



The Bamboo Collection at Glynllifon Park

by David Saunders

In the Summer/Autumn 1998 issue of *The Bulletin* the chairman drew attention to the unsatisfactory situation at Glynllifon in Gwynedd. At the time of writing the situation has advanced a little but the future of the park is still not secured.

The park at Glynllifon was laid out in the 18th and 19th centuries by the Wynne family, and is now a Grade 1 listed garden. It encompasses gardens, woodland, a stream, water features, and follies. The park has been long neglected, but noticeable among the surviving features is the remains of a bamboo collection. To date there has been insufficient research to establish exactly when nor from whence the bamboos were introduced; but aspects of the collection do invite a degree of conjecture.

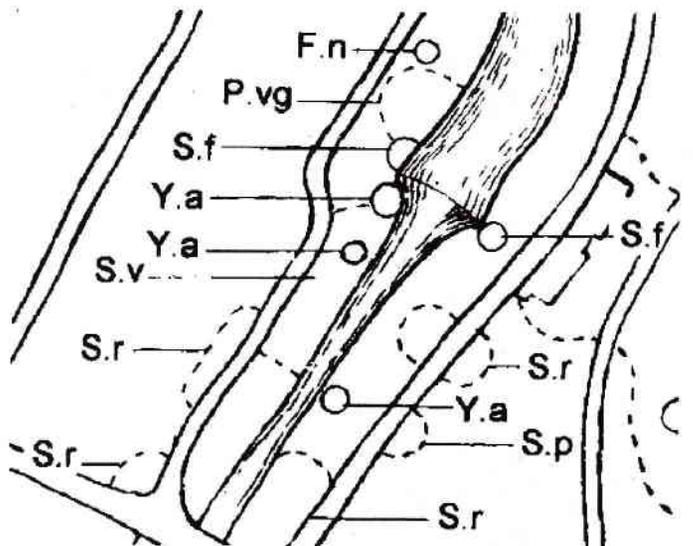
On the 5th September 1998 members of the Bamboo Society from across the country visited the park, where they identified eight species of bamboo in seven genera. This is fairly typical of an established collection that has suffered neglect since its original planting. Enquiries so far indicate that this collection was in a state of neglect in the early fifties. Canes were being cut for horticultural use; suggesting that the clumps of bamboo were by then mature and quite extensive.

Bamboos were first introduced to this country in 1827; but it was the development of the collection at Kew in 1891-92 that made them fashionable in gardens. The house at Glynllifon was extended in 1890, and the possibility can be considered that the collection dates from around this time. A.B. Freeman-Mitford in his book *The Bamboo Garden*, published in 1896, describes with one exception (*Sasaella ramosa*, introduced in 1892), all the species now at Glynllifon. He was growing these at Batsford; albeit under different names in most cases. Changing of botanical names is one of the hazards of horticulture; and is particularly prevalent among bamboos. It is noticeable also that in general bamboos have not acquired common names in Britain.

The collection was planted along the banks of the Afon Llifon, the stream that runs through the park. This places it a hundred metres or so to the right of the photograph of the house in the bulletin referred to. It is hard now to discern any original planting plan; because some species have spread widely, perhaps more than intended, and others may have died out. A degree of formality might be indicated by the length of low hedge formed on the north bank by *Sasaella ramosa* and *Sasa veitchii*; possibly also by the positioning of clumps of a very stately bamboo, *Semiarundinaria fastuosa*, on each side of the two weirs within the area of the collection. *S. fastuosa* has straight, shiny green culms (canes), and dark green glossy leaves which can be 20cms or more long. Elsewhere the plantings were quite likely to have been informal. *S. fastuosa* also appears in small clumps intermixed with other bamboos, here their lack of spread may well be due to competition and to the cool climate under the

trees along the stream.

Some of the more rampant species have not suffered unduly from their neglect, and indeed to a degree have derived some benefit. *S. ramosa* at the approach to the woodland walk on the south bank of the stream has spread to form an attractive understorey as in its native habitat in Japan. This and *S. veitchii* are rampant but quite low growing, and both have the additional characteristic of withered leaf margins, giving from a distance the impression of variegation.

