



# WHGT BULLETIN

ISSUE 71 MAY 2016



*The Menai suspension and Britannia tubular bridges ca 1850 lithograph by Thomas Picken, image courtesy The National Library of Wales. The site of the Britannia Park lay on the left between the two bridges.*

## Britannia Park: Railways, Bridges and Gardens Gaenor Price

Although largely ephemeral, Britannia Park reveals a nexus of connections between entrepreneurs, designers and gardeners, and as the only recorded work of Joseph Paxton in Wales it has its importance. The site is now the home of Treborth Botanic Garden, University of Bangor.

In 1846 the Chester and Holyhead Railway Company bought 90 acres of land running along the Menai Strait west of Telford's Suspension Bridge in connection with the railway and the construction of the Britannia Tubular Bridge. The land is fairly level along the railway, and then falls towards the sea, descending abruptly for the final 50 feet. A map published in 1850 shows fields everywhere, except for a stand of woodland, and woods along the steep seaward edge; both are now classified SSSIs.

In 1849 the Railway Company decided to use their land for a suburban development of villas and terraces, and a large hotel with 25 acres of pleasure grounds.

Joseph Paxton was engaged to provide the overall design. He was already famous, not only for his work

for the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, comprising both superior horticultural techniques and innovative glasshouse design culminating in the Great Stove of 1836, but also for the 1840s designs of Prince's Park, Liverpool and Birkenhead Park. Both designs featured detached villas, terraces and crescents of houses around the perimeter, which were sold to finance the park.

Paxton was therefore the obvious person to plan the similar Britannia Park project; he was deeply involved in the railways, both as a shareholder and as a Director of the Midland Railway Company, and must have been known personally to directors of the Chester and Holyhead railway. By the end of the year the plan had been supplied, and Paxton was writing to the Crown Commissioners for permission to make a new and easier access across Crown land directly at the end of the Suspension Bridge.

In 1850 Paxton was on site in April, in June for the floating of the third tube of the Britannia Bridge, and in

October to select with the architect Charles Reed the site for the hotel. In April 1851 he was, fruitlessly, urging action on the new access. Work started on the hotel in the spring, but never got beyond the foundations owing to financial difficulties. Work would have started on the Pleasure Grounds at the same time. Reports in the *North Wales Chronicle* indicate its progress:

10<sup>th</sup> July 1851: *"The formation of the pleasure grounds is proceeding rapidly."*

11<sup>th</sup> September 1851: *"The grounds, under the direction of Mr Paxton, are being very handsomely laid out, and the parts of them already finished affords a very good idea of the magnificence of the entire conception. The two pontoons are to be used for bathing as well as a landing place, with a convenient approach to the upper grounds, the pathways of which will be so firm and clean that in the wettest weather a lady might deign to walk on them. Access is to be obtained from the railway by a glass entrance, forming a conservatory, in which the rarest plants and flowers, indigenous and exotic, will be preserved."*

6<sup>th</sup> November 1851: *"The ornamental grounds, as laid out by Sir Joseph Paxton, are already considerably advanced, and ...I am quite satisfied that the Britannia Park will surpass anything of the kind in Europe."*

Although the newspaper articles give the impression that Paxton was personally supervising the work, this was not the case. At Prince's Park and Birkenhead Park the landscaping and planting had been entrusted respectively to Edward Milner and Edward Kemp, two of his top men at Chatsworth, each of whom later established his own landscape practice.

Paxton would have had little time available for Britannia Park. From the middle of 1850 he was heavily engaged in the planning and construction of the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851. The idea had come to him at a Midland Railway meeting; it was based on the ridge and furrow iron and glass structure of the Great Stove at Chatsworth, but on an even grander scale, and fired the enthusiasm of the whole country. Paxton spent the summer in London with his family and was knighted at the close of the exhibition in October. At this time he was also executing commissions for the Duke at Lismore, his Irish property, and designing a mansion, Mentmore, for the Rothschilds. Then there was negotiation to allow the Crystal Palace to remain in Hyde Park; when this failed the Palace was re-erected at Sydenham. In November 1851 he wrote *"The past year has been to me one of great anxiety and great uncertainty of action...I let many things into arrears in the early part of the year that an accumulation of engagements pressed so heavily on me this autumn that I could never for two days together be certain as to my movements."* (*A Thing in Disguise: The Visionary Life of Joseph Paxton* by Kate Colquhoun, Fourth Estate, London, 2003)

Edward Kemp has sometimes been suggested as the supervisor of the Britannia Park project, but Elizabeth Davey, who has thoroughly researched Kemp's work

and written a history of Birkenhead, has found no such reference; moreover he seems not to have had much contact with Paxton after 1847. Edward Milner has also been suggested, somewhat more plausibly; he remained associated with Paxton and from August 1852 worked at Sydenham supervising the construction and planting of the grandiose gardens at the new Crystal Palace. From the mid-1860s he designed several gardens in North Wales (see *Trafodion*, November 2011). It is possible that he paid some visits and thereby became known to the local gentry, but the recent discovery of a court report in the *Chronicle* has yielded the name of the man responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the work. (I am indebted to Elizabeth Davey for this reference.)

John Ashwell, born in Bedfordshire (Paxton's home county) in 1823, was recorded in the census of March 1851 as a gardener lodging in Baslow, at the gates of Chatsworth. Chatsworth staff records are deficient for this period, but it is legitimate to infer that he worked there and was another of Paxton's up-and coming young men. In June 1851 he was already in Bangor. This agrees well with the start of the work on the pleasure grounds in the spring of 1851. In November 1852 a court case was brought by Vickers, a local nurseryman, over plants supplied by him to the Chester and Holyhead Railway the previous March which had not been paid for. The details of the case are trivial, but a few useful facts and interesting connections emerge. The railway's representatives, *"employed to purchase trees and plants required by Sir Joseph Paxton for the decoration of the Britannia Park"*, were Ashwell and one William Bowman; the latter was not directly employed by the railway but acted as Ashwell's agent in the sourcing and delivery of plants. In March a Mr Peto, one of the Directors (and incidentally the father of Harold Peto the garden designer), had given orders that *"tree-planting should be got on with immediately"*. Vickers sent 2,000 box trees and 500 mountain ash, apparently without receiving an official order. This was twice the quantity of plants required, and they were found to be of unsatisfactory quality; Ashwell refused to use them. This is the only available reference to the actual plants used. Charles Ewing, the head gardener of Bodorgan, Anglesey, gave evidence showing that trees had been supplied from Bodorgan and duly paid for. (Ashwell referred to these plants as "shrubs".)

Ewing was a well-respected gardener, earning a mention in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* of September 1850. Inspired by Paxton's glass and iron constructions, he had invented a double glass wall (effectively a very long narrow glasshouse) at Bodorgan, within which fruit trees could be grown (*Gardeners' Chronicle*, November 1851) Ewing almost certainly met Paxton, perhaps at the floating of the tube. Bodorgan did not habitually sell plants, and the order, to the value of £33.2.8, implies some special arrangement.

