



No. 51  
Summer 2008

# A Royal Opening for The Bothy

by Michael Tree

A little over a year ago, after a very busy year for the WHGT, I was looking forward to taking the month of August off from all duties except perhaps the rescue of my own home, when somewhat unexpectedly the Trust Committee agreed to establishing an office in South Wales, and also to us employing a part-time paid Administrator. At about this time we gathered that our Patron may be establishing his first home in Wales nearby at Llwynywermod, which in turn provided us with the opportunity of commissioning a history of the property for presentation to Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, early in the year which went ahead as planned. Thus somewhat naively at that time we also suggested that if the opportunity arose, our Patron might consider popping over to open the Bothy for us: 'You're on!' was the immediate response, greatly to my surprise and delight, especially as it would enable the Aberglasney Trust to be involved and to benefit: their kindness towards us has been exemplary.

Thus some months later we met officials from Clarence House to settle the details of the visit, and it emerged that we would be given the double honour of HRH The Duchess of Cornwall visiting us as well as our Patron. It was clear too that far from casually 'popping over', the visit to us would need to be slotted into an already busy day, so there was no way that we could have a lengthy presentation list: we were glad therefore to be able to include the Officers of the Trust and, a last-minute idea, a bibliography of local history to be drawn up and presented by Tomas Lee a pupil of Rydal/Penrhos school, an independent school in Colwyn Bay. Nevertheless, special provision was made for the Chairmen of the WHGT branches and their spouses to welcome the Royal couple from the terrace by the

restaurant when he passed by, after the visit to the Bothy.

The appointed day (23rd June) arrived after much hard work had been done by Mrs Andrea Dudley, our treasure of an Administrator, putting up display boards, sorting out exhibits, and generally making sure that the Bothy was shown off to best



*The ribbon is duly cut.*

© James Davies, West Digital News and Picture Agency

advantage. Thus all was in order when the helicopter arrived and the Royal couple made their way to the line up of county and local officials, including our members Mrs. Rosemary Rooney as Deputy Lieutenant of the County, and her husband Mr. Patrick Rooney. After my sister Mrs Margaret Nicholson, and I were presented we accompanied Their Royal Highnesses to the Bothy to present Miss Anne Carter, and Mr David Toyne (Vice Chairmen), Dr. John Moyse (Treasurer), and Mr. Jeremy Rye (Trust Secretary). His Royal Highness then proceeded to cut the ribbon placed across the doorway, and to declare the office open. Inside, Mrs Dudley was presented, and their Royal Highnesses were shown displays of the Trust's activities: Publishing including the website; Events arranged by the Trust; Success stories; and Parks and Gardens at Risk. Then came the signing of the photograph as a permanent reminder of the occasion, before Tomas Lee used much initiative to ensure that his presentation of the bibliography went ahead as planned despite the melée of photographers awaiting Their Royal Highnesses outside the Bothy, before they were escorted around the gardens by officers of the Aberglasney Trust.

As the Royal couple left, I could not help thinking how greatly honoured we had been, and how very fortunate we are to have HRH The Prince of Wales as our patron. Indeed the kindness afforded to the Trust quite spontaneously, within lives that are hectic to a degree, was deeply touching especially when one remembers that six hundred plus other engagements are undertaken each year. Yet time was found to come to our little Bothy, by a patron who, last year alone assisted in raising £122 million to support 19 core charities that represent the largest multi-cause charitable enterprise in the UK. Remember though that this is in addition to numerous other responsibilities, such as supporting Her Majesty The Queen, heading the Duchy of Cornwall, promoting environmental protection, and actively supporting special causes such as the rescue of

Dumfries House. There are others that are too many to mention, and we are indeed singularly lucky and honoured to have such a Patron.

In a lighter vein, I am glad to say that the fun did not stop after the Royal Party left: there was a champagne reception on the restaurant terrace for all the Trustees of both Trusts, which proved to be both highly convivial, and too, the means to unwind after a busy day.

Of course we are highly privileged to have His Royal Highness as our Patron, but let us not forget that the real honour is directed at none us personally but is for the organisation we represent: the WHGT that aims to safeguard, rescue and promote all that is best for historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes of Wales for the next generation and many beyond. This delightful occasion is therefore hugely important to our mission in that it helps to position us in the public perception as the prime amenity society in Wales concerning heritage parks, gardens and landscapes, so that we can be seen to have a strong and clear voice. That is how we have the best chance to save 'at risk' gardens, parks and landscapes. Indeed now we are getting to know the broad extent of such items, the more they are seen to present a formidable challenge to us over the next twenty years or so. It is clear therefore that the intrinsic need for the WHGT is greater than ever.