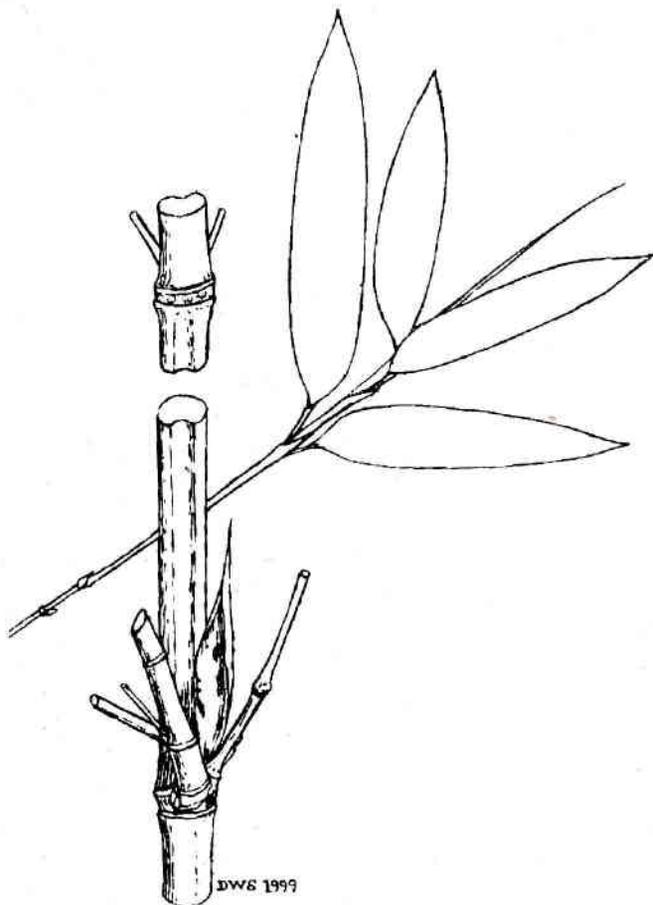


Detail from the survey showing the various species of bamboo. *S. fastuosa* (*S.f*) can be seen each side of the weir.

Further up the valley *Sasa palmata* f. *nebulosa* has also flourished; and indeed it has been found necessary to cut it back quite drastically where it has encroached upon the path. Its enormous leaves, arranged like the fingers on a hand are a striking sight. It is also rampant in the woods above the feature known as the mill, where it is happy in the shade of the trees including the deep shade of various evergreens. Interestingly clumps of *Pseudosasa japonica* growing in the same area are dying out almost completely. *P. japonica* is the bamboo most commonly seen in gardens. Culms long dead and black with age indicate a height at one time approaching 5m; but now the remnants are barely 60cms high. It is perhaps significant though that here they are flowering. The flowering of bamboo has given rise to some misconceptions; in particular the belief that they will flower and die throughout the world at the same time. There is some truth in this, but not all species die, and the flowering can be spread over a number of years. Others are debilitated for a number of years after flowering, and *P. japonica* is one such. This has probably contributed to its decline as the woodland

has matured to overshadow it, whereas *S. palmata f. nebulosa* has flourished in the increasing shade. In contrast, by the streamside *P. japonica* is growing to a degree of beauty not always apparent in more open situations, and it makes a fine sight across the water. Adequate moisture and humidity, and shelter from wind will have contributed to this. Some of the clumps arise out of mounds of old decayed culms 65 cms high, and this suggests considerable age. Some known twenty year old clumps elsewhere have no mounds at all. The stately *S. fastuosa* nearby also benefits from these conditions, with culms 2.5cms in diameter.

A problem will arise with the clumps of *Fargesia nitida* by the stone bridge, which are coming into flower. This beautiful bamboo is alas unlikely to survive here. Until recently it had never flowered in cultivation since its introduction in 1889. In recent years though flowering has been reported around the country, and it seems that it is one of the bamboos that does die subsequently. It may produce viable seed, and seedlings might survive on site; but this is unlikely if they are not protected. New plantings may be necessary if the species is to be guaranteed a presence in the grounds.



Phyllostachys viridiglaucescens
Length of culm showing characteristic groove and branching

The only other problem is with the stand of *Phyllostachys viridiglaucescens*. A large area of this quite extensive stand has unfortunately been cut to the ground. Some bamboos can be treated in this way, and are visually improved by such treatment annually; but not the *Phyllostachys*. Their new culms that arise annually are energised by the existing culms. If all the culms are cut down the resources of the root system are inadequate for proper regeneration. Hence the wispy new growth now visible. The appearance of stands of *Phyllostachys* is improved by the judicious removal of old, weak, thin, and dead, or dying culms; but this should never exceed one third of the existing culms.

The remaining part of the stand has also sustained some damage, with some culms being broken. This is unfortunate as it is the only representative of the genus present, and an imposing area of the bamboo could have been created; with culms attaining a height perhaps of four or five metres. Such large stands of *Phyllostachys* are not common in this part of the country. Restoration will be a long process, but with proper cultivation techniques it would be possible in due course to re-establish this stand; although it would probably appreciate more sunlight.

Perhaps the one surprise at Glynllifon is the presence of *Yushania anceps*. This bamboo had a recent flowering in 1980-81, and is one of those that often dies subsequently. There are odd specimens of *Y. anceps* scattered among the other species. There is no evidence so far of more recent planting, so it seems most likely that here it has survived flowering. *A. anceps* certainly produces viable seed in this part of Wales. It is something of a weed in its natural habitat in the Himalayas, and is apparently becoming so in some Cornish gardens where bamboos have been long established.

In general terms however, the collection has survived very well over a long period of neglect. An advantage that it has over many other collections is that most of the species have been allowed plenty of space within which to develop. Some species have become intermixed, but given the amount of space available and the informality of their woodland setting this is no disadvantage. Although it contains no more than about 5% of the bamboo species that can be grown now in Britain it is an object lesson in the way in which bamboos can be displayed in a large garden or park. The writer has mapped the approximate position of all the specimens located so far. A small section of the map is shown on page 1.

A collection of hardy bamboos was a feature of gardens at the end of the last century. Since then the bamboo fell somewhat from favour, and although quite extensive lists were published in certain nurserymen's catalogues even in the 1950s, the majority were out of stock. The Glynllifon collection is of considerable historic importance, and every effort should be made to preserve it. There is now a revival of interest in bamboo, and even if there are no further additions to the collection some careful restoration and management would provide the park with an outstanding asset.