Where did the planting take place? A surviving plan of 1853 (permission to make a copy of this has been



Lucombe oak and lime trees at Treborth which may have survived from the Britannia Park planting of the 1850s © John Gorham

withheld) shows only the hotel and neighbouring villas, without any indication of the pleasure grounds. A railway map of the 1860s shows a long narrow stand of trees along the line of the railway, necessary to shield the proposed development from noise and pollution, and probably dating from this time. It is obvious that no planting could be done on and around the proposed building sites until building had been completed; moreover it was essential that the views should not be blocked. The pleasure grounds must therefore have been below the brow of the plateau on the slope to the sea, and this is indeed where the surviving features are found. The choice of mountain ash and box, relatively low growing, is significant here. Laurel and *Rhododendron ponticum* on the site may be a relic of this planting; one would have expected something more exotic and indeed a sales advertisement of 1866 refers to "luxuriant ornamental Coppices of Rare and Variegated shrubs." Any larger trees would have been planted well down the slope.

In September 1852 the *Chronicle* reported that the grounds were "in rapid progress toward completion", but financial difficulties continued and in November it was resolved to discharge Ashwell as soon as the job (unspecified) he was engaged on was completed. Unlike Kemp and Milner, Ashwell did not establish a career in landscape design. He is later found working as

a railway contractor for the Midland Railway on the line to Manchester through Millers Dale, and on the Settle-Carlisle railway. This may have come about through Paxton, a director of the Midland Railway, or his Chester and Holyhead contacts. By the end of the century he was in London as a Public Works contractor, and finally retired to live on his own means. Not as impressive a career as Paxton's, but not bad for the son of a Bedfordshire gamekeeper!

Meanwhile, back in Bangor, Britannia Park, although not originally intended as a public park, was functioning as such. The Tubular Bridge was an important tourist attraction; there was a railway station and refreshment rooms in the immediate vicinity. A letter in the *Chronicle* (June 1855) described the scene: "The waters of the varied and romantic Menai seemed exultingly to reflect the gay company assembled on its shores; while the grand and unrivalled works of art [sc. the Bridges] give a dignity and grandeur to the scene." The writer went on to regret "the unfinished state of this beautiful piece of ground", but indicated that the carriage drive was almost completed. This followed the line of the old footpath parallel to the sea and would have led visitors through the edge of the pleasure grounds.

The railway company had still failed to sell any building plots or to attract finance for the hotel, even on a reduced scale. A station had been planned to serve the

hotel and new town, but instead was built much nearer to the Suspension Bridge to serve Menai Bridge and Beaumaris; the new access road was finally built at this time (1857-8). The struggling Chester and Holyhead Railway was then amalgamated with the London and North Western Railway.

In 1867 the Treborth Isaf estate above the railway was bought by the Davies family, and shortly thereafter Britannia Park itself. Edward Milner drew up a plan for the grounds in 1875, but this does not show anything beyond the railway. It is probably legitimate to assume that surviving features date to the preceding Paxton era. The Park continued to be visited and the carriage drive used, but in the 1890s the Davieses built a new house, Ceris, near the Suspension Bridge, forcing an inland detour at that end of the drive.

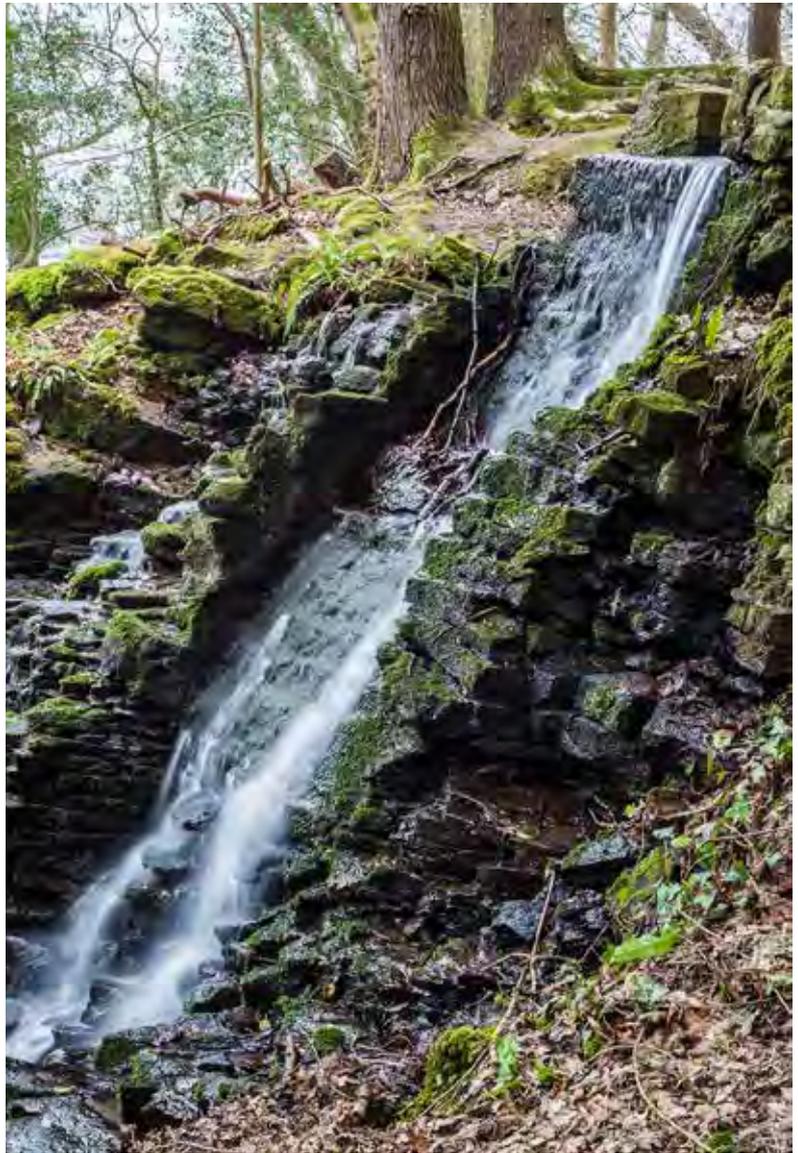
Early Ordnance Survey maps (1888, 1889) show that woodland, presumably secondary, but perhaps with some planting by the Davieses, had overtaken the site of the pleasure grounds. There are some clearings in the eastern section, which may reflect some feature of the original design. The field near the railway, now the heart of the botanic garden, and the fields to the west were grazed; there was some 20<sup>th</sup> century afforestation in this latter area.

The surviving features still to be seen include the carriage drive which now forms part of the Wales Coast Path and is much frequented. Some parts of the drainage system are visible; more remains to be discovered. Some of the drains have been arranged to deliver water to an area now known as the Bog Garden which may have been intended as a pool.

The "lime avenue" is a misnomer; it is a single dog-legged line of multi-stemmed limes which seems to follow an earlier field boundary and is backed for part of its length by a ditch. At its lower end it crosses the carriage drive and terminates in the seaward woodland. As noted above, view-blocking trees would have been undesirable and the intention may have been to prune the limes as a hedge, possibly to camouflage the ditch, or to demarcate a path to the projected bathing pontoons; a back-eddy below somewhat mitigates the ferocious Swellies currents and would have been a possible site.