In conclusion I would like to thank all those who contributed to the success of this historic event for the Trust, especially Andrea Dudley and Mark Baker, without whose sterling efforts this event would not have occurred.



*Officers of the Trust are presented.*

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*The photograph is signed.*

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*Hwyl a pob bendith,  
Michael Tree  
Chairman WHGT.*

## The Royal Visit



*The unveiling of the plaque, applauded by Dan Clayton Jones and Hilary Thomas.*

It was in July 2003, at the AGM of our (South and Mid Glamorgan) Branch of WHGT that Dan Clayton Jones took over the chairmanship and told us of his 'idea' for the creation of a Physic Garden in Cowbridge. In the succeeding five years plans were prepared, committees formed, the Cowbridge Physic Garden Trust was established (with the original WHGT Branch committee as members) and the garden began to emerge. Readers of this Bulletin will have read of progress over those intervening years and now the garden has had an official royal opening.

Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, visited the garden on Thursday 26th of June and expressed her admiration for all that had been achieved. On a gloriously sunny afternoon, she was conducted around the garden by Dan and others and met small groups of people whose contribution to the project has been and is significant. The whole visit was an extremely enjoyable event with the Duchess chatting informally and showing a real interest in the history of the garden and its plants. Towards the end of the afternoon she planted a tree, unveiled a plaque commemorating her visit and responded to Dan's



*The Duchess plants a tree.*

carefully prepared speech in which he thanked the Duchess and expressed his gratitude to the many supporters and sponsors of the garden. She spoke engagingly of her pleasure at being able to come to the garden and her regret that her husband was unable to be present on this occasion. As she was leaving the garden the Duchess was presented with a specially bound copy of *Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan*.

This event was a fitting climax to all the years of hard work by a dedicated team of trustees and volunteers. The garden looked superb (as it has for months, but as you will appreciate there was a particular concentration upon weeding and tidying in the run up to the visit!!), with the roses in particular filling the long border with colour and fragrance and with all the medicinal beds in immaculate and well-labelled order.

The garden is now attracting increasingly large numbers of visitors and what is particularly encouraging is their evident appreciation and enjoyment of what they see. Apart from the locals who are clearly very proud of this amenity and who visit it regularly, increasing numbers of groups and individuals travel a considerable distance to view the garden which is now a recognised Welsh Tourist Board attraction. Maintenance, fund-raising, the production of information leaflets and other publications will demand continuing commitment from all our supporters.

Cowbridge Physic Garden has now been open for two years. It will constantly develop and the coming years will present their own challenges for the volunteers and the trustees. Its royal opening has set the seal on achievements to date and royal interest in the garden augurs well for the future.

*Hilary M. Thomas*

## Better Woodlands for Wales at Penllergare

Family diaries and images recorded by John Dillwyn Llewelyn in the earliest days of photography testify to a long-standing interest in arboriculture at Penllergare, the diverse and well-managed woodlands providing a perfect setting for this romantic and picturesque paradise. Indeed, on 20 August 1910, an anonymous correspondent for the *South Wales Daily News* noted, “*The valley from stream to hilltop is luxuriantly wooded. It needs but a glance to comprehend the care with which the estate is managed. The giants of the forest are not too thick to spoil each other. There is room for light and air to reach the undergrowth. Here and there are little clearings, lending change to the vista and providing opportunity for a different flora*”.

Today, despite its registration at Grade II by Cadw and hints of its former splendour, the former estate is scarred by decades of neglect and damage. Most of the notable trees were felled for timber in the post WW2 period and not replaced. Unmanaged undergrowth and bracken began to dominate and annual fire-raising by vandals accelerated the dereliction of its once-famous plantations.

In making our plans for Penllergare it was therefore evident that the restoration and regeneration of the woodlands would be of great importance. With experience of managing the Grade I picturesque landscape at Hafod under our belts we felt confident that if we approached the Forestry Commission our proposals for Valley Woods would be viewed sympathetically. The auguries seemed favourable because the Commission’s Cydcoed scheme had already been hugely helpful in enabling us to start making Valley Woods a more accessible, safer and enjoyable place for visitors.