Glynllifon bamboo list

Bamboos can show considerable variation in size according to their environment, even within the British Isles. Here they are classified only loosely therefore as either small (approximately 1.5m), medium, tall, or very tall (approximately 7m).

Names in roman type are those in use in *The RHS Plant Finder 1998-99*. Names in italic type are those most likely to have been used at the time of planting.

Fargesia nitida *Arundinaria nitida*

From Western China. Introduced in 1889. Tall. Hardy to -20°C . Forms tight clumps of thin arching purplish culms with masses of small dark green leaves. Seed was collected and sent to the Imperial Botanic Gardens at St. Petersburg in 1886, and some of these seeds were duly sent on to Kew. It had never been known to flower in Britain, but has recently begun to do so. Unfortunately subsequent death is almost certain.

Phyllostachys viridiglaucescens *Phyllostachys viridi-glaucescens*

Native to China. Introduced to France in 1846, and then to UK. Very tall. Hardy to -20°C . Grows vigorously in Britain, with

straight green culms that can change to a dull yellow green with age; and glossy green leaves. The culms are often not upright, but typical of the *Phyllostachys* is the sulcus or groove above each branch. Early Spring shoots are edible.

Pseudosasa japonica
Arundinaria japonica

Native to Japan and South Korea. Introduced to France in 1850, and to Britain a few years later. Tall. Hardy to -15°C. It has become the bamboo most commonly seen in our gardens. Culms straight, with papery culm-sheaths that are retained indefinitely. This can make the culms look rather scruffy. The large glossy green leaves though are very handsome, being up to some 30cm long. A vigorous species forming dense thickets. In its native habitat it grows on open moors as well as elsewhere, hence its suitability for hedging and windbreaks; but it is seen at its best if given some shelter in woodland. It flowered in 1872-74, and several

and having few branches. Forms dense thickets which spread rapidly once established, to the exclusion of other plant life. The leaves are large, around 25cm long and up to 6cm wide, glossy green. They wither and become straw coloured at the edges in winter, giving an appearance similar to marginal variegation. Will tolerate dense shade, and is very successful under trees.

Sasaella ramosa
Arundinaria vagans

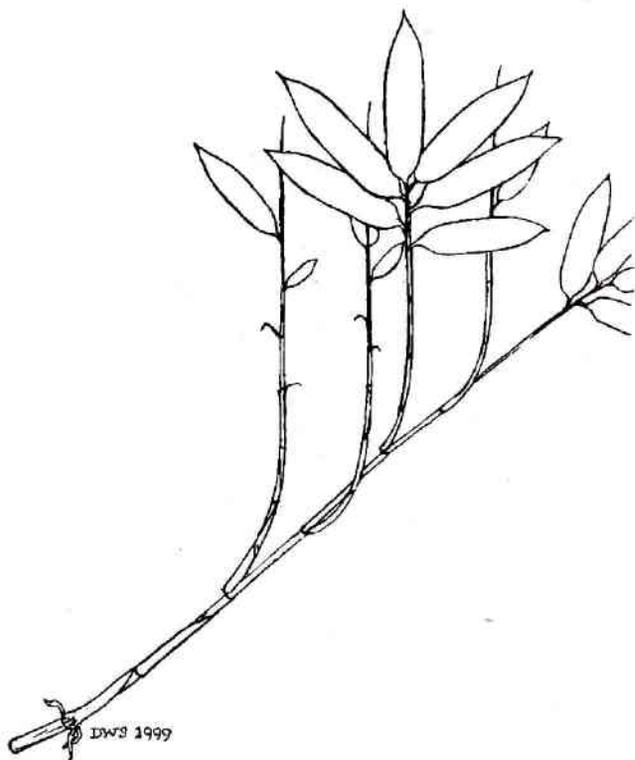
Japan. Small. Hardy to -20°C. Introduced to Britain in 1892. Culms slender. The bright green leaves acquire a papery withered edge in winter. A very invasive running bamboo that tolerates deep shade. Will form a dense ground cover under trees. It can survive occasional mowing.

Semiarundinaria fastuosa
Bambusa fastuosa

Native to Japan. Introduced to France in 1892 by M. Marliac; and to Britain in 1895. Very tall. Hardy to -20°C. Culms up to 2.5cm in diameter. It flowered in 1935-6, 1957, and 1965-70. A handsome bamboo with stately upright growth. The culms are green at first, turning purplish later. Notable features upon close examination are the wine colouring of the insides of the culm-sheaths; and the groove or sulcus on the upper branches, more typical of the genus *Phyllostachys*, but absent on the lower parts of the culms.

Yushania anceps
Arundinaria anceps

N.W. Himalaya. Tall. Hardy to -20°C. A vigorous and invasive bamboo, with straight erect green culms that rise from the ground well spaced. The tips of the culms arch over as they mature, weighed down by masses of small fine leaves.



Sasa palmata f. *nebulosa*. A mixture of leaning and upright culms creates an impenetrable thicket covering large areas

times since; including a prolonged period through the 1980s.

Sasa palmata f. *nebulosa*
(Freeman-Mitford describes the related form *S. palmata* under the name *Bambusa palmata*.)

Japan. Medium. Hardy to -20°C. An invasive running bamboo. The culms are often curved at the base and have few branches. The leaves are very large. Dark irregular blotches appear on the culms as they age. Older culms tend to collapse sideways and impenetrable thickets are formed, which spread rapidly once established to the exclusion of other plant life. Leaves large, around 30cm long and 5-9cm wide, glossy green. They can wither at the edges in winter. Will tolerate dense shade, and will even grow up through *Rhododendron ponticum*. The related *S. palmata* has culms that remain green.

