

No. 55
Summer 2009

The work of William Goldring

by Maureen Thomas

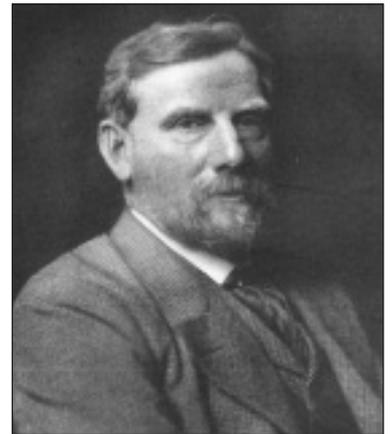
As a leading garden designer of his day, William Goldring was fortunate to have had some important figures in the horticultural world as patrons during his training, and in his working life. They included Lady Dorothy Neville, William Robinson, and Sir Joseph Hooker and W. Thistleton Dyer, both of whom were Directors of the Botanical Gardens, Kew. Goldring was introduced by them to writers, artists and garden designers, as well as to estate owners, industrialists and politicians. He was close to the often vituperative exchanges between William Robinson, who promoted naturalistic garden designs and the formalists like Reginald Blomfield. During a long career he has been described as Gardener, Horticulturist, Journalist, Garden Inspector, Author, International Landscape Gardener, Arboriculturist and member of The Royal Horticultural Society, and President of The Kew Guild. His garden design at St. Louis for The Royal Commission in America won him Gold Medal in 1904.

Goldring was born in 1854 into a horticultural family at West Dean, near Petersfield in Sussex, and became one of Lady Dorothy Neville's thirty four gardeners at Dangstein, Petersfield before being taken on as a gardener at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

in 1875. In 1879 he was appointed Assistant Editor of William Robinson's horticultural newspaper, *The Garden*, (1879 – 1888), and later became Editor of *Woods and Forests*.

In addition to over 700 private commissions, Goldring was noted for his landscaped park designs and asylum gardens. He also wrote of his work, observations and travels in India, China, Japan, Singapore, France and

America in his articles in *The Garden*, *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, *The Gardeners' Magazine*, his *Book of the Lily*, *The Journal of the Kew Guild*, and *The Journal of Horticulture*. After leaving Kew he attempted to raise the status of gardeners as a member, then



William Goldring, illustrated in the Journal of the Kew Guild 1913-14.



Goldring designed Thompson's Park, Cardiff. The fountain statue is by William Goscombe John.

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President of the Kew Guild, 1913 – 1914.

His training at Dangstein was the first step of an horticultural journey taken during a period of major social change which was reflected in gardens and landscapes throughout the country, and abroad. The eclectic mix of garden features at Dangstein was typical of many Victorian gardens, so not only did Goldring introduce his readers to horticultural innovation through his writings and connection with Kew (which was receiving all the latest plant hunters' introductions), but also to design ideas which had their origins in previous centuries; that which Dr. Brent

Elliott describes as historical revivalism. Elliott uses the term to encompass a wide range of historical garden forms and features from Elizabethan gardens, Picturesque Landscapes, Capability Brown designs and Repton styling, Blomfield's formalism and Robinson's New School of Naturalistic Design. Goldring addressed such themes, features and issues in his work, demonstrating an awareness of the search for an English garden design identity which resulted in the Arts and Crafts designs of the late Victorian/Edwardian era.

Some of William Goldring's gardens in Wales

Bryn Estyn, Wrexham, North Wales

Early in the twentieth century Frederick William Soames, a wealthy Wrexham brewer, bought part of the Erlas Hall estate, and built a half timbered mansion in mock Tudor style to replace the recently demolished Georgian house. Goldring submitted a design for a new garden in 1903. The plan for the garden combined formal and informal elements; there were geometric beds of roses near the house, winding paths through shrubberies, and informal tree planting. Other features included an orchard to the north, a terrace overlooking a lake with bog planting, tennis and croquet lawns. Particular features included a curved seat, reminiscent of the classical seat at the Tomb of Mamia in Pompeii, at the end of the renaissance-style terrace path, and a classical garden temple resembling the King William Temple at Kew.



An early 20th century postcard of Bryn Estyn.

The formal walled kitchen garden layout is very traditional, positioned on a north/south facing slope descending from a glasshouse range and garden buildings, and included an area for soft fruit bushes, particularly gooseberries. The use of natural materials; hand dressed stone paths and studded oak doors into the garden, was a particular feature of the Arts and Crafts style favoured by Ruskin and William Morris, and was a reaction to the mass production of the Victorian era. The Bryn Estyn house is now The Erlas Technology Centre for Wrexham Education Department, and the kitchen garden, one of the few surviving working kitchen gardens in Wales, is now part of a training project for MENCAP.