Did we fare as well with the new *Better Woodlands for Wales* (BWW) scheme? Given that the applicant has to employ a management planner from a given list, it was evident that we would have to find one who was in tune with the special characteristics of the place. Happily Mark Potter of Abersenny Ltd fitted the bill and agreed to act for us. This was doubly fortunate because, although the application process shares some of the iterative characteristics of Cydcoed, it is far more complex and time-consuming. There were particular problems



Penllergare woodland, captured by the camera of John Dillwyn Llewelyn in the 1850s.

© Penllergare Trust



Four Oaks on the east bank of Upper Lake, by John Dillwyn Llewelyn photographed in the 1850s.

© Penllergare Trust

with the mapping in that, while it may be perfectly adequate for straight-forward blocks of woodland, it does not (currently) lend itself to the intricacies and minutiae of a designed landscape. But throughout, we – clients and consultant – were at pains to ensure that the historic and cultural characteristics of Valley Woods were reflected in the development of the plan.

The upshot is that Valley Woods will benefit from:

- Restored Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).
- Planting of new native woodlands, including a sprinkling of the exotic species used by John Dillwyn Llewelyn.
- Improved condition and diversity of existing, neglected woodlands.
- Regeneration and greater diversity of ground flora, largely through the suppression of bracken.
- Extended and improved vehicle and walkers’ access, based mostly on the nineteenth century layout, and – where practicable – using historic techniques of construction and maintenance.
- Improved interpretation.

And by so doing, and very largely thanks to BWW, we expect to revive the tradition of high-quality, multi-purpose management of woodlands at Penllergare, the heyday of which was described by that anonymous correspondent almost a century ago.

Michael Norman  
Ymddiriedolaeth Penllergare The Penllergare Trust  
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It has been gratifying that the article in Bulletin No 50 on the subject of Better Woodlands for Wales has generated an exceptional number of responses and expressions of interest.

Here we publish two very different reactions: at Penllergare, Michael Norman is delighted with the application of the Better Woodland for Wales grant aid and has experienced no conflict with the historic objectives for that site. By contrast John Hegarty (formerly of Llwynywormwood, and author of *Red Tape in a Picturesque Park*, published in Bulletin 41), reminds us that in some cases public money may come with strings which are unacceptable.

Objectives for Welsh woodland have changed dramatically over recent decades and will no doubt be revised further in the future. Sometimes also, special interest species like bats, newts or lichens occupy a dominant position amongst conservation criteria and their needs may not be synonymous with the re-instatement of a cultural landscape. Every site where grant specifications meet the needs of the designed landscape is a cause for satisfaction, and where conflicts exist the owner may choose, like John Hegarty, to 'play his own tune'. But there are no villains, the 'strings' have

been devised with the best intentions, so discussion of cases of conflicting interest is important since it can inform the drafting and application of grant guidelines, and should lead gradually to a consensus more satisfactory to all.

In the same vein, the planning process is our most substantial tool in preventing many unsympathetic changes to gardens and landscapes, and here too the Trust has much to contribute. All local authorities are in the process of drafting or consultation on their Local Development Plan, which will replace previous documents like the Local Plan (LP) or Unitary Development Plan (UDP). It behoves all Branches of the Trust to monitor their Local Development Plan and ensure that policies in this document reflect local needs. And in particular it allows organisations such as ours to nominate "Candidate Sites" which should be protected from development. A fuller account of the opportunities offered by the new Local Development Plans has been compiled by Ros Laidlaw but will for reasons of space, appear in the next Bulletin. Meanwhile, for some valuable summer reading, apply to your local planning department or visit their website.

*Caroline Palmer*

## He who pays the Piper...

The holy grail for the lover of old gardens is coming upon a place which has somehow remained lost or unnoticed and undisturbed in this busy world, the overgrown drive leading through a heavy shrubbery to a shabby house or perhaps just a ruin or the faint ghost of a park or garden.

And of course the instinct is to save or 'restore' it, which is where the trouble starts. The mere cutting-back of some brambles or the forcing-open of a collapsing garden door somehow immediately changes the atmosphere. The stillness has been disturbed and the skill of the restorer is to bring back the essence with the minimum of damage.

Very few gardens survive in an original state and these have a special interest in their own right. Most bear the patina of generations of hands and a multitude of seasons and this is what gives each its unique character and interest. I am very suspicious of those who wish to fix a garden at a particular time or style. Like a good painting or piece of music, a garden provokes an aesthetic and an emotional resonance, the difference is that a garden is a living thing, ever changing under the forces of nature and the hand of man. This does thus require a gentle and imaginative response and an approach which must be tailored to the unique characteristics of the place.