Sasa veitchii
Arundinaria veitchii

Japan. An invasive running bamboo. Small. Hardy to -22°C. Culms slender and often curved at the base, ageing to purple

Further Information

THE BAMBOO SOCIETY.

Secretary: David Helliwel

43 Whitehouse Road, Oxford, OX1 4QJ

e-mail: djh@bodley.ox.ac.uk

EUROPEAN BAMBOO SOCIETY

(including EBS Great Britain)

<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/users/djh/ebs>

BAMBOO INTERNET GROUP

bamboo@home.ease.lsoft.com

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David Saunders is a retired expert on digital typeface design, who includes the favoured W.H.G.T typeface, Times New Roman amongst his creations. He is a keen gardener and numbers more than 60 bamboo species in his collection.

The Annual General Meeting, which was well attended, was held at Powis Castle on 5 May 1999, a very pretty day on which the gardens looked their best. The use of this venue was given in recognition of W.H.G.T efforts in successfully fighting off the proposal for an unsightly Agrimart to be located within the essential view of the castle. The Chairman, Bettina Harden delivered an account of the Trust's not inconsiderable achievements over the ten years of its existence. A full account of The First Decade will appear in the the final Bulletin of the present Millenium. It is planned that this will also include an index of publications in both *The Bulletin* and *The Newsletter*, latterly relaunched as *Gerddi*.

The Chairman opened the Exhibition *Gerddi Cymru - Welsh Gardens* at the Royal Cambrian Academy, Conwy, and also addressed the assembled W.H.G.T. members at the private view at The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. The reception at the R.C.A. was a most congenial occasion, the latter a little marred by the N.L.W. decision to confine the reception to a small area of the basement cafeteria far removed from natural light, air or indeed the exhibition. The exhibition itself, selected by Dr Paul Joyner, was themed under a series of titles: Artists' Gardens, People and Gardens, Town Gardens, Country Gardens etc., and as such included historic and modern images intermixed.

Even the most scholarly of the members felt regret that the accompanying labelling contained such limited information. Locations of gardens often did not even extend even to county level, and a few words on the artists would also have been most edifying. The W.H.G.T. has, for several years, lobbied the National Library of Wales for a major Gardens Exhibition. There was a feeling that *Welsh Gardens* served chiefly to whet the appetite for the many other treasures which could be displayed, and emphasise the greater fascination of an exhibition which answers fundamental questions such as where is it? is it still there? was this design ever executed? Questions which the W.H.G.T. is well placed to address.

The *Edwardian Study Day* has been postponed, for a variety of reasons to the new date of 18-19 September at St Fagans. This has greatly the range and quality of speakers who will include Prof. Michael Tooley on Miss Jekyll in Wales, Elizabeth Whittle on Edwardian Gardens in Wales, Deborah Evans on the Edwardian Gardens of St Fagans Castle and several papers including the T.H. Mawson garden at Wern, Porthmadoc and Miss Jekyll's work at St Fagan's Court. A booking leaflet will shortly be distributed to members.

Work on the *Gateway Project* continues and the post of Access Officer has been advertised and has generated a gratifying response. New display boards have been commissioned for the *Royal Welsh Show*, and W.H.G.T. officers and members of Brecon and Radnor look forward to meeting many members on the stand in the flower tent (once again sponsored by British Gas).

In view of her unstinting efforts, the Editor feels that the Chairman's decision to take a weekend break in France to be justified. We publish some of her holiday tips, in *Postcard from France*.

Obituary

MRS S W THORNEYCROFT

The death of Sheila Thorneycroft on 22 June 1999 at the age of 85 will be mourned by the members of the Trust generally as well as in Monmouthshire. She had been chairman of the Gwent branch and a member of the main Trust committee from its early days. It is hard to believe that we shall no longer see at our meetings that elegant figure with her charm and her rapier wit. Her presence brought any meeting to life and the Trust owes much to her judgement and sound commonsense.

Sheila was brought up in Staffordshire where her father's family had long been established. Her mother was a Gatey from Westmorland. If outspoken independence is a characteristic of Northern England then Sheila was a true daughter of her ancestry. It was in Staffordshire that Sheila met and married her distant cousin Peter Thorneycroft, then at the start of his distinguished political career. Her husband's election as MP for Monmouth in 1946 brought Sheila to the area where she was to live for the rest of her long life. After divorcing her husband in 1949 Sheila found both a passion and a profession in flower arranging. She was a superb artist and a brilliant organiser. She played a significant part in developing flower arranging clubs in South Wales. She would have been much touched by the beauty of the flowers at her funeral (in St. Mary's Church at Monmouth) which her clubs had arranged as their tribute to her.

Although Sheila Thorneycroft's interests were wide, her main concern for the last years of her life was with the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust. Her firm advice and staunch support did much to steer the Trust into calmer waters after its initial difficulties. Its great success in recent years gave her much pleasure. For many years she organised the restoration of the Nelson Garden in Monmouth, the first such work to be carried out entirely by a County Trust. Sheila will be remembered by her friends for her wit, courage and wisdom. The Trust will remember a devoted supporter.

