which owns a large portion of the parkland at Vaynol) to share expertise and the cost of the professional advice we needed. Thus Tony Smith of W.S. Atkins gave sterling service in introducing us to our prime consultants, who were headed by Gary Halman of *How Planning* and who undertook the role of our planning advocate with much distinction: his summing up of our case was masterful, and perhaps one of the best I have heard.

Gary was supported by Peter Skelton, the Head of Lambert Smith Hampton, in his capacity of our Economic Business Consultant. Thus

it was Peter who was able to master the Council's figures which they claimed could justify their proposals. He found great holes in their argument in a way we could not have attempted on our own, and stripped out the 'black magic' element of the Council's case.

Likewise we were hugely fortunate in having the services of the National Trust's Area Manager, John Morgan, and Chris Lambert, their Land Use Planning Adviser. They made the whole exercise most convivial, and we hope may now be regarded as long term friends of the WHGT.

I gave written and personal evidence on the historic importance of the estate, which included submissions kindly provided by both Tom Lloyd and Peter Welford. Sheila Roberts prepared the submission on the significance of the garden and park. We also owe a huge debt of thanks to Jo Davidson, who stepped in at the last moment to finalise and present Sheila Roberts' submission in her stead.

We await the outcome of the Inspector's deliberations, which should be available before Christmas. We will report to you then also.

Michael Tree, Chairman.

A New National Database of Parks and Gardens

Parks and Gardens UK is a project about the rich, but relatively unknown, heritage of the UK's historic parks, gardens, and designed green spaces. It is a three-year project led by the Parks and Gardens Data Partnership, and sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project aims to encourage and support the research and recording of historic parks, gardens and designed green spaces throughout the UK; and to create a web resource to share information and provide a tool to aid further research.

The partners in the Parks and Gardens Data Partnership are the Association of Gardens Trusts and the University of York, but there are also many other organisations involved directly but on an informal basis. The project is managed by a small team based at the King's Manor in the University of York: Dr. Jon Kenny, Project Manager; Janet Davis, Web Manager; John Warden, Data Manager; and Sarah Collins, Communications Coordinator.

Jon and Sarah have started visiting County Gardens Trusts and other organisations involved in researching historic parks and gardens to meet the people and find out about their research. The Volunteer Coordinators, who will be in post soon, will help them in making contact with groups and identifying what we can do to support the volunteer researchers.

We are planning and designing a database to hold the information about parks and gardens sites. The records will be accessed through the web site, which will also have articles and educational resources for children and adults. The aim is to create 6,000 records of historic parks and gardens throughout the UK. Most of these will give basic information about a site, such as where it is (or was), who created it when, and what type of a park or garden it is. Five hundred of these records, however, will have more detailed information and will include links to digitised images and documents.

'Historic parks and gardens' is quite loosely defined. It could include places created as recently as the mid-1980s. It can include all types of parks and gardens, not just the grand country house gardens. They could be garden squares in towns; allotments; public parks; cottage gardens; gardens at offices, factories, hospitals, schools;

botanical gardens; or nurseries. We hope to provide maps showing the locations of sites, and a facility to search for records via a map. The web resource will also provide brief biographical information about the people who commissioned, designed, created, altered or maintained the parks and gardens.

The web resource will enable experts and non-experts to share and use information about UK historic parks and gardens. The first phase will be launched in April 2007, and will include a facility for volunteers to add their records to the database via the web site. It will be launched to the general public in spring 2008, and we hope that people will continue to add new information after that to create the most comprehensive resource on UK historic parks and gardens.

If you would like to find out more about how to get involved, or sign up for our bi-monthly newsletter, please contact us. We are really looking forward to working with and meeting members of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust; and to helping to tell the world about how special the historic parks and gardens of Wales are.

Janet E. Davis

Janet Davis is the Web Manager for the Parks and Gardens UK project, with responsibility for the design and content of the web site, including leading on creating educational resources. She has BA (Hons) and Master of Philosophy degrees in modern art and design history. Over the past 6 years, most of her work has focused on web-based heritage resources, and heritage collections databases.

Contact details for Parks and Gardens UK:

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The King's Manor, York.

© Janet Davis

Some dates for the autumn

PEMBROKESHIRE BRANCH

Monday 18th September Visit to Dale Castle.

Monday 16th October Annual Lecture. Subject under discussion.

Monday 20th November Lecture: A Mediaeval Countrywoman's Medical Chest, Rising Sun Inn, near Haverfordwest 7.30 pm.

GWYNEDD

Saturday 14 October Study Day: Grottoes. Parc Glynllifon. Lecture by Hazel Jackson, visit to the Hermitage Grotto.

SOUTH AND MID GLAM.

Friday 1 September The Cowbridge Physic Garden will open to the public for the first time.

Wednesday 13 September Visit to Gardens and Grottoes of Dewstow

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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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Sitting pretty once more



NFU Mutual

Family's replaced furniture guarantees a sunny summer

It seemed as though a miserable summer was in store for the Styler family after thieves stole their garden furniture. But one hassle-free claim later, Sarah, Adam and their four young children are sitting pretty.

In what Sarah is certain was a planned theft, her teak table and eight armchairs were taken from their garden in the Worcestershire village of Bretforton. NFU Mutual's claims team swung into action and Sarah received a cheque within one week.

"We've insured with NFU Mutual for more than ten years. And making the claim was simple and straightforward", said Sarah. "When we call our agent's office, they always know who you are – there's no need to give an impersonal customer number or repeat your details over and over. That's a personal service that you just don't get with the bigger, anonymous insurance companies."

The Stylers have a number of NFU Mutual policies, from household and vehicle cover to pet and holiday insurance. Sadly, the loss of their furniture was not the first time the family had been victims of rural crime which, NFU Mutual says, is increasing as thieves turn their attention away from high-security urban areas to the countryside.

If you would like to speak to your local agent for a quote, call 0800 975 0600* or visit nfumutual.co.uk

Measures that you can take to protect your home from theft:

- Install an approved burglar alarm
- Fit and use mortise deadlocks on doors – particularly final exits
- Fit and use window locks on ground floor windows and accessible first floor windows
- Fit a strong padlock to garages and other outbuildings and ensure supporting material is of adequate strength to support the lock
- Don't leave valuables on view
- Store ladders and tools out of sight
- Set timers for lights and radios when you're not at home
- Don't keep large sums of cash in the house
- Keep garden tools secure and out of sight



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