The cascade is the most striking original feature. A culvert under the railway delivers water over rockwork down the steep slope to the sea. It was originally wider and even more impressive, but has been modified with a concrete channel at the top, probably because of erosion

Hardly anything remains of the original planting, except as previously noted. There are two Lucombe oaks, which look sufficiently venerable to date from the 1850s, and a scatter of limes in the woodland near the sea, which may



*The cascade © John Gorham*

be either an Ashwell or a Davies planting.

A proposed geophysical survey may locate paths, drains, the exact hotel site, and perhaps other features.

In 1960 the University College of North Wales (now Bangor University) bought the remaining part of the Park, forming sports grounds at the far end and founding the Botanic Garden. It is a matter of profound satisfaction to all who know this site that the hotel and new town were never built; the present gardens are immeasurably more useful and beautiful than these would have been.

Gaenor Price

*I am grateful for the assistance of the Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden and would particularly like to mention Pauline Perry, now deceased, who did a great deal of research into the Park.*

*See also: Britannia Park- Paxton's Pleasure Park at Treborth Botanic Gardens by Mary Garner in WHGT Bulletin No. 30 Autumn 2001*

*and*

*Britannia Park, by M L Clarke, Caernarvonshire Historical Transactions Vol 19 1958*



## Penllergare

At Penllergare Phase 1 of the restoration project has centred on the rugged picturesqueness of the upper valley. The upper lake has settled down beautifully after a massively disruptive operation to remove years of silt deposition.

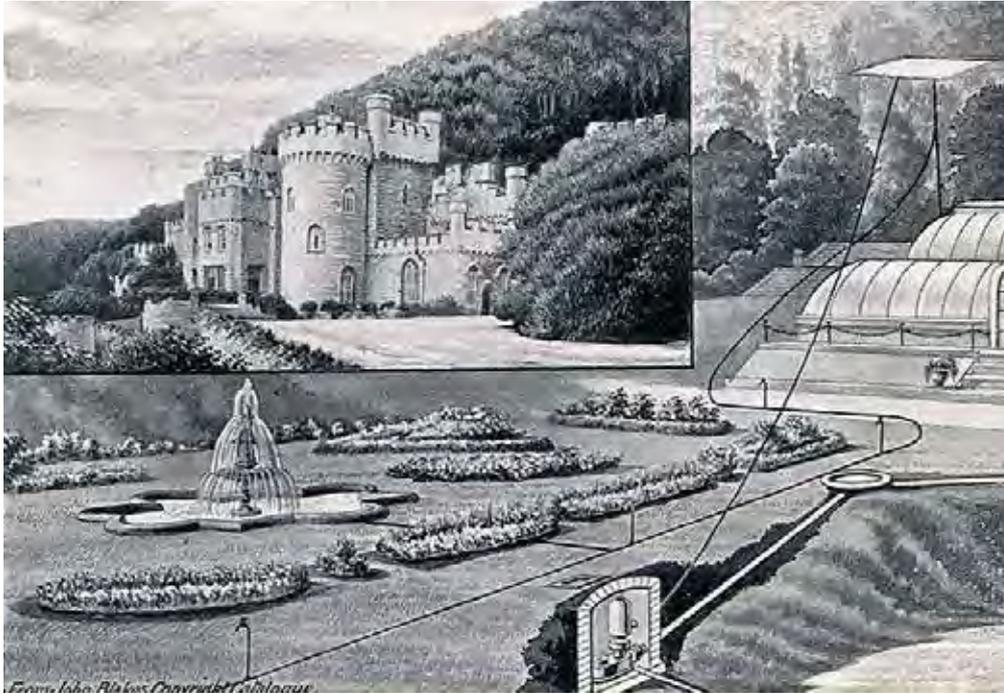
The equatorial observatory has emerged from an overly protracted repair contract and the Trust now has to face the fact that this unique structure will be in the midst of a housing development.

Meanwhile the Archimedes screw turbine is generating electricity and much-needed income, while the adjacent, rebuilt stone-arched Llewelyn Bridge is once again the focal point for walkers, after which they enjoy well-earned coffee and cake in the café that's already too small to meet demand as footfall in the Woods is climbing past 80,000 per annum.

Thanks to a further development grant from HLF and the

offer of a lease for the walled gardens and its environs Phase 2 aims to complete the re-integration and restoration of the principal features of the Registered landscape; improve and consolidate its capacity to offer a regionally unique visitor attraction; relieve visitor impact on the upper valley by offering alternative and contrasting attractions, and increase the scope for community engagement, raising sustainable income and volunteering, without which Penllergare could simply not function. If this phase is successful it will be possible – after two decades or more of campaigning and research – to start restoring and reviving the formal walled gardens and the pioneering orchid house in their ornamental woodland setting. In contrast, balancing enhanced wetland habitat conservation with improving access in the river valley will be the subject of a feasibility study that could just be Phase 3.

Michael Norman



*Gwrych Castle, Abergele, the seat of the countess of Dundonald showing a small Hydrum, raising water for the supply of the Glass-houses and Gardens.*

## Gwrych Castle News

2015 was a great year for Gwrych Castle, a Grade I ruin on the 'Buildings at Risk Register'. It is set within a Grade II\* registered landscape outside Abergele, Conwy, against a wooded hillside overlooking the coast above the A55.

Recent archaeological excavations by the Gwrych Preservation Trust revealed that the original late-Georgian heating system in the conservatory remains mainly intact. Original pathways have been found beneath a jousting tiltyard constructed in the 1970s as a tourist attraction. Its soil, sand and gravel surface formed a hermetic seal, which has preserved the site's archaeology.

A geophysical survey identified the original pipe work for the 1894 fountain (illustrated above), together with the pump-house adjacent to the Melon House (this was originally a deer park shed of c.1819-1822).

The Gwrych Preservation Trust is now working with EPM UK Ltd and the Edwards family, the owners of Gwrych Castle and Estate, to find a solution for the main castle building whilst concurrently working on a Heritage Lottery Fund application to restore the gardens and to create a visitor facility in the Melon House.

The terraced formal gardens at Gwrych were designed and constructed by the owner of Gwrych Castle, Lloyd Hesketh Bamford-Hesketh, during the 1830s.

They replaced an earlier formal garden of c.1822 located on the eastern side of the main castle building. This early garden consisted of a series of two large rectangular central flower beds with paths around each side leading to viewing platforms overlooking the park and the Vale of Clwyd.

As Lloyd continued to extend the castle in the 1830s the current formal garden was developed as a level

terrace based on a medieval raised bed garden. This was aligned to the main building and accessed from the eastern boundary of the former garden, which was converted to lawn, via the Lady's Walk, which afforded views over the terrace and to the landscape beyond.

The planting is detailed both in a watercolour of c.1840 and in contemporary plant lists drawn up by Lloyd himself. Evidence of pineapple pits and melon frames contained under glass covers can be seen in later photographs of the garden and these are also mentioned in documents relating to the gardens.

The garden seems to have been completed by 1837 as a stained glass window was com-

mmissioned for the cast iron conservatory to commemorate the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne. The conservatory was attached to a two-storey tower (The Gardener's Tower) copied from the Water Tower/Sally Port adjacent to the River Clwyd at Rhuddlan Castle but adapted according to the advice given by Loudon in his handbooks on gardening.