John R E Borron

Disappearing Urns

Since the Bulletin last reported on the situation at Glynllifon there has been the looming threat of a developers' bid which would have involved the division of this fine Grade I listed mansion into 17 flats. Gwynedd branch has been active in opposing this planning application. The threat seems to have been averted and the owners, Coleg Dwyfor are now in negotiation with a buyer whose intentions are much more sensitive.

However, it is a sad reflection on the times that assets of the mansion which came into the County Council's possession when the house was purchased in the 1950's and remained *in situ* during its many years use as an Agricultural College, have now been removed and shipped off to Christie's for auction. Particularly evocative is the fate of the urns in the walled garden which has long been tended by the Special Needs Unit. These were unceremoniously upended of their plants and compost, and added to the haul.

Caroline Palmer

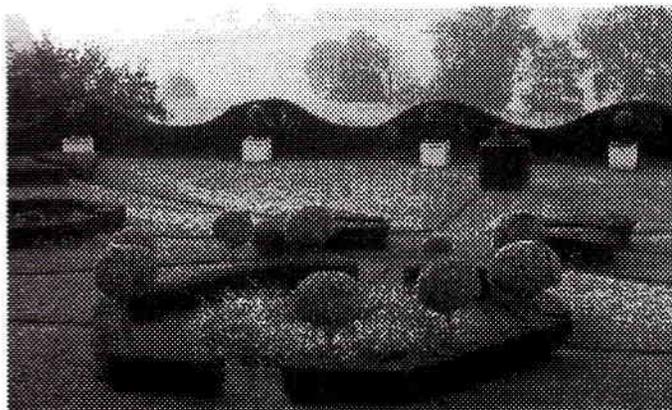
Postcard from France

by Bettina Harden

Having never been to Brittany before I was delighted by the similarities to Wales that met me on every hand - words that were the same in Breton and Welsh, saints that arrived from Wales. Celtic music. Some of these similarities were expected, but somehow I had managed to overlook the fact that the Gulf Stream also warms the Breton coast and that there would be vast and wonderful rhododendron gardens on every hand. Being much further south, the flowering season was coming to its end, but even so I saw some magnificent sights. My garden source was a very good leaflet *Fleurs & Jardins de Bretagne*, available from all tourist offices.

Two gardens stood out. The park and Chateau de Trévarez in the département of Finistère, north of Quimper, is an astonishing twentieth-century creation. It was built in 1906 by a rich industrialist who wanted to create a mansion and gardens 'worthy of the President of France'. Commandeered by the German Submarine Corps during the war, the Chateau was badly damaged when the RAF bombed it in an attempt to destroy a group of senior officers (possibly the inspiration for the film *The Dirty Dozen!*). The red-brick chateau is hung on the edge of a high ridge, overlooking lovely countryside and is surrounded by 85 hectares of what are principally woodland gardens. There are huge specimen trees, underplanted with a vast array of camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons, with the promise of hydrangeas and fuchsias to come later in the year. The only trace of formality that remains is the parterre immediately beside the chateau. This has been simply planted to preserve its shape and design. The walled gardens are currently being restored and will house a special azalea garden in due course. As you walk further into the gardens you discover a large ornamental pool, fountains and cascades and a delightful water garden.

The real gem of my visit was Chateau de La Ballue in the north-east corner of Brittany, south-east of Dinan. Originally a fortified castle, the Chateau, as you see it today, was completely rebuilt in the 17th century by Gilles Ruellan, Marquis de La Ballue. A secret hideout of the Chouan counter-revolutionary partisans, Chateau de La Ballue was confiscated during the French Revolution. In the 19th century this dramatic past became the romantic inspiration of writers such as Balzac and Victor Hugo.



The 20th century saw a long period of abandonment until the chateau was bought by Claude Arthaud in 1972.

The gardens were a wilderness and Mme Arthaud commissioned the architects Francois-Hébert Stevens and Paul Maymont to redesign and reinterpret them. Francois-Hébert Stevens created a formal garden in the seventeenth-century style immediately in front of the chateau, separated from the rest of the gardens by a long yew hedge along whose length is an allée of wisteria spilling over yew columns. Paul Maymont was responsible for the superb Mannerist garden that fills the rest of the pleasure grounds. These marvellous gardens were themselves abandoned for six years until the Chateau was purchased in 1996 by the current owners, Marie-France Barrère and Alain Schrotter, both publishers.

To reach the twentieth-century architectural garden you go through an orangery and a little wicket gate, and there you find 13 elements to explore and interpret. The setting is laid out along a broken diagonal, carefully designed such that you never see the garden as a whole. It contains elements of sixteenth-century Italian garden design and French Baroque, laced with startling dashes of modern sculpture and a sense of humour. I felt that Clough Williams-Ellis would have thoroughly approved.

