



MIDDLETON HALL: A CONTEMPORARY TOURIST'S DESCRIPTION.

Extracted from:

"The Memoirs of the Harcourt Family; a tale for young ladies."

Published in 1813 by G. Walker, London
and dedicated to Miss Caroline Paxton.

Proceeding, they passed Golden Grove, the seat of Lord Cawdor. In another situation the house might appear to advantage, but here it is completely lost, being built low, and buried among trees. The attention of the party was soon attracted by a range of hills on the left, on the summit of one of which was a triangular tower. "This has been built since I was in Wales," said the colonel; "I must enquire about it at the next village we come to, which will be Llanarthney." "If we stay long enough, I must endeavour to take a sketch of it," said Amelia. "The prospect from it must be very extensive," observed Mrs Harcourt. After spending some time in admiring this building, and the flourishing plantations which clothed the sides of the hill nearly to the top, the colonel pointed out to his companions, Grongar Hill, celebrated by the muse of Dyer; and nearer to them on the right, the remains of Drylyn Castle, mentioned also by that poet. The ascent to the castle is dangerous on account of the hill on which it stands being undermined, or rather excavated somewhat like a honey-comb, by the immense number of rabbits which have taken possession of it.

They soon reached Llanarthney, where the colonel proposed baiting for two hours: he made enquiries respecting the tower on the hill and was informed that it had been built by Sir W. Paxton, and was named Nelson's Tower, in commemoration of the noble admiral of that name. "If you have a mind to visit Middleton Hall," said the landlord of the little inn, "it will be worth the walk; it is only two miles off, and is a beautiful place."

This was a proposal highly agreeable to the children, and they eagerly tried to read approbation in the countenances of their mamma and uncle. A smile was the signal for departure, and they set forward with that rapturous sort of pleasure which childhood still feels, and which those more advanced remember to have felt, when - "Nature pleased, for life itself was new, and the heart promised, what the fancy drew." The direction was plain, and the road pleasant: they soon reached the park, which did not disappoint the expectations they had formed. The undulating surface presented an agreeable variety of hill and dale. The hall, situated on a gentle eminence, seemed to smile protection on the cottages, which at various distances were seen peeping through the trees. From the back front of the house the ground sloped gently down to a lake, fringed with trees, and inhabited by a number of beautiful swans. The fertility of the grounds, the well-disposed plantations, and broad expanse of the lakes, excited the admiration of the party, and filled them with pleasing sensations as they approached the hall. The family was absent; but the servants with much civility, offered to show them the house and grounds: this offer was willingly accepted and an old domestic (whose silver locks made Mrs Harcourt think of the bards of former times) hastened to throw open the doors of the great hall for their

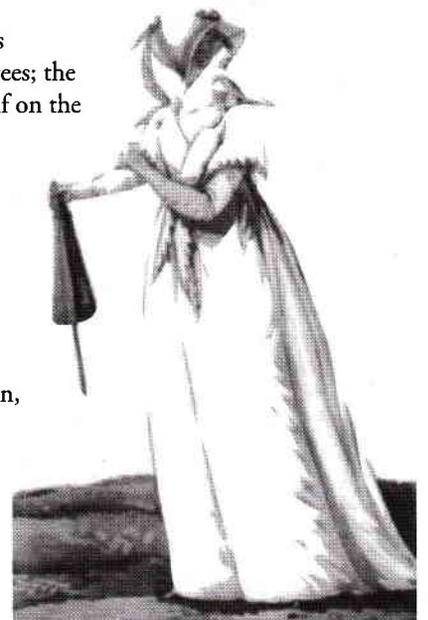
reception. They were then conducted through lofty and handsome apartments, furnished with the most elegant taste: from the different windows they beheld beautiful and extensive views of the country, and from one of them Amelia, who always carried her portfolio with her, made a tolerably accurate, though hasty sketch of Nelson's Tower. They then proceeded to the library, in which, would the time have allowed them to do so, they would willingly have staid for some hours. "This is a truly classical retreat," said the colonel, as he examined the well-selected collection of books.

A superb pair of globes, a planetarium, and various philosophical apparatus, attracted the attention and curiosity of the children; while the admiration of Mrs Harcourt was excited by a beautiful alabaster vase, representing, in bas relief, Andromache weeping over the arms of Hector. Mrs Harcourt could not resist the impulse of the moment, but wrote the following lines on a slip of paper which she left in the vase.

Lo, fair Andromache! She mourns in vain, and views with tears the arms of Hector slain. While he, proud Ifian's hope, the dread of Greece, in death's eternal mansions rests in peace.

They now reluctantly left the library, and followed their guide along a winding gravel-walk, which was sometimes obscured by the spreading branches of the trees uniting and forming a verdant arch over the head: at other times it was quite open to the sun. As they advanced, the different features of the landscape presented themselves in quick succession; at one time the hall was the predominant object, then the tower, and various hills, some near, others at a great distance, many of them clothed with woods, enlivened by white cottages peeping from among the trees; the chrystal lake expanded itself on the right-hand; while on the left rose the green sloping fields.

This walk of about half a mile conducted them over a rustic bridge to a little spot, which seemed to be the work of fairies. A wild sort of garden, two small buildings, and a trickling spring, were before them: on the right was a waterfall, the water of which passing under the



bridge on which they stood, precipitated itself with much violence over masses of broken rocks.

For some minutes they gazed in silence, unable to express the pleasure they felt at a scene so enchantingly romantic. The guide informed them that this lovely little spot was called the Spring, on account of a chalybeate spring which had here been discovered, and found to possess great medicinal virtues.