By the 1890s the medieval form of the garden was removed and replaced with a French parterre, which had at its centre a large fountain, installed in 1893 by Robert Bamford-Hesketh and his wife Ellen. Robert died suddenly during this process and his heir, Winifred, Countess of Dundonald, completed the work. The architect Detmar Blow appears to have carried out further minor alterations c.1914 for the Countess, which included the use of Portland cement within the Gardener's Tower and within the conservatory.

The Countess used the first floor chamber of the Gardener's Tower as her writing room and the gardeners had their mess room in the basement. Last summer the Gardener's Tower was restored and is now furnished for public open days.

At the time of the Countess's death in 1924 the garden was still well maintained but quickly fell into dereliction. Many specimen trees were felled (c.1946-48) and the conservatory, badly damaged during the war when German bombs exploded in the park, was demolished c.1950.

Mark Baker

*Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust Open Days: Event weekend dates 4th & 5th June and 13th & 14th August.*

[www.gwrychtrust.co.uk](http://www.gwrychtrust.co.uk)

## Horticultural Societies in Wales

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) was founded in 1804. It promoted garden-related activities nationally through London-based competitions and exhibitions. Provincial societies soon followed. And whereas the need to eat to survive was universally understood, the quality of produce grown by the lower classes was variable. Thomas Johnes of Hafod and the founders of several Welsh county agricultural societies addressed that problem by raising standards of both agricultural and garden productivity on their own demesnes and beyond. Initially the gentry and middle-classes promoted local horticultural societies. In towns these often introduced new gardening initiatives, while in rural areas competitive plantsmanship was more likely to emerge from established agricultural societies. Although some societies were visibly elitist, the growing professional classes were keen to found competitive garden improvement societies to benefit cottagers, workers and the new middle classes. Few records exist to document them, so it is hardly surprising that little has been written on early provincial agricultural-horticultural competitions. Although the histories of Llanilar and Talybont shows in Cardiganshire (of 2004 & 1996) were written from researching newspapers at first hand, today more accessible information is obtainable free online through the digital archive of Welsh historic newspapers at the National Library of Wales.

By mid-century the gentry and middle classes were encouraging universal education by example and reward, often philanthropically. To promote their altruism, the RHS began to award silver medals recognising horticultural aspiration. Initially, recipients were professional gardeners or their employers, though medals were also offered simply to promote local excellence. Cash prizes were probably always the most potent incentives to compete. In Wales the first horticultural societies were at Cardiff (established in 1828), Swansea and Neath (1831) and on Anglesey (1835). As interest gathered momentum, they were joined by Wrexham (1837); Denbighshire and Flintshire (1838); Chepstow (1839); Mold (1845) and Newport (1846), so that by the First War Wales probably had as many as 200 societies. A few have survived with continuous histories, and today gardening clubs remain popular throughout the Principality.

The earlier societies were founded in better-populated areas. Though dependence on agriculture often meant that gardening interests took second place in country areas, competitive horticulture was nevertheless often fostered through farming organisations.

Serious thought went into structuring Victorian exhibitions and competitions, so that by 1850 the ideal horticultural competition would structure its entrants into three groups. The first accommodated Professionals, Gentlemen's Gardeners and even Gentlemen themselves because this was an age in which they often excelled as plantsmen. Nevertheless, though head gardeners were relatively well paid, it must still have seemed odd that employers

who hardly needed the money could sometimes carry off prizes which many felt should have gone to their gardeners.

Amateurs formed the second class of competitor. In a country with its rapidly expanding middle class, these were independent owner-occupiers or the better off tenants who did – or were supposed to do – their own gardening. Besides access to a suitable piece of ground, they may have owned a modest greenhouse or a small conservatory.

With growing philanthropic aspiration, like the gentry, this new class of professionals and tradespeople became increasingly concerned to address the lot of the rural poor - the Cottagers - who were often tenants tied to country estates. Cottagers made up the third class, qualification for their inclusion usually being a maximum of £15 payment in annual rent. But some cottager groups also had bespoke organisations with titles encouraging industry and self-reliance as well as gardening. That their shows attracted numerous competitors as well as onlookers was testimony to their great success. In fact some succeeded so well in the more socially comprehensive shows that their industry could sometimes dominate them. By accommodating 'the lower classes', these gardening promotional enterprises successfully practiced an early kind of inclusivity which eventually added Children's Gardens to their prize lists.

It soon came to be appreciated that useful money could be won at shows for which the entrance or competitors' fees were minimal. By the income standards and rental demands of the day, some prizes offered to the rural poor for growing healthier plants could therefore be a serious incentive.

Although the three competitor classes actually institutionalised a social hierarchy, in theory their structuring aimed to achieve fairness between entrants with dramatically differing abilities to commit time and money to raising plants. Unsurprisingly, inequalities could be difficult to iron out in practice, and in the North Cardiganshire Horticultural Society at Aberystwyth (1894-1905) there were obvious difficulties in Class A, and bystanders were concerned when some gentry accepted cash prizes for prize-money that arguably should have belonged to their employees, and which incidentally also depleted the society's reserves.

Show adjudicators always possessed expertise. Occasionally they were market gardeners, more rarely gentlemen, and more often than not were the head gardeners of local estates. Though some travelled from adjacent counties, few came far, as judges' expenses and fees were serious budgetary items.

Historic horticultural societies in Wales are at present little known or understood. Indeed, the picture painted in Brent Elliott's brief exposé of Victorian flower shows offers only limited, perhaps even unique, insights. A better appreciation will only be attained through the detailed examination of many more local records. Only

then may it be possible to better assess the important contribution they made to Britain's communities, to floral appreciation and self-sufficiency.

Newsprint reports about these shows routinely list hundreds of prizewinners, usefully locating their homes and identifying prize plants and produce. Such lists are vital research tools for helping establish which properties possessed glasshouses, kitchen gardens, or other structures enabling plant husbandry. Furthermore, researching the types of plant grown or exhibited could aid a better appreciation of developing fashions of floristry and diet. Incidentally, it should be noted that historical research best benefits when more than one newspaper account describes a given event.

Aside from fulfilling an important role in community life during the flux of early industrial expansion, the main achievement of horticultural and cottager improvement societies was educating and engendering enthusiasm among the poor for more confident self-sufficiency and

an appreciation of floral beauty. Such organisations made significant contributions to the endurance and quality of life during the years leading up to, during and after the First World War.

C. Stephen Briggs, Llwyn Deiniol, nr Aberystwyth  
Further reading

*C. Stephen Briggs, 'Promoting horticulture before 1920: The North Cardiganshire Horticultural Society (1894-1905), Ceredigion 17 (2015), 73-110.*

*Brent Elliot, 'Flower Shows in nineteenth-century England', Garden History 29 (2001), 171-184; The Royal Horticultural Society: A History 1804-2004, Chichester, 2004. Toby Musgrave, The Head Gardeners: Forgotten Heroes of Horticulture, Aurum Press, 2007.*

Stephen has kindly offered to send a pdf of his Ceredigion article to anyone who'd like to look more closely at the subject.