The first set piece to attract my attention was the 'jardin mouvementé'. This 'undulating' garden is planted in a palette of greens, with clematis and roses scrambling up the walls behind. Small yew cones and box balls are set amidst a foaming sea of *Alchemilla mollis*, all hedged about with cypress trees. It is a very effective piece of planting. As you walk to the 'knee joint' that connects the two parts of the broken diagonal, you pass the scented chamber filled with pots of deliciously fragrant plants, with its pool adorned with a marble otter and waterlilies. A long, dark path takes you through the 'bosquet mystérieuse', past the replanted open air theatre, to Diana's Temple. This is a simple but brilliant piece of garden architecture. Entirely planted in *Thuja plicata atrovirens*, it really is a Greek temple complete with columns and portico. How on earth it was trained and clipped I can't imagine. I only know I want one too. When you stand in the corner of the temple you can see back along the path you have come and out to a lovely avenue of limes that lead you further into the garden. A brief diversion takes you into a marvellously contorted Labyrinth. Not very big, it nonetheless turns you back on yourself over and over again to encounter very jolly ceramic sculptures of a wolf and a bright green dragon lurking in dark corners. You finally emerge from the trees into Francois-Hébert Stevens' 'jardin à la Française' laid out on the south side of the Chateau.

Chateau de Trévarez. 29520 Saint-Goazec (near Chateauneuf-du-Faou)

Open every day in April, May & September 1.00 p.m. - 6.00 p.m.,
July & August 11.00 a.m. - 6.30 p.m. October - March Wednesday, Saturday
& Sunday and jours fériés 2.00 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.
Admission 25 Frs, children to 11 yrs free.

Les Jardins du Chateau de la Ballue, follow signs from Bazouges-La-Pérouse.

Open 15th April - 15th October 1.00 p.m. - 5.30 p.m., Sundays and
jours fériés until 6.30 p.m.
Admission 35 Frs, children to 12yrs 15Fr.

The Chateau De la Ballue also offers very superior B&B.
email: chateau@la-ballue.com

Wynnstay's Wealth

Tom Lloyd has submitted the reprint, here reproduced, which commemorates the formation of the lake at Wynnstay.

CURRENT NOTES.

THE BELAN WATER, 1784.

Lovers of old times will be interested in what is reprinted here:—

THE BELAN WATER, WYNNSTAY.—The following is a copy of an extract from (probably) a Chester newspaper published in the autumn of 1784, and relates to the formation of a sheet of water in the Bath Grounds of Wynnstay Park, Rhuabon:—

We have received the following account of the feast given by Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, on completing the Dam at Wynnstay:—

Sir Watkin Williams Wynn having had in contemplation, for some time, the execution of a scheme proposed by the late Mr. Brown, of forming a beautiful piece of water, by constructing a dam below the bath in his park, determined to execute it in the course of this summer; accordingly he began it on the first of June, but finding all the teams and labourers he could hire unequal to the task, he had recourse to the assistance of the neighbouring gentlemen and farmers, who cheerfully sent to his aid their teams, carts, and colliers, by which means this immense work was completed by the 17th instant, when each individual concerned received a ticket of invitation, repaired to Wynnstay, and being properly marshalled by Mr. Sidebotham, in pairs, formed the following procession to the Dam Head.

PROCESSION.

Hugh Sands, the game-keeper, with a long staff.

A pair of bagpipes.
Six tall men, with mattocks, by way of pioneers.

Six short men, with their clay maul.
80 colliers, armed with spades and pickaxes, with a flag in their centre.
A waggon drawn by six oxen, in which was a large piece of roast beef, with the following motto:

THE SUPPORT OF LABOUR.

100 carters with their cart whips, and a flag in their centre.

A waggon drawn by four horses, wherein was a hog'shead of beer, with this motto:

TO MOISTEN THE CLAY.

200 labourers, armed with their mattocks and spades, with a flag in their centre.
20 artificers, armed with their tools, ensigns of their arts.

[All the foregoing had black printed tickets hanging at their breasts.]

Mr. Bagley, with his *loving* *man*.
150 gentlemen and farmers, with red tickets, with a flag in their centre.

A band of musick.
The spirit level, carried by a tall man.
Mr. Evans on horseback.

Sir Watkin and Lady Williams Wynn, with their eldest daughter, in a phaeton, drawn by six ponies.

Master Williams Wynn and Master Charles, on horseback.

Several Carriages.
The servants and waiters brought up the rear.

S. Sidebotham, on horseback, who conducted the whole.

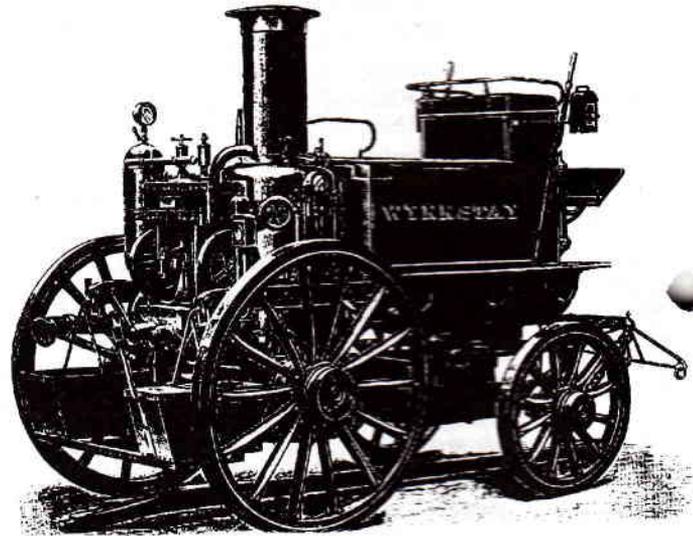
The company having formed a circle round the Penstock, the new lake received from Master Williams Wynn, amidst the shouts and acclamations of a vast concourse of people, the name of the

BELAN-WATER.