Bodysgallen, Llandudno, North Wales.

In 1904 Lady Augusta Mostyn commissioned Goldring to produce a design for part of the gardens at Bodysgallen. The formal design was to complement the stone mullioned Jacobean



A broken Mamia seat in the grounds of Bryn Estyn.

house which overlooked a mixed garden scheme with an Arts and Crafts flavour. There was a tennis court and a sunken Dutch style rose garden with geometric beds filled with pillar roses, rose arbours, rose bowers and roses on poles. Goldring's knowledge of plants suitable for the soil, climate and aspect was prodigious, and this is evident in his choice of plants; cherry, berberis, syringa, lilacs, rosa rugosa, choisya ternata, forsythia, genista, spartium, magnolia, aesculus, pyrus, amelanchier and veronica. Some of Goldring's features still remain, namely the box hemicycle, and recently restored box edged rose beds.

Derry Ormond, Ceredigion, mid Wales

The elegant mansion was a two storey classical villa, seated on massive terracing and embraced by a picturesque parkland setting. Goldring refers to a commission for Inglis Jones in 1905, and in an account of the garden in the *Historic Parks and Gardens of Ceredigion*, Penny David mentions that after 1888 and before 1905 the terracing and formal gardens were substantially altered, presumably to Goldring's designs.

Thompson's Park, Cardiff

Goldring became a highly-regarded park designer, incorporating both new and more traditional features in his park designs. As cities became more congested and abominable living conditions caused ill health and early deaths, civic authorities and private patrons hoped to improve the situation by buying or donating land to provide public parks. Mr Thompson gifted the land known as Sir David's Field, which is named after a certain Sir David Matthews, standard-bearer to King Edward IV, who was one of the Barons of Glamorgan, a notable person who fought



An early 20th century postcard of Derry Ormond, where Goldring probably created this formal parterre.

© Peter Davis collection

his country's battles, and was rewarded with this tract of land.

According to A.A. Pettigrew, a colleague of Goldring's at Kew, the land known as Sir David's Field, Llandaff, 'was laid out to the plans of Mr. Wm. Goldring, the landscape Gardener'. It was laid out as a naturalistic landscape, with avenues of sweet chestnuts, a lake, edged with stone and wooden posts which were joined up with chains, and there was attractive waterside planting surrounding the lake. The fountain statue, by Sir William Goscombe John, is fed from the lake which in turn is fed from rain water running down from a pool at a higher level. It was described by another of Goldring's colleagues from Kew as a 'charming bronze figure placed in a geometrical design filled with tulips and other flowering plants'. Mr Thompson had stipulated that the fountain should be kept playing at all times whilst the park was open so there was less likelihood of a build-up of rubbish. It was considered an advantage to have a small to medium-sized fountain rather than a larger one where water jets might be blown about in the wind. Small stone drinking fountains located in the park were considered a necessity in the nineteenth century to stop children drinking from the horses' troughs.

William Goldring was a man of his time and owed much of his career to the wealth and developments which flowed from the British Empire, from fortunes made by entrepreneurs which funded and improved gardens and from the introduction and cultivation of plants collected by plant hunters. His articles in *The Garden* reveal not only his extensive knowledge of new plant introductions from the far flung corners of the world, but commentaries on the eclectic mix of features in Victorian/Edwardian gardens, as well as an appreciation of traditional garden design. Although he is credited with beautifying over seven hundred gardens, he is not identified

with any one particular style. If Victorian gardens were noted for a mix of features, Goldring could be said to have provided an eclectic mix of landscape designs, stemming from his clients' individual wants, and his noted habit of studying the aspect, climate and soil of a site rather than providing one particular style.



Drinking fountain in Thompson's Park.

© Maureen Thomas

He was appreciated by his friend and colleague William Jackson Bean from Kew who wrote an appreciation in *The Journal of the Kew Guild* 1913:

"Mr Goldring's success has a solid foundation in his deep knowledge of hardy trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. Like the old masters, who not only laid on their colours with unapproachable skill but knew how to prepare their own oils and pigments, he also combines with his power of imagining, beautiful garden scenes."

Maureen Thomas has recently completed an MA in Garden History at Bristol University writing her dissertation on William Goldring. She is an active member of the Chwyd branch of WHGT.