A blue plaque marking Jimi Hendrix' stay on an island in Roath Park Lake might look like this. image © [ilovesthediff.com/](http://ilovesthediff.com/)

## The night Jimi Hendrix slept on an island in Roath Park lake

Lost in the misty (purple) haze of the '60s, an urban myth suggests one of rock's biggest ever names woke up in the middle of one of Cardiff's most popular parks.

I may have heard it mentioned by an old-timer in a St Mary Street pub when I was just beginning my drinking career. I first read of this suburban myth online in 2006 when a feedback-swathed rendition of the Welsh national anthem, in the style of Hendrix's famous Star Spangled Banner, was "discovered" by a Cardiff-born chap called Martin Davies. (That recording was even played on Newsnight before it turned out to be a hoax.)

Seattle-born James Marshall Hendrix (1942-1970) visited the Welsh capital twice in his short life, in spring and winter of 1967. Just before and after the so-called

Summer of Love, which in Cardiff may have just involved slightly more cwtching than usual.

In April the Jimi Hendrix Experience appeared low down on the bill at the Capitol Cinema among acts by The Walker Brothers, Cat Stevens and Engelbert Humperdinck. By the time he returned to the 'Diff' on November 23, he headlined at a sold-out Sophia Gardens Pavilion.

Cardiff's very own Amen Corner supported Hendrix on the six-band billing with Pink Floyd (with Syd Barrett) and The Nice (who became Emerson Lake and Palmer) – an amazing line-up, even if the cramming of two shows into one evening meant the sets were ridiculously short. Jimi was quickly gaining a reputation for his feedback-drenched, screaming-guitar psychedelic blues-rock, his Carnaby Street-infused Americana, and his rousing sensuality. For some of those who caught a glimpse, life would never be the same again.

Given that Hendrix's second visit to the capital was in winter – far too cold for messing about on Roath Park lake – the chances are that Hendrix's island experience occurred on his first visit, 49 years ago.

As to which islet he awoke on, possibly startled by a disgruntled duck, probably with a fuzzy head from a few too many pints of Brains, there is precious little evidence. If I had to guess, I reckon it's the south western-most islet nearest the lighthouse. In the spring evening sunshine, there's an aura about it – a purple haze almost.

Chris Amodeo

<http://www.ilovesthediff.com/>

## Storm Eva Plas Cadnant, Anglesey

Storm Eva struck Plas Cadnant on Boxing Day, following weeks of heavy rain. At its peak approximately four inches of rain fell onto the saturated land above the gardens.

All this water washed into the Walled Garden, overwhelming the existing drainage and the 200 plus year old walls acted as a dam, filling the walled garden like a tank until the lower wall eventually collapsed.

A 'tsunami' of water and rocks surged on through the Valley Gardens into the river, scouring some areas down to the bedrock. The force of the water was such that parts of our stone obelisks ended up in the raging Cadnant River. Thankfully nobody was injured.

None of the buildings were affected but there was considerable damage to the footpaths, walls, bridges and the parking area. Fortunately only a relatively small area of planting was destroyed and a good proportion of these plants have been salvaged.

Temporary paths have been laid which will be completed with a gravel finish. A structural engineer has been engaged to design a new retaining wall which is integral to the adjacent pool. The wall will be completed later this summer.

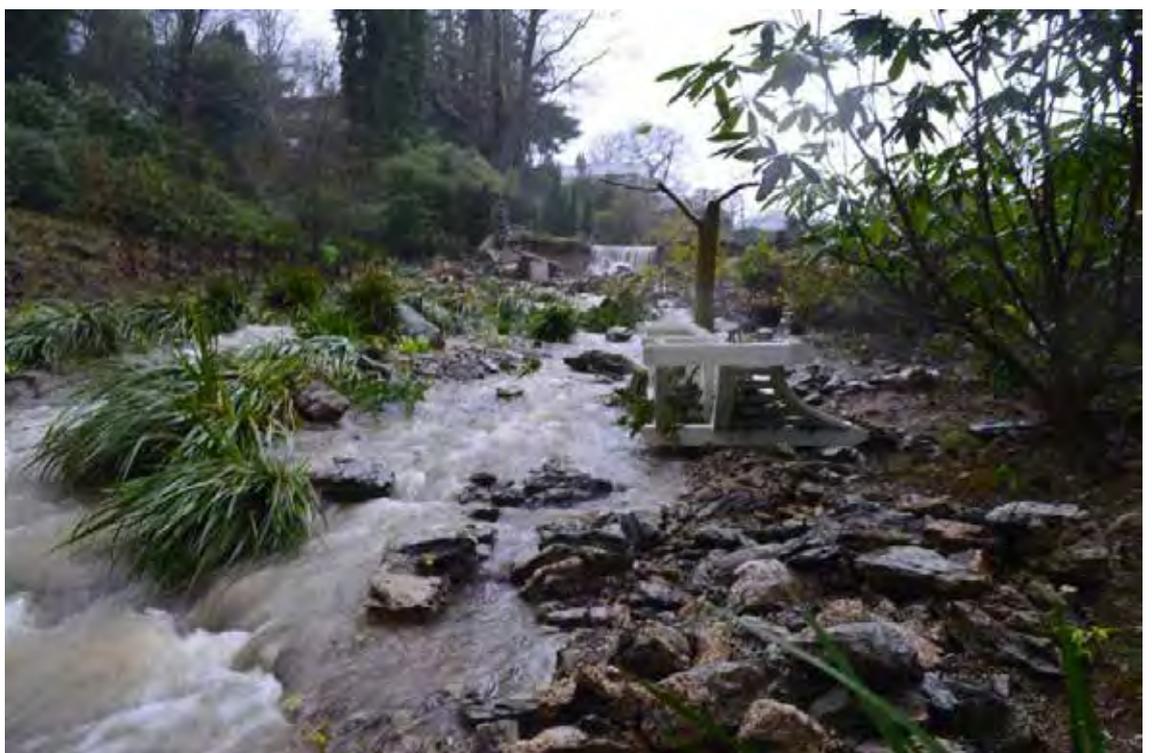
Miraculously our new bespoke bench caught onto the remainder of the Magnolia Star Wars that was battered during the preceding storms but saved from obliteration. The bench is now in the process of being restored and should be ready to return once the wall has been restored. Much of the garden restoration is now completed and the Valley Gardens have been made safe.

Happily the garden is now open and welcoming visitors.

[plascadnantgardens@gmail.com](mailto:plascadnantgardens@gmail.com)



*Above: Pool and walled garden before and during Storm Eva*



*Below: flood waters washing stone and plants down the valley, but the bench is caught in the magnolia.*



*The Footbridge on the grounds of Ruthin Castle is closed as it is in urgent need of restoration.*

## Good News from Ruthin Castle

The future conservation of Ruthin Castle took a significant step forward in March with the registration of the Ruthin Castle Conservation Trust as a Community Benefit Society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014. The new trust also registered with the Financial Conduct Authority, and aims both to conserve the medieval Ruthin Castle and the nineteenth century castle-mansion and to create a visitor attraction featuring the gardens.

There are five dedicated founder directors who each bring exceptional experience to the project chaired by Anthony Saint Claire BA, MSc. FIH, Director of the Ruthin Castle Group of Companies and Project Champion.

The new Trust has an open membership and more directors are expected to be co-opted onto the board in due course for their specific skills and expertise. At the moment the Trust is particularly seeking those with skills in finance and media relations.