The procession then returned to the great avenue, where tables were laid, and most plentifully furnished. Dinner being over, many public and local toasts were drunk; and notwithstanding the number of guests amounted to 600, exclusive of double that number of spectators, the day concluded without one accident or act of irregularity to disturb its cheerfulness.

Mr. Sidebotham, who marshalled the procession, was one of the household, and was one of the performers in the Wynnstay Theatricals, and the business manager.

The editor, who also cannot resist the lure of old newspapers, contributes a picture of the handsome steam driven fire engine, supplied by Shand Mason and Co for the protection of the mansion. Doubtless it chugged down to the lake to protect the new Victorian Wynnstay from mishap by fire.



Recollections

William Condry, naturalist and writer
A fitting memorial

Reading the interesting article in the last issue on Glansevern Hall reminded me of a happy occasion many years ago. My husband Bill and I used regularly to stop, when driving from Birmingham to Eglwys Fach, for a picnic overlooking the lake in the gardens of Glansevern. Here, where the boundary walls gave way to railings, there was an old planted hornbeam. Once Bill, who was always on the lookout for hawfinches, saw one feeding on the hornbeam fruits. We were thrilled as it was then, and is even more so now, a rare bird in Wales.

Old estates are usually good places for birds, and hornbeams are worth considering if one wants to plant something to give food to birds and pleasure to both tree and bird lovers in the future.

Three hornbeams have been planted at the R.S.P.B.'s Ynysihir Reserve in memory of Bill in the hope that hawfinches will become more frequent visitors to the Reserve.

Penny Condry

Book Review

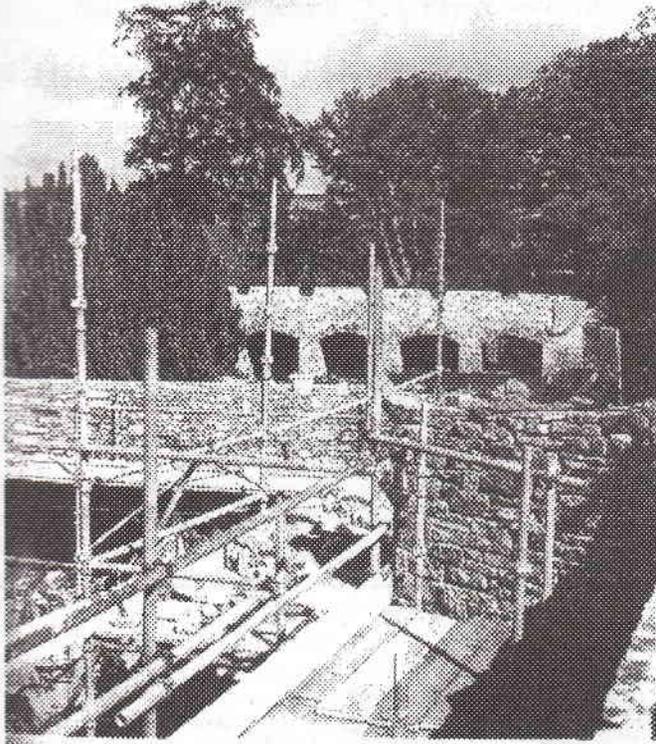
A Garden Lost in Time - The Mystery of the Ancient Gardens of Aberglasney

Penny David

Weidenfeld and Nicholson. Hardback £20.00

I am ashamed to admit that I have books on my shelf unread. Thoroughly worthy and extremely solid accounts of individual houses and gardens, rich in scholarship, most or all of which remains secure between the covers and fails to transfer itself to my brain.

Penny David, who as a professional editor, has doubtless had more than her fair share of authorial turgidity to contend with, flits through six chapters on Aberglasney in Carmarthenshire with a far lighter touch, tantalizing even, for she leaves questions hanging in the air, questions which we feel she could and would answer, were not these answers peripheral to the book's theme.



Her pleasing turns of phrase bring two-dimensional historic characters to life. Would John Claudius Loudon have recognised himself as 'garden-book guru and demon dendrologist'? How pleasing it is to imagine the ambitious Bishop Rudd falling victim of his own ingenious preaching such that Queen Elizabeth I 'muttered that he should have kept his Arithmetic to himself and went off in a huff'. In this century we are introduced to the 'case of the pinched portico', (a story which Christie's Auction House might prefer not to be reminded of) and invited to imagine the cream of the county's youth 'canoodling in the cloisters' at a memorable post-war dance, one of Aberglasney's most recent moments of glamour.

This in no way diminishes the book's scholarly content, it is thoroughly researched, well referenced and supplied with exhaustive tables of family trees. A lavish quantity of

contemporary photographs charting the lottery-funded restoration and development of the garden mingle with quality images of historic documents, maps, pictures and photographs. David employs a chapter structure in which she takes the reader in turn into each of seven gardens and holds us there while regaling us with an instalment of the human history of the place. Aberglasney changed hands frequently, and thus we find ourselves learning about Bishop Rudd in the Cloister garden, the Dyers in the Pool garden, Surgeon Thomas Phillips, a nabob, in the walled garden and so on. It is presented, though, as a detective story, in which the shards of evidence from many sources are pulled together, inspected, and a 'best fit' interpretation selected in the light of these sometimes conflicting strands. The author will be the last person to be upset if later evidence calls for adjustment to her story. The book invites questions, to which some answers may yet be forthcoming from its readers.