Over the last few years, vast sums of money have become available through the Heritage Lottery fund and some other Government-inspired sources and some wonderful works have been achieved. The money comes, quite rightly, only after numerous hoops have been negotiated and with strict criteria.

Many projects have been made possible which might never otherwise have been attempted. However I think we are approaching a point where there is a danger that, in some cases, the tail is wagging the dog.

It is apparent to me that many of the criteria are socially and politically motivated and are applied rigidly to all proposed projects regardless of their relevance or suitability. Schemes which require a sensitive and aesthetic approach are being subjected to a stiff bureaucratic control which in many cases is quite inappropriate.

This is where I feel the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust has an important part to play. If the authorities will not yield to the needs of the particular project, then I think the Trust should bring pressure to bear, and help to find alternative more relaxed sources of finance and ways forward. I would argue that the preservation of the unique character of a garden is more important than satisfying some politically correct mantra which is quite likely to change anyway, over time.

A whole industry of consultants and contractors has built on this grant system. This imposes heavy costs which might otherwise be avoided, or at least minimised. The Trust, by contrast, has access to local knowledge and culture which is simply not available, or of interest, to those operating 'The System' which operates on targets and rules.

Sometimes the piper must play a tune to his own liking and at his own cost.

*John Hegarty*

## Urgent Call - Ruperra Castle Planning Appeal

As recorded in Bulletin no 50 Caerphilly Councillors refused to grant consent for housing at Ruperra Castle in early 2008. The owner of the Castle has now appealed to the Planning Inspectorate to have this decision overturned and has chosen an informal hearing. Although the Planning Officers will support the Councillors' decision in the coming hearing, it is very important for the Inspector to realise the strength of public feeling about the

heritage importance of Ruperra. We earnestly entreat you to write in before the deadline of August 13.

Write or email to the **Planning Inspectorate, Crown Buildings, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ.**

Email: [wales@pins.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:wales@pins.gsi.gov.uk)

Please quote the Ref.No. **APP / K6920 / A108 / 2078434**

For more details see [www.ruperracastle.blogspot.com](http://www.ruperracastle.blogspot.com)

## Scandinavian chalets for Ruthin Castle?

Ruthin Castle is listed because it is of National and International importance. This is the only privately-owned Edward I castle in Wales, deserving every protection from inappropriate development.

At present the essential setting of Ruthin is threatened by a planning application for a small estate comprising 15 permanent two-storey, four-bedroom Scandinavian kit structures requiring necessary services, car parking, lighting and driveways – all of which will fragment and degrade the integrity of this site.

This planning application goes against ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) directives concerning the enhancement of heritage sites and directly contravenes the Denbighshire Development Plan 1996-2011 which seeks to prevent development which would unacceptably harm the character of a historic landscape, park or garden or its essential setting.

Begun in 1277 Ruthin Castle predates Conway or Caernafon but it was destroyed during the civil war. In 1826 it was inherited by Maria Myddleton who with her husband the Hon Frederick West decided to build a house from the ruins. Their son Frederick Richard West remodelled the house with an impressive new main block of warm red sandstone which rises three stories around an octagonal tower with a vice turret reminiscent of Caernarfon. The architect was Henry Clutton who also added a clock stage on top of an octagonal turret. The house was designed to overlook acres of parkland and garden.

The earliest parts of the garden had been planted by Maria but in the main it was landscaped by Clutton, who added the castellated lodge and gateway in 1848-53 and enclosed the garden with a limestone curtain wall. Much of the Victorian and Edwardian garden remains although there are huge areas which have become overgrown and neglected. Frederick's son William married Mary Cornwallis, (known as Patsy) a society beauty and mistress of the Prince of Wales. At this time the gardens and grounds were developed for the parties and high society for which the Cornwallis-West family was famed.

By 1919, when the house was sold to Duff House Sanatorium, it had a lake on the west and ruins on the east. It also boasted a double tennis court, a croquet lawn and an Italian garden, herbaceous and rock gardens and specimen trees. A dovecote with a deep well under it survives in a medieval courtyard.

The Ladies walk dates to the late 1800's in the north west of the old castle and may have once been glazed. Its two blocked fireplaces on the east wall suggest it once housed tender plants. The walled kitchen garden with valuable fruit trees was divided by wide walks and had a central rose pergola. An adjoining orchard had a 110 ft range of peach houses, a range of glasshouses, potting shed, cold pits and a fruit room.

This is the landscape where the new owner, Countrypark hotels wants to sell 15 long-term chalet leases for £200,000 each. He seeks to buy this planning permission by setting up a



Ruthin Castle c. 1910.