Plans have been developed as a first step towards separating the commercial interests of the hotel from the ancient castle and gardens, which are to become a visitor attraction in their own right, held on a long lease by the Trust.

The Trust aims to raise public awareness of the architectural importance of the thirteenth century castle and its special landscape. Ruthin Castle was constructed in 1287 as part of King Edward I's 'Iron Ring', which includes Caernarfon, Conwy, Beaumaris and Harlech castles, which have UNESCO World Heritage status.

The significance of the ancient Ruthin Castle has long been undervalued. For many, the misperception is that Ruthin Castle is the nineteenth century hotel building.

By engaging with the local community and educational

groups it is hoped that the project can attract the essential funding for its conservation and restoration.

The castle park and the mid nineteenth century gardens are Grade II listed on the *Cadw/ICOMOS Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales* and the medieval walls are an important scheduled monument.

The gardens are set within and integrated with the ancient castle ruins. Originally the garden was laid out by the heiress Maria Myddelton. Maria married Frederick West and they built the 1822 house. Their son Frederick Richard West commissioned Henry Clutton to enlarge the house between 1849-52 in the Arts & Crafts style.

The gardens continued to be developed as they were important to Theresa his wife. Her mother, the artist and writer Anne Whitby designed the grounds of Newlands Lymington, for Admiral Cornwallis, inherited in turn by Ann and Theresa.

The beautiful Mary Adelaide Virginia Thomasina Eupatoria FitzPatrick known as "Patsy" (1858-1920), a socialite and mistress of the future King Edward VII married William Cornwallis-West in 1872. She too was also a keen gardener. After the family left Ruthin Castle it was rented out and between 1913 and 1923 became a private sanatorium.

Some of the gardens have retained much of their nineteenth century character and interest but the medieval walls and several of the garden features are now in a parlous condition and restoration and conservation of this landscape is urgently needed.

Anyone interested in becoming a member or assisting in any other aspect can contact Ruthin Castle Conservation Trust: [foundation@ruthincastle.co.uk](mailto:foundation@ruthincastle.co.uk)

## Capability Brown at Talacre

A banqueting house in the Westbury Castle walled garden (formerly known as Talacre Abbey) near Prestatyn, has long been ascribed to Capability Brown.

The charming Palladian-style building is set into the garden wall of the walled garden, now in a separate ownership to the main house. It is very like the Owl House in the Wallington walled garden in Northumberland, so called as a stone owl carving ornaments the pediment of the building. There are also drawings of a similar building held at Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute.

Brown was raised at Kirkharle just a couple of miles away from the grounds of Wallington so it is highly plausible that he worked at the neighbouring estate and he is thought to have visited Wallington in the 1760s.

Talacre Abbey, the seat of the Roman Catholic branch of the Mostyn family is located a few miles W of Mostyn Hall. The Talacre family was founded by Piers, brother of Thomas ap Howel ap Jevan Vychan Lord of Mostyn. The family was settled by the end of the reign of King Henry VIII with the marriage of Pyers Mostyn and Ellen daughter of Thomas Griffith of Pant y Llwyndu of the parish.

The Talacre parkland is laid out on top of an earlier post-medieval estate. A new house was built in 1634 in the reign of James I and later enlarged and improved by Capability Brown (*Gleanings of the Histories of Holywell, Flint, Saint Asaph, and Rhuddlan* by J Poole (of Holywell.)1831 p 67).

In 1748 Sir Edward Mostyn, 5th Bt, married Barbara Browne, daughter of Sir George Browne, 2nd Baronet of Kiddington, Oxfordshire. Lady Mostyn was the sole heiress of Kiddington where she had commissioned Capability Brown to create the serpentine lake in 1740. This was Brown's first independent commission and the first piece of water that he created. It is likely that this work at Kiddington attracted the attention of Lord Cobham who appointed Brown as head gardener at Stowe in 1741.

It is thought that Barbara introduced Brown to Talacre; commissioning the banqueting house after she was widowed and before her second marriage to Charles Gore of Barrington Court, Somerset. The banqueting house is the only surviving building associated with Brown at Talacre.

The 7th Baronet Sir Edward Mostyn was responsible for levelling the old house. He laid the first stone for a new Tudor Gothic mansion in 1824 with a large private chapel designed by the Chester architect Thomas Jones.

In spite of a fire in 1827 the house was completed by 1829. The 1839 tithe map shows the plan of the house almost as it remains today, with but with minor additions to the end of the service wing. In 1921 Talacre was sold to a closed order of Benedictine nuns who built a church to the front of the house in 1931-2 and the campanile in 1952. In 1990 the few remaining nuns left and the building reverted back to a private house.

Early 19th century pleasure grounds surround the



Above: Banqueting house, Talacre prior to restoration  
Below: Wallington Owl House

mansion but the house is now cut off from not only the walled garden but also a rock grotto. Views over Liverpool Bay are now interrupted by a spread of caravan sites that threaten further encroachments on the parkland.

There is good news; since the above image was taken the building has been restored.

No documentary evidence has been found for Brown's work at Talacre.

Glynis Shaw



left: *The Gothic Arcade, nearing completion as it appears today viewed from the Chain Bridge* © David Newnham  
right: *Piper 3, one of three studies by John Piper, 1939. Private Collection.*

## Hafod, Gothic Arcade Restored.

The Hafod Trust has recently completed the restoration of the Gothic Arcade, a three arched eye-catcher which frames the view where Thomas Johnes' suspension bridge spans the narrow gorge on the upper Ystwyth.

The arcade was something of a puzzle, being represented on the ground by the remnants of four basal pillars, only one of which reached high enough to show the first springer stone of the former arch. While listed among the

built features of Hafod, with Ancient Monument status, there is very little evidence as to exactly what it looked like, or when it was built.

John Piper, in 1939, shows it as a three arched rather spindly structure, but then no aspect of his picture is precisely representational. Exhaustive appeals have so far not revealed a single box brownie photograph of the arch, though many people are likely to have passed or picnicked there in the 1950s. Worse still, the accounts by visitors in Johnes' time, even Cumberland in his *An Attempt to Describe Hafod*, failed to mention it. The only possible exception is an unclear account by the Rev H.T. Payne, Archdeacon of Carmarthen, who in about 1815 alluded to a "rude arch of stone". But a literal reading of his description would place his arch on the opposite bank, or even identify it as the Rustic Alcove near the Peiran Cascade.

The restoration was led by the overall shape indicated by Piper's sketch, and the shape dictated by the remaining fragments. It was built with locally sourced, undressed stone by Abbey Masonry and Restoration, Llanelli.

The arch represents the penultimate item on the Hafod Trust's current restoration objectives. Still under development is the plan to put a flat timber span across the bridge abutments of Pont Newydd, the old carriage drive which crossed the Peiran just above the famous falls.

Caroline Palmer



Left: *Stabilisation of the foundations of Pont Newydd prior to replacing the span* © Caroline Palmer



above: *The East Entrance* by David Cox Jr.c. 1870, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

below: *The Sundial Terrace* 1954 and as seen today

## Powis Castle East Terraces

The crumbling former main entrance of this mid-Wales castle once welcomed King George V, Queen Mary and Queen Victoria (as Princess Victoria). It has been hidden behind locked gates since the National Trust took it over in 1952. It was closed off as it was unsafe and to prevent further damage.