Our year ended with a successful AGM at Presteigne. The weather was not kind to us, rainy and unseasonably cold, but WHGT members are not easily deterred and many cheerfully endured a soaking during a fascinating visit to Brampton Bryan before the business meeting commenced. In the warmth and dryness of the Radnorshire Arms we enjoyed an encouraging address from William Graham, Conservative AM for South Wales East and a wry and scholarly account of the ideas behind 'The Picturesque Movement' from Hafod Trust administrator, Jennie Macve. Afterwards members were conducted around the grounds and splendid woodland gardens at Stanage, by Jonathan Colman Rogers. Some even remained on Sunday for a visit to Stokesay Court, and the lily pond recently notorious as the location for Keira Knightley's immersion in the film 'Atonement'. The editor is reserving space for a fuller account of these three fine private gardens to appear in the Autumn Bulletin.

The business meeting saw the end of Michael Tree's term as Chairman, and my election as Acting Chairman. I have stepped into the post at a difficult time, the recession is affecting everyone in different ways, members are necessarily careful with their resources, grant-givers such as CCW have had their budgets reduced, and yet the Trust has recently taken on greater commitments in terms of staffing and a permanent office. The Trust must take steps to live within its income, and concentrate upon its core objectives. The branches vary greatly in their prosperity and extent of activity, a priority must be to rebuild dormant branches and to increase our representation throughout Wales, providing local and national events which attract new and existing members.

Exemplars for this must include last year's Edwardian Gardens Study day which was organised by the Brecon and Radnor



Branch, and which has also yielded several fascinating articles. This year's study day is on Garden Ornamentation, organised by Gwynedd Branch at Portmeirion, and promises to be inspirational, I urge you not to miss it.

I write this following our July Committee meeting where some restructuring and new initiatives have been agreed. John Moyses has recently tendered his resignation as Treasurer and we send him all our good wishes for his forthcoming operation. We are most grateful to John Borron who has stepped into the position as Acting Treasurer. Anne Carter has also agreed to continue as my Vice Chairman. Two new Trustees, Joy Neal and Jennie Macve were elected at the AGM, they are now joined by Jean Reader and Judith Martin-Jones, bringing our Trustee body back to the correct strength. Glynis Shaw has undertaken to address the problem of a new WHGT website and we hope this will soon be running. The last few years have seen the development of the Parks and Gardens UK website (to which WHGT has, and will continue, to contribute), and this detailed information-source relieves us of the

responsibility to continue to publish descriptions and opening times for historic gardens. The two sites will be intimately linked, and our own will offer online access to back numbers of the Bulletin and Gerddi, and all the essential information for present and future members.

Our next public appearance will be at our stand in the Floral tent at the Royal Welsh Show (20-23 July). I hope you will visit us there, (and perhaps stay and help out on the stand for an hour or so). I am certain you will also enjoy the extensive variety of Branch excursions which have already been advertised in the Spring Bulletin.

Gwyneth Hayward

GARDEN ORNAMENTATION A Study Day to be held at Portmeirion on Saturday 24th October 2009

The Gwynedd Branch of WHGT invite all Trust members and friends to a day of lectures at this prestigious venue in North Wales. The fantasy landscape is an ideal setting for a study of garden ornamentation.

After coffee and registration at 10am the morning programme will begin with a talk "Garden Water features from the Moghul Empire to the present day" by Bryan Hirst who is a Director of Waterlands Productions Ltd and a member of the Fountain Society, he has lectured, among other places, at the English Garden School and the Society of Garden Designers at Kew. Lord Alastair Aberdare, Vice President of the Fountain Society, has started to collect information about fountains in Wales and will review the findings of his research to add a Welsh dimension to the morning.

Our speaker after lunch will be Helena Attlee, author of the recently published 'The Gardens of Wales' which has

received excellent reviews. Helena has made the garden and its history her special subject for over 20 years. She is the author of 'The Gardens of Portugal' and 'Italian Gardens: A Cultural History', and leads specialist tours in Britain, Italy and Portugal. She will talk to us about Renaissance and Baroque garden ornamentation in Italy, the inspiration for so many historic gardens in Britain, and Portmeirion in particular.

We hope someone from Portmeirion will be able to tell us about the decorative features in the grounds and there will then be an opportunity for members to explore the gardens.

The cost for the day, to include entrance to Portmeirion, Coffee and biscuits on arrival, Buffet lunch and Tea and biscuits in the afternoon will be £35.00 per person.