Valentine's Series Postcards

£250,000 Trust over a 10 year period towards the repair of the castle walls. (This represents less than 10% of the capital which would be raised). Chalets or no chalets, public funds will be necessary for the castle walls which need in excess of £1.8 million for their restoration.

A 2006 planning application for a bungalow at Ruthin Castle was refused so it is difficult to see why 15 chalets should be acceptable in 2008. The present planning application has now been 'called in' by the Assembly. It is to be hoped that the Conservation status of Ruthin Castle will be upheld. The Welsh historic landscape is important to tourism, national identity and the local sense of place. Ruthin Castle, its moat and mature garden woodland should not be situated within a chalet park.

*Glynis Shaw WHGT Clwyd Branch.*

### A Welsh Historic Gardens Trust Study Day The Edwardian Garden in Wales

A one-day seminar organised by the Brecon and Radnor Branch at the University of Wales, Gregynog, Newtown

**Saturday 20 September 2008 10.00 - 5.00**

*"Who loves a garden still keeps his Eden"*  
Amos Bronson Alcott, *Tablets*, 1868

The theme of Edwardian gardens in Wales and their legacy will be explored by an eminent group of speakers with a particular focus on style and context in the Welsh landscape.

Speakers:

- Anne Carter, **The Gardens of Gregynog**  
Gerry Donovan, **Dyffryn: Mawson (1861-1933) and Garden Rooms**  
Helena Gerrish, **Avray Tipping (1855-1933) and the restoration at High Glanau**  
Bettina Harden, **Clough Williams-Ellis (1883-1978): An Edwardian Young Man**  
Phil Jayne, **Maesruddud, a little known garden by Thomas Mawson**  
Sarah Law, **Waterlilies in Edwardian Wales**  
Marion Mako, **Alfred Parsons (1847-1920): His Gardens in Wales**  
Corinne Price, **Plas yn Rhiw: Italian influence or Welsh Inspiration?**  
John Woods, **Mawson at Bellevue Park, Newport**

Tickets to include coffee, lunch and tea:  
£35 (cheques and bookings must be received before 25 August 2008)

Please make cheque payable to the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust (Brecon and Radnor Branch) and send to Ginny Scott, The Shrubbery, Llyswen, Brecon, LD3 OYE, and enclose SAE for acknowledgment.

## AGM at Picton Castle in Pembrokeshire – 7th June, 2008

The keynote speaker was Mr Gwilym Hughes, Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings, who gave a summary of the priorities and future development of Cadw over the next few years. Minutes of the formal part of the meeting will be published in next year's Review, but significant changes were the resignation of Mr Jeremy Rye as Treasurer and his appointment as Secretary, and the appointment of Mr John Moyses to be our new Treasurer.

About thirty five members attended a luncheon in the Picton Castle Restaurant, followed by a walk through the Castle grounds up to the 18th Century viewpoint at the end of the main axis of the gardens. This consists of a mound which had been erected over a masonry tunnel prolonging the axis. The tunnel had originally been designed as a grotto with recesses for statuary (compare with Alexander Pope's garden at Chiswick). Sadly, the family had later erected a tower on the mound, whose weight had been too great and collapsed the tunnel!

Some of the party then visited the stable block and coach house, before going on to walk round the Walled Garden. The original walls remain, and the traces of the vine and glass houses can still be seen. The garden itself had been replanted in the Victorian period with flower beds and photographs of the period

are still extant. There is now a formal rectangular pond and fountain. Rhododendrons and many flowering trees grace the area round the Walled Garden, and a former Head Gardener, Mr Leo Ekkes, had continued his work on hybridisation of rhododendrons and azaleas during his retirement until immediately before his death a few months ago.

We then drove to the gardens at Upton Castle, which have recently been resurrected after a long period of decay. The property of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, they are now in the care of a small private Trust, and attractive walks have been restored. The castle chapel contains three mediaeval tombs and is still used for occasional services. The gardens were extensively planted with a range of unusual trees, mostly in the 1920s and 1930s, including many fine rhododendron species, some magnolias and hydrangeas. The climate is very mild, and eucryphias, tulip trees and ginkgos flourish.

Four members met for dinner at the Trewern Arms, near Nevern in the north of the county. On Sunday morning, a few members viewed the Cilwendig Shell House, before leaving Pembrokeshire for home.

*Col. Richard Gilbertson*

### Other Branch events for the autumn

#### Ceredigion

##### Sunday 7th September

Visit to Abbey Cwm-Hir house and garden, by kind permission of Mr and Mrs P. Humpherston.