Urgent repairs are necessary as damp is eroding the wall holding up the high terrace, which could soon affect the structural stability of the castle's east side.

Thanks to generous support following an urgent appeal last January, the renovation work is now underway to restore and replace the broken steps of the East Front. Drainage will be installed to help prevent damp causing similar damage in the future and repairs made to the stonework, terrace and broken balustrade.

In 2017 a new area will be open to the public with an access stair and lift to the Bowling Green Terrace. Once completed, visitors will again have the opportunity to walk up the grand main steps, stop on the terrace and

enjoy the spectacular views over the Breidden Hills before entering the Castle.

During the preparations for the renovation work, a team from the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust uncovered the remains of a building. This find revealed what is thought to be a fourteenth century tower, which pre-dates the earliest known plans of Powis Castle of 1629. Made of sandstone and containing fragments of medieval floor tiles, the building is thought to have been destroyed during an attack on the castle in 1644.

Work on the East Front was understandably put on hold during this exciting discovery. Powis Castle is of special historical interest, because whilst most castles in Wales were built by the English to subdue the local population, Powis was built by the Welsh ruler Gruffuth ap Gwenwynwyn to defend his territory from aggressive neighbours to the North.





*Museum from the south lawn © Chris Wilson*

## Bishop's Park

The Carmarthenshire branch is leading its own lottery-funded development programme where the County Council envisions “a park and museum for all” and the WHGT is helping with its realisation under the project title of the Tywi Gateway.

With the County Museum (formerly the Bishop's Palace) at its heart, the Registered Grade II Bishop's Park, comprising the pleasure grounds, walled garden and

portions of the Great Meadow and Bishop's Pond, itself a notable SSSI, will be conserved, revitalised and managed through an innovative and sustainable stewardship of a shared cultural heritage.

This concept of sharing will be more than an aspiration because it is intended that the collections and narratives of Park and Museum will complement and interact seamlessly with one another, integrating visitor facilities, community outreach and education. If successful, the project will help to assure the future of both Park and Museum.

Without the HLF this project would not be possible. If the Bishop's Park development phase is successful, the HLF will make a further grant of some £1.1 million to deliver the potentially ground-breaking Tywi Gateway project.

The total project cost is estimated at £2.1 million. The County Council has pledged some £250,000, and substantial volunteer time is crucial to the project. However, even with a vigorous campaign of fund-raising the short-fall is still stubbornly in the region of £255,000.

There's an old saying to the effect that help given early is help worth thrice. We need that help now please.

Michael Norman

## Shakespeare's Gardens by Jackie Bennett

*(London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2016), Hardback, 192 pp; Photographs by Andrew Lawson, £25.*

William Shakespeare died in April 1616 and all the indications are that this year will see the publication of many books on his life and work. Most of us remember the name of some of the flowers that appeared in his plays – wild thyme, love-in-idleness, musk roses and eglantine. From his sonnets it is clear that he knew something of the nature of plants with such lines as ‘Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds’. The gravedigger in Hamlet gives a clue that Shakespeare might have appreciated the work of gardeners when he says ‘There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers. They hold up Adam's profession’. But the Bard was so busy and spent so much time in London and out of Stratford, did he have time for being involved with gardens of his own?

Jackie Bennett's book, produced with the close cooperation of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, is likely to convince you that he did. It focuses on the gardens Shakespeare knew both as a boy and as a man. Most of them are in Stratford-upon-Avon but there is also a chapter on the gardens he might have seen in London, as well as an overview of Tudor gardens. There are separate sections on his birthplace in Henley Street, his grandmother Mary Arden's farm, Anne Hathaway's cottage, his final home in New Place and Hall's Croft, built for Shakespeare's daughter Susanna and her husband, John Hall. Dr Hall was a

practising Doctor who used to harvest all the ingredients for his potions from the garden.

Each section contains a history of the garden in question which includes not only Andrew Lawson's beautiful colour photographs but old maps, paintings and engravings. Within each chapter there are also separate illustrated sections on subjects as Shakespeare's mulberries, Ophelia's grief, food in Tudor times, saffron and household herbs.

*The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is currently looking at ways in which to steer and develop the five gardens into destinations in their own right. Of particular interest to WHGT members in the Cowbridge area is the possibility that Hall's Croft might be developed into a Physic Garden in the future. In May a delegation from Hall's Croft will visit Cowbridge to study how that garden was set up; the plants it contains and the recipe for its success in the decade since it was created.*

Jean Reader

Huw Francis, New Director  
National Botanic Garden of Wales

Swansea born Huw Francis was educated at Olchfa Comprehensive and graduated from Cranfield University as an engineer with business and mentoring qualifications. Huw has professional experience working in operational, development and consultancy roles. He lived in Carmarthenshire for five years working as an International Trade Adviser for the International Business Wales Division of Welsh Government. For the past nine years, he has been



the first Chief Executive of Scotland's largest community landowner, Stòras Uibhist, located in the Outer Hebrides. A strategic manager, Huw has strong commercial skills, financial acumen, and experience of working in the public, private and voluntary sectors. He has previously worked in Hong Kong, Turkey and France. Huw said: "It is a great to be coming home to Wales and working in such a fabulous place. I'm looking forward to the challenge enormously and working with the talented team at the Garden."

Chairman of the Garden's Board of Trustees, Rob Jolliffe, said: "We are delighted that Huw is joining us. He will be a real asset as we seek to take the Garden forward into a bright, new future."

He will take up his new role on June 13th.

**The 27th Annual General Meeting**

at  
**Aberglasney**  
Saturday 11th June 10.30 am  
hosted by Carmarthenshire branch

Followed by a talk

**Moving Heaven and Earth -  
Capability Brown's Gift of Landscape**

by

Steffie Shields,. Photographer, writer,  
Cambridge tutor, and Vice-President of The  
Gardens Trust.

After lunch there will be a guided walk around the gardens by Joseph Atkin (Head Gardener) and a visit to the folly/ eye-catcher Paxton's Tower.

All members should have received an Annual Report, an AGM programme and booking form and an information sheet. These are available at [www.whgt.org.uk](http://www.whgt.org.uk)

Full accounts are available on request  
WHGT, Aberglasney Gardens, Llangathen, Carms SA32 8QH  
[admin@whgt.org.uk](mailto:admin@whgt.org.uk) / 01558 668 485

**William Emes Discovery Day**

Saturday Oct 1st, Chirk Castle

Talk by Prue Keeley-Davis

Guided tour of the Emes landscape  
Special roof access for an aerial view  
£25 (coffee and lunch included)

WHGT Officers:

President: Elisabeth Whittle	
Chairman: Jean Reader	029 2059 6742
Vice Chairman: Hugh Gardner	01792 290014
Treasurer: Maldwyn Rees	07974 311320
Membership Secretary: Jennie Macve	01970 626180
Conservation Officer: Ros Laidlaw	01970 832268

**Plants from the New World  
Botany Empire and The Birth of an Obsession.**

by

Andrea Wulf, author of *The Brother Gardeners*.