For more information and details of local accommodation please contact Olive Horsfall by telephone 01766 780187 or email oandmhorsfall@btinternet.com.

Ruperra: Representing WHGT Interests at the Appeal

by Judith Martin Jones, BA, MA, MRTPI

When in June 2001, I was drafting a conservation statement for Ruperra Castle and parkland as a piece of work for my MA in Garden History little did I think that nine years later I would be revisiting my conclusions and that so little would have changed.

Readers of *Gerddi* will have read Pat Jones- Jenkins scholarly article (Summer 2009) on the history and evolution of the Ruperra estate in Glamorgan. Pat's passionate campaigning for the protection and restoration of the mock castle and its setting have inspired many others to join the cause and support the Ruperra (Castle) Preservation Trust and raise the profile of this cause.

The Welsh Historic Garden Trust followed the saga with keen interest and Ruperra was a regular feature on the agenda of the Mid and South Wales branch. When the planning application for housing development in and around the ruined castle was refused by the Planning Authority at Caerphilly County Borough Council (against, it must be said, the recommendation of the planning officer) there were two cheers of delight. Three would have been too many because there was always the possibility that the applicant would be encouraged to appeal against the decision. This is indeed what ensued and the resulting public local inquiry was held in April this year.

It now seems incredible that initially the preferred format for the appeal was a hearing lasting a day or two at most! The WHGT, along with other interested parties, made strong representations, that a full Inquiry allowing more time and a fuller examination of the important issues was more appropriate. The Planning Inspectorate agreed to this with the added proviso that the final determination would be by the Minister. The level of objection to the proposed development and the degree of interest engendered in local residents, politicians, conservationists far and wide, including many esteemed academics has vindicated the case for a public inquiry.

I had made representations for the WHGT and had requested and been granted 'Rule 6' status for the WHGT. That is to say the opportunity to appear at the Inquiry with equal status as the main participants, the Council and the Appellants. The Inquiry procedure is designed as a forum for views and opinions to be aired to enable the Inspector to fully understand the situation and in this case advise his Minister. Our Inspector Mr. Poulter was from the onset at pains to accommodate all who wished to contribute, remembering that at that time he had not, save for the restricted views from adjacent roads, seen the castle and its setting.

The number of professions appearing in support of the Council's case against the development proposals was remarkable but not unique. One of my most recent experiences when working for a planning consultant was in support of Cardiff Council in its case against development of the Llanishen Reservoir site. The protagonists for the protection of the reservoir as a public space were similarly formed into an organised body with venerable professional support. The dismissal of not one but two appeals on that site seemed a triumph for people power which gave us encouragement at Ruperra.

Here surely the case was clear cut? The land is green space between settlements subject to various polices of protection. In normal circumstances building a small housing estate (37 units were proposed in total) would be out of the question. The appellant was



Oblique photograph of Ruperra Castle and gardens – taken in the 1930s

seeking to present a case for development to 'enable' the restoration of the castle to residential use and to some extent the setting, although inevitably much of this would be irretrievably lost. I recalled my experience too many years ago to mention when working for Cardiff Council and serving on the Caerphilly Mountain study working group. This was in its time an innovative and far-sighted exercise in joint working between the various local authorities in South East Wales to secure the protection of open land for its own intrinsic value as well as for provision of appropriate leisure and recreation uses- golf courses, picnic areas walking and riding routes etc. compatible with the objectives of protection and enhancement. It was these objectives, mirrored in appropriate planning policies and documents of the partner authorities, that generally restricted the growth of the urban development of Cardiff to the south of the M4 motorway. Caerphilly Council has gone on to create and manage, through its countryside service, several local country parks: – what an achievement it would be if Ruperra was added to the list!

It was timely that in the autumn of 2008 Caerphilly County Borough Council was presenting its draft Local Development Plan for consultation and the WHGT responded by urging a greater degree of protection for historic sites, including Ruperra.

Rather than engage a barrister the WHGT had the agreement with the Ancient Monuments Society that their casework adviser, Frank Kelsall, would act as our advocate as well as speaking on behalf of the AMS itself and forwarding the view of other national amenity groups- the Victorian Society and the Georgian Group. I was called to present evidence at the end of three long days of exhausting debate.

For those unused to the quasi-judicial procedures this arena can be a daunting one. Even for the seasoned professional the cut and thrust of debate requires full concentration and an ability to assimilate facts and opinions. In my experience as a chartered planner in both public and private sector over 35 years I have participated in many such inquiries. The Ruperra inquiry can fairly be described as entertaining and educative by turns!!