By coach from Aberystwyth, 9am. Organised jointly with the Cardiganshire Horticultural Society.

#### Clwyd

##### Saturday 18th October, 10.30am

A visit to A Victorian Garden Cemetery in Wrexham, Ruabon Road, followed by a lunch at The Beeches, Gresford, and a talk on old trees.

#### Gwynedd

##### Tuesday 30th September

Michaelmas Luncheon at Plas Maenan in the Conway Valley, 3-Course Lunch and Coffee £18.

##### Saturday 18th October

Study Day at Glynllifon Country Park. Historic Gardens in the 21st Century. Speakers from the National Trust, a privately owned garden and an Estate. £16 to include coffee and buffet lunch.

#### Pembrokeshire

##### Thursday 11th September

An illustrated talk 'Edwardian Gardens and Harold Peto', by Robin Whalley.

**Thursday 9th October** An illustrated talk: 'Old Apple Trees' by Gerald White.



#### South & Mid Glamorgan

##### Sunday 21st September at 2.30 pm

A rare chance to visit Coedarhydyglyn, St George's super Ely, Cardiff thanks to Rhodri Traherne and family.

This is a Grade II\* picturesque early 19th century landscape park which survives in its entirety. The Edwardian developments include extensive woodland, a Japanese inspired Dell, terraced gardens and a walled kitchen garden.

#### West Glamorgan

**Saturday 6 September** visit to Westbury Court Garden and Dyrham Park.

Westbury Court is a beautiful and rare survivor and the only restored Dutch water garden in this country. Its restoration was an early collaboration between the National Trust and the newly formed Garden History Society.

Dyrham is a spectacular late 17th century mansion, garden and deerpark. The grand baroque house has lavish collections which reflect the fashion for all things Dutch at the end of the 17th century. These include Delftware, paintings and furniture. Victorian domestic rooms are also on view. Dyrham Park is still undergoing restoration work, and, new this year, is the development in the west garden described as 'a contemporary garden with echoes of the past'.

**Thursday 11 September 2.00pm** at St Paul's Parish Centre  
A talk by Jean Reader, who is currently studying for her PhD looking at the contribution to gardens in Wales of women during the 18th and 19th.

**Thursday, 13 November. 2.00pm.** St Paul's Parish Centre, De La Beche Road, Sketty. Topic to be confirmed.



**New for 2008**  
**WHGT Notelets - see enclosed flyer**

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Registered Charity No. 1023293



# Help for flood victims wins insurer top awards



Rural insurer NFU Mutual has won two top prizes in this year's insurance industry awards.

NFU Mutual took the title of General Insurer of the Year and also the Customer Care prize at the British Insurance Awards, announced last night at London's Royal Albert Hall.

"We're absolutely delighted – it's a terrific achievement to win these awards against competition from the whole of the insurance industry," said Ian Geden Chief Executive.

"It's a tremendous accolade to the professionalism, hard work and dedication of our staff and agents throughout the UK.

"Our latest success clearly demonstrates that we really do deliver our vision: to be recognised by our stakeholders as setting the market standards in terms of all round value, service and trust.

He explained that NFU Mutual had responded to last summer's devastating floods in the Midlands by bringing in extra staff from unaffected regions to help provide immediate aid to customers; making immediate payments to people whose homes were damaged, and setting up mobile offices in badly-affected towns. At Christmas, NFU Mutual also offered a special payment to people who were still living in caravans while their homes were still being repaired to help them celebrate the festive season.

The July floods alone led to over 3,000 claims from NFU Mutual policyholders costing over £57m.

The audience of over 1,500 representatives of UK insurance companies heard the judges praise NFU Mutual for not only its financial strength but also the way it delivers customer satisfaction.

"Because we are a mutual we can focus all our efforts into looking after customers," Ian explained.

Founded by a group of Warwickshire farmers in 1910, NFU Mutual has grown into one of the UK's 10 largest general insurers but still adheres to its founders' belief in mutuality as the best way to serve customers' interests over the long term.

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**Notes to editors:**

With over 300 offices located in rural towns and villages throughout the UK, NFU Mutual has become part of the fabric of rural life and remains committed to serving the needs of people who visit, live or work in the countryside. Recognised as a UK leading rural insurer, NFU Mutual offers a wide range of products, including general insurance, life, pensions, investments, and risk management services. These products and services are delivered through the agency network, as well as through a direct sales and service centre.