Monday 6 June at 7.30pm.

William Davies Lecture Room,  
Ibers Gogerddan Campus, Aberystwyth University.

**Festival of Gardens North Wales**

Saturday May 28th - Sunday June 5th 2016

Over nine glorious days in the spring of 2016 more than 20 of the great gardens of North Wales will host exciting, fascinating and entertaining garden events and activities

The festival launch by

**Roy Lancaster CBE, VMH,**

Plantsman, gardener, author and broadcaster  
at

**Plas Cadnant Hidden Gardens.**

Saturday May 28 at 4.00pm

Garden open from 3pm,

Official opening at 4pm

and walk around the garden with Roy Lancaster.

Refreshments at 5pm.

**Illustrated talk on plant collecting overseas**

by

**Bleddyn Wynn-Jones**

at 6pm

Admission by ticket £35

*Proceeds to Friends of Plas Cadnant*

*booking and further details 01248 717174*

*A programme can be found at:*

<http://www.gardenstovisit.net/festival-of-gardens-north-wales/>

Please send Items for the Autumn Bulletin to:  
[bulletin@whgt.org.uk](mailto:bulletin@whgt.org.uk) or  
[glynis@castell-photography.co.uk](mailto:glynis@castell-photography.co.uk)

Events: [www.whgt.org.uk](http://www.whgt.org.uk)

## Pembrokeshire

**It's very good news** that the Pembrokeshire is being re-established. There is now a steering committee: Chairman Robin Watson from Newport Castle; Treasurer Hywel Davis and Secretary Steve Watkins. An official launch is planned at Picton Castle in September.

## Monmouthshire & Gwent

**June 22** Visit to Badminton House and Gardens (Fully booked)  
**September 8** at 2.30 Visit the gardens at Machen House, Lower Machen, Newport, NP10 8GU.

**October 13** at 6.30. Longhouse Farm, Penrhos, NP15 2DE "We still believe in Tradition" talk by Peter Minter of Bulmer Brick and Tile Company on making hand-made bricks for restoration projects all over the country.

Contact: Merilyn Anderson,  
[m.anderson666@btinternet.com](mailto:m.anderson666@btinternet.com) 01600 780389

## Montgomeryshire

**May 30 2pm – 6pm** Gardens open at Bodfach Hall, Llanfyllin with part of the proceeds going to the Montgomeryshire Branch of the WHGT.

**July 10 2pm – 6pm** Garden Open at Vaynor Park, Berriew. Part of the proceeds of the Garden Open will be donated to WHGT.

**August 29:** Garden Party at Gregynog Hall. Part of the proceeds of the Garden Open will be donated to WHGT

**End of September (TBA)** Private view of romantic landscape pictures in Montgomery Town Hall curated by Anthony Mould.

Contact: Joy Neal  
[joyneal@btinternet.com](mailto:joyneal@btinternet.com) 01654 781203

## South & Mid Glamorgan

**June 15** Gided tour of Llanerch

**July** Visit to Hensol Castle (TBA)

**August** Celebration in Plasturton Gardens with Cardiff Civic Society members on the refurbishment of the little Park keepers building (with WHGT money) (TBA)

Contact: Val Caple  
[VAL.T.CAPLE@care4free.net](mailto:VAL.T.CAPLE@care4free.net)

## West Glamorgan

**July 11 All day** coach trip to 15th century Hampton Court Castle Gardens, Herefordshire plus a visit to Hereford Cathedral, which dates from 1079. Home of the Mappa Mundi, a mediaeval map of the world dating from the 13th Century.

**July 17** Strawberry Tea to be held in Mayals, Swansea. Full details to follow.

**29 September 2:00pm** (Doors open 1:30pm). Talk "Saving Pollinators using DNA coding" by Laura Jones Phd researcher with National Botanical Garden of Wales Science Team.

**Please note this is a change to the Programme Card**

**November 17 2:00pm** (Doors open at 1:30pm). Talk "Oxymel and Orchids" on John Dillwyn Llewellyn's pioneering photography at Penllergare. By Jenny Eyres, Trustee Penllergare Trust.

Contact: Phil Stevenson  
[philip.stevenson1@ntlworld.com](mailto:philip.stevenson1@ntlworld.com) 01792 208431

## Brecon & Radnor

**May 26** Visit Croome Court, Worcestershire to celebrate the tercentenary of Capability Brown. See the house, park and gardens and then visit Little Malvern Court for tea and walk around gardens.

**July 10** Garden party at Treberfydd including tea in The Walled Garden Nursery and a tour of the house.

**July 18 - 21** Royal Welsh Show

**September 26** visit to Allt-y-Bela, the medieval house and garden belonging to Arne Maynard, near Usk followed by a visit and tea at Llanover on the way home.

**December** Winter Lecture TBA

Contact Maldwyn Rees  
[reesm@pc-q.net](mailto:reesm@pc-q.net) 07974 311320

## Ceredigion

**June 1** Visit to Doldowlod at 2.30 and visit to the organic gardening education centre being established by RENEW in the walled garden.

**June 6 at 7.30pm. Celebrity Lecture:** Plants from the New World – Botany Empire and The Birth of an Obsession. Andrea Wulf, author of *The Brother Gardeners*. At William Davies Lecture Room, Ibers Gogerddan Campus, Aberystwyth University.

**July 20. at 2.30** Visit to the recently restored Cardigan castle and grounds.

Contact: Caroline Palmer  
[caroline-palmer@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:caroline-palmer@tiscali.co.uk) 01970 615403

## Clwyd

**June 5 Wynnstey Hall Chapel (former Orangery) 2.30pm**

A visit to the Grade I Capability Brown Wynnstey Hall

**June 26** at 2.00pm Queen Anne's Cottage, Whitehurst Gardens, Chirk in support of the Friends of Whitehurst Gardens (FWG).

**July 7** at 2pm Visit to Hartsheath, Pontblyddyn, Mold, CH7 4HP. Tour of house and Gardens

**August 4** Visit Gwaenynog Hall, Denbigh LL16 5NU. The kitchen garden was used as inspiration by Beatrix Potter for her *'Flopsy Bunnies'* book. 2016 is the Beatrix Potter 150th anniversary.

Contact Sinah Harrison-Jones  
[sinah@btinternet.com](mailto:sinah@btinternet.com) 01745 583433

## Gwynedd

**June 8** Coach visit to Shropshire to Much Wenlock Priory and Preen Manor, Church Stretton Lunch at the Gaskell Arms, Much Wenlock

**June 24** Garden Party 6pm – 8pm, Bryniau, Llangoed, Anglesey, Home of Huw and Ruth Parry. Wine and canapés

**July 12- 14** Visit to the Gardens of Herefordshire (Fully booked)

**8th September** Coach visit to Cheshire, to Norton Priory and Bluebell Cottage Garden and Nursery with Friends of Treborth Botanic Garden

Contact: Olive Horsfall  
[oandmhorsfall@btinternet.com](mailto:oandmhorsfall@btinternet.com) 01766 780187

WHGT, Aberglasney Gardens, Llangathen, Carmarthen SA32 8QH  
[admin@whgt.org.uk](mailto:admin@whgt.org.uk) 01558 668 485