Over and above its undoubtedly handsome and highly readable appearance this book is of particular delight to me as an embodiment of one of my most central convictions. Garden history is about people, it is indeed a branch of anthropology. Gardens reflect far more than the evolution of design. Like the potlatch ceremonies of North America Indians, in which great quantities of gathered foodstuffs were competitively destroyed, the British or European garden is an expression of conspicuous consumption, displaying personal wealth and disposable income. It is highly effective form of self-advertisement, which can be manipulated to signal the continuity of the gentry or the injection of new money; social aspiration and higher aesthetic values. The history of a garden or landscape is the imprint of its owners, and the changing fortunes which promoted or inhibited this form of self expression. Without the characters, fortunes and flaws of these owners this history is a forgettable sequence of dry events.

It is intriguing in this context to consider how posterity will interpret the new metamorphosis of Aberglasney, once again the arena of conspicuous expenditure, this time of Heritage Lottery wealth. This time the creation is a hybrid creature, part restoration, part inspiration, welding the vision and ideas of a broad team of disparate experts: landscape architect, garden designer, archaeologist, artist, and others, rather than the personal taste of a single bishop, lawyer, surgeon or poet...

Caroline Palmer

Welsh viewers may already have watched the four part BBC series following the Aberglasney project and the party which marked its opening to the public. The series will be repeated nationwide on BBC2 on 3 September.

The Gardens at Aberglasney are now open daily

9.30 - 6.30pm.

Tel/Fax: 01558 668998

Design Dossier

- Update

John Davies reports several useful responses to his enquiries placed in *The Bulletin*. Thomas Lloyd has been able to shed light on botanist **William Pamplin**, the designer of Llwynycelyn, Merthyr Tydfil, while Steve O' Donovan contributed the news that **Thomas Greening**, who worked at The Gnoll, Neath, later became Royal Gardener to George II.

Penny David submits a botanical question concerning the naturalised patches of **snowdrops** so common on hedge banks and near old or former dwellings.

How can one estimate the antiquity of such colonies? When did the practice of naturalising snowdrops on hedge-banks begin? What patterns of naturalised snowdrops occur elsewhere in Wales?

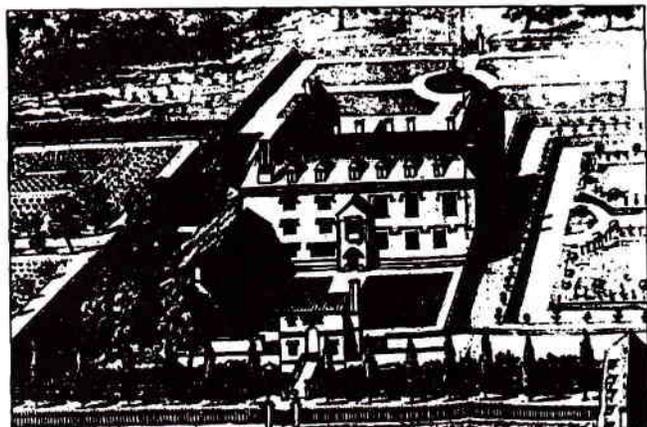
Responses via *The Bulletin* (indeed we would welcome a snowdrop article) or to Penny David, Fern Cottage, Falcondale, Lampeter, SA48 7RX.



The Gloucestershire Gardens & Landscape Trust

**The Association of Gardens Trusts
Business Meeting and Weekend Conference**

**17th Century and Early Formal Gardens
in Gloucestershire**



**Venue: The Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester
10th — 12th September 1999**

**CONTACT: Mr Peter Lindesay, Gloucester
Gardens and Landscape Trust, Court Lodge,
Avening, Glos GL8 8NX.**

CONTACTS

Brecon & Rad: Miss Anne Carter (01982 570279)
Mrs Hilda Williams (01982 560288)

Carmarthen: Contact Administrator.

Ceredigion: Mr Donald Moore (01970 828777)
Ms Ros Laidlaw (01970 832268)

Clwyd: Mrs Sara Furse (01352 770360)

Gwent: Mr David Freeman, 14 Four Ash Court
Usk, Gwent, NP5 1BE

Gwynedd: Mrs Joan K. Jones (01766 522766)

Montgomery: Mr John Gleave (01686 640494)

Pembrokeshire: Mr Gerry Hudson (08134 814317)

South & Mid Glam Dr. P. C. Elmes (01222 512102)

West Glam: Mrs Elizabeth Belcham (01639 721868)

Administrator: Ms Ros Laidlaw, Ty Leri, Talybont,
Ceredigion, SY24 5ER (01970 832268)

Treasurer: Col. Richard Gilbertson, Coed-y-Ffynnon,
Lampeter Velfrey, Narberth, Pembro
SA67 8UJ (01834 831396)

Bulletin Editor: Dr. Caroline Palmer, The Old Laundry,
Rhydyfelin, Aberystwyth, SY23 4QF
(01970 615403)

Membership Sec: Mr Peter Williams, Llangunnor House,
Crickadam, Powys, LD2 3PJ
(01982 560288)



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Editor's erratum

Miss **Entwisle** was not pleased to see
Her name spelt with superfluous T.
And an extraneous H was added
Entwhistle is not how to spell it.

The Editor is quite distraught
It did not come out as it ought.
C.P.