I hope that I managed to convey not just the planning context of this vital site but its major potential for tourism. I took heart from the quote from Dame Jenny Abramsky, the recently appointed chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund, who in an interview in 'Regeneration' journal said "*We talk about getting out of this recession, and tourism could really help us, what with the weak pound. I'm going to keep arguing that. It's crucial.*" We now keenly await the outcome of the Ruperra appeal.

Seeking Sphinxes

I am reading for an M.A. in Garden History at Bristol and have started a dissertation on 'The Sphinx and the Garden', which will cover Britain, France and Germany. So far my only Welsh examples are at Bodnant, Maenan Hall, and Leeswood Hall, but I think there must be more. I should be most grateful if members could contact me with details of any sphinxes they know of, especially in Wales, but also of less well-known examples (e.g. in private gardens) elsewhere. Any records in contemporary accounts of what owners and visitors thought about the sphinxes would be particularly welcome, and records of any no longer extant. I am including sphinxes on gate piers and at house entrances as well as those out in the grounds, and possibly also ones figuring in garden furniture, e.g. as urn handles, bench ends or table supports.

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Sphinxes at Biddulph Grange.

Seeking Images of the Gothic Arcade at Hafod – Reward offered!

A seriously dilapidated structure overlooks the Chain Bridge on what is now known as the Gorge Walk at Hafod. This was Johnes's "New" Walk, which was created between 1794 and 1805 when the chain bridge was erected. Today the ruin is enveloped in blue tarpaulins. The structure was scheduled (with the bridge) in 2002 and recorded and examined by Cambria Archaeology in 2003. The pillars were then taken down and rebuilt to the extent of the remaining materials, but the lime mortar mix failed to cure properly and without a pediment to stabilise it the structure is at risk of collapse.

Strangely, and despite exhaustive search, there is little clue to its origin. Neither Johnes nor other contemporary writers mentioned this feature, and the only known image of it was drawn by John Piper in 1939. He coined the term Gothic Arcade and drew a three-arched gothic façade. He speculated that it was a "folly, probably by Nash". However, on stylistic grounds, others have suggested it may date from the mid to late 19th century.

The Hafod Trust would like to reconstruct this feature - the springing points for the arches have survived on the outer pillars, and the Piper drawings give an indication of the proportions. However more evidence is needed and it seems truly surprising that, if it was intact in 1939, no family photo collection contains a group assembled, as people do today, at this pleasant viewpoint.

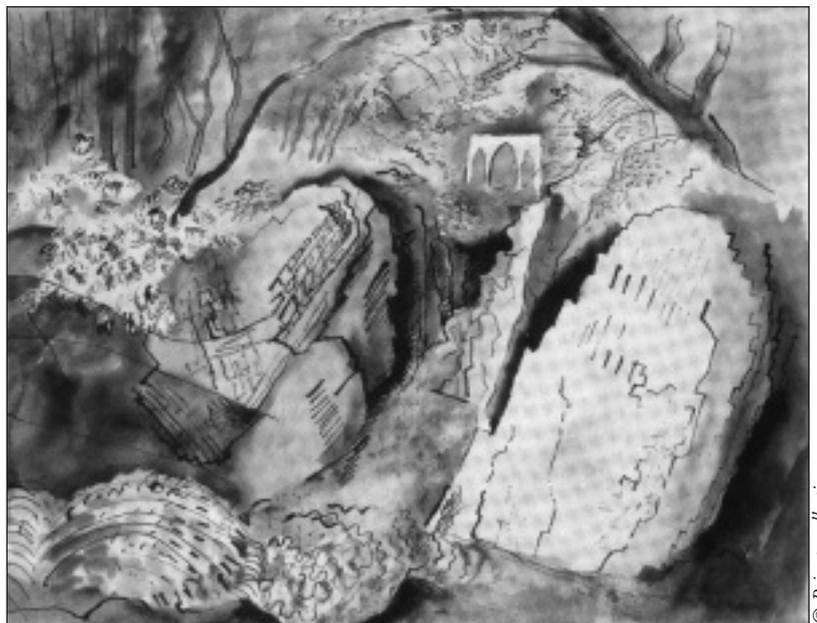
Thanks to individually generous sponsors, the Hafod Trust is able to offer a reward of up to £150 for photographic evidence of the appearance of the arcade in the early 20th century before the arches collapsed. This could resolve the present ugly and unsatisfactory situation on this beautiful gorge.

If you can help, get in touch with the Hafod Trust at the Estate Office, Pontrhydygroes, SY25 6DX, or phone 01974 282568.



The pillars of the Gothic Arcade, enrobed in tarpaulins.

© Jennie Maceve



John Piper's 1939 representation of the Ystwyth Gorge and Gothic Arcade.

© Private collection

Records find a permanent home

In 1992 Pembrokeshire was a founding branch of the WHGT. A year or so later Gerry Hudson was asked to be the Branch Recorder, despite his almost total ignorance of history and gardens! Since then he has amassed a wealth of information with maps, estate agents particulars, and his own photographs covering over 140 garden sites.

Recently he suggested to the committee that this material could be stored at the County Records Office in Haverfordwest. As such research is never complete it was agreed that members could possibly add to it as well as study it. The Recorder's family could also reclaim a bedroom!

It so happened that these records were the 100th collection submitted to the Records Office. The County Archivist, Nikki Bosworth suggested marking the event with a press release. We hope that this will highlight our Recorder's work as well as encouraging participation in local history research of all kinds.

Alma Stanford



Archivist Nikki Bosworth and Recorder Gerry Hudson with a few items from the collection.

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Book Review

The Flowering of Aberglasney

by Graham Rankin

(Aberglasney Enterprises Ltd 2009)

Hardback, 240 pp. ISBN 978-0-9562782-0-3 £30

Ten years on from the archaeology and restoration, Aberglasney is a new garden on old bones. This book celebrates that achievement, and showcases the plantsmanship and design talents of its Director of Operations, Graham Rankin, who is also no slouch as author, photographer and lecturer.

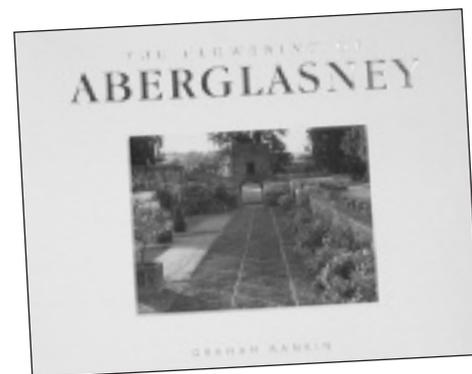
First and foremost this is a lavish picture book. Graham Rankin is a photographer of distinction, and with the advantages of constant access to the garden, from dawn to dusk, in fair weather and foul, his pictures provide a portrait far more intimate than that which could be achieved by a big-name photographer on visiting assignment. A frond of fern enrobed in a cocoon of transparent ice, a perfect camellia bloom crusted with early morning spicules of frost, or the work of orb spiders beaded in glistening dew on a sweet-pea trellis bear testament to fleeting moments of delight. As a photographer he is at his most active at dawn and evening, as low light gleams through leaves and petals. He uses conventional film, and slow exposures. His immaculate plant portraits can only be taken when there is not a breath of wind.

Chapters are devoted to each garden area, - Cloisters, walled gardens, the sloping hill above the mansion, the pool garden and the Ninfarium, and the text describes the process and the planting, emphasising the discriminating choice of newly-introduced species from the wild or new and improved cultivars of old friends. The emphasis is always on the best and most entrancing plants. More than a few are choice rarities, some of which arrived with Graham Rankin from his previous garden.

There is a colloquial term for illustrated books such as this one, - plant porn - as page by page one lingers upon close-ups of the immaculate fleshy textures of new petals, the clustered anthers of a lily, the weird spathes of Arisaemas, the extraordinary sculptural stigmas at the centre of a magnolia flower. But it is also much more than this. Graham Rankin and his editor Penny David know their plants, the scientific nomenclature is impeccable, the index precise, and the insights into the plants and their sources are a delight. Plant collectors from Reginald Farrer to Bleddwyn and SueWynn Jones, and the plant breeders constantly refining the beauty of new varieties appear regularly in the narrative.

This book is rightly a celebration of what Aberglasney Gardens has become, and is published to coincide with the ten-year anniversary. I have only one criticism - in common with most photographic extravaganzas, it is too heavy to comfortably read in bed!

Caroline Palmer



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Christmas Card 2009!



The 2009 Christmas Card is available at £4-80 for 10 (see Flyer enclosed). Members can also still purchase the Notelets, £4-70 per pack, from the publisher, Quartilles International, 6 Boss Hall Business Park, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 5BN
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