One of the buildings was a bath, supplied from the spring; both the bath and the spring were private, for the use of the family; but Sir William, unwilling that the poor should be deprived of what experience had proved to be highly beneficial, had been at the expence of having the water conducted by a pipe into the road, so that the use of it was free to everybody: the other building was a grotto, not finished, but which afforded an agreeable retreat from the heat of the sun.

"Unwilling as I am to leave this charming place," said the colonel, "we must now go; it is near five o'clock, and we must reach Carmarthen before we dine."

"Oh, do not mind the dinner!" said the children: "we are not at all hungry; and this is such a sweet place that we could stay here for ever."

"Sir," said the guide. "another half hour would allow you to see the hermit's garden and bath; they are a very little way further; and it would be a great pity to go without seeing them."

"Well," said the colonel, "shew us the way; we have already staid more than two hours, but I must indulge these children; and indeed everything here is so charming that I regret not having time to stay longer."

Again they followed their guide; the lake still continued on the right hand, while on the left the ground rose high and steep, covered with plantations. In this part the lake appeared highly romantic, narrowing in some places, and being lost among the trees, which here feather down to the very edge of the water: occasional openings gave some pleasing object to view; among others the hall presented itself, majestically rising as it were out of a wood.

The smooth expanse of the water presented the surrounding scenery with the faithfulness of a mirror. The various foliage of the trees, enriched with the mellow tints of autumn; the distant hills rearing high their summits, tinged with the purple hue of evening; the half-seen bridge and the ethereal vault, adorned with light clouds, were reflected in softened shades from the unruffled bosom of the lake: the murmuring of a brook at a small distance conspired, with the surrounding view, to charm the mind and to invite repose.

The whole party seated themselves on a rustic bench; placed beneath a spreading tree, and for some minutes gazed in silence on the lovely scene. At length the colonel addressed his sister, "You," said he "were poetical in the library, and I feel inclined to be so here, though I confess my poetry will be very humble. "Amelia, my love, lend me a pencil and a piece of paper."

Amelia obeyed, and made a slight sketch of the hall, while her uncle wrote the following lines.

Sweet are these scenes of innocence and ease,
Where Art and Nature both unite to please'

Here lawns far spreading open to the day,
And trees embowering shield the sun's bright ray;
Here chrystal lakes their liquid mirrors show,
And streams wild rippling o'er rough pebbles flow;
Here falling waters charm th' enraptured eye,
And massive rocks in broken fragments lie.

They now continued along the winding path, which conducted them into an arched way, over-shadowed with jessamines and honeysuckles, that led into the hermit's garden. This was a retired sheltered spot, planted with shrubs and flowers. Geraniums and myrtles were here growing in wild luxuriance; a large palm tree in the centre spread its branches over a seat, which seemed to invite the visitors to rest.

On one side ran a rivulet of clearest water, while on the other lofty hanging woods seemed to rise into the clouds. The lateness of the day obliged them to hasten forward to the hermit's bath.

The walk here was no longer gravelled, but green and sloping; it led them by a gentle descent into a most romantic little dell: at the bottom of which rippled a rivulet: the sides were clothed with trees, and at the extremity appeared a small cascade dashing itself with miniature fury from rock to rock till it reached the bottom, where it formed a pool, which has sometimes been used as a bath, and which gave the name to the place.

"I can no longer find words to express my admiration," said Mrs Harcourt; "I can only repeat what I have already said, at least fifty times, – it is enchantingly beautiful."

"I told you," said the colonel, "that there were spots in Wales that might vie with the vale of Tempe", and this is one of them."

"It is indeed," replied Mrs Harcourt, "and this place does not at all appear indebted to art for any of its beauties. Here all is natural, wild and charming."

Tearing themselves from this enchanting scene, they retraced their steps to the Spring, where their obliging guide led them into the road by a private door. After making proper acknowledgements to him for his civility, they returned to Llanarthney, where they found their horses already put to, and the carriage waiting for them. They hastily took their seats, and pursued their route through a charming country.

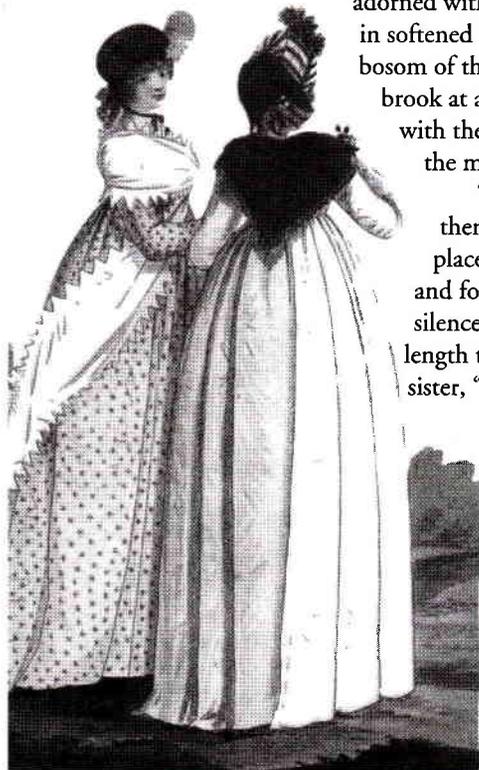
This delightful extract from a book in the library of her historian husband is reproduced by kind permission of Mrs Sheila Lacroix. It describes Middleton, now home of the National Botanic Garden of Wales, some eighteen years after the house was built (c. 1793-5) and the park and gardens laid out by Sir William Paxton. Miss Caroline Paxton, to whom the book is dedicated, was possibly the fifth and youngest daughter of Sir William Paxton.

The identity of "The AUTHOR" is not revealed but the Harcourt family consisted of Henry – the eldest at fifteen; Amelia, thirteen; Caroline, eleven; and Louise, nine.

Simon 2nd Viscount and 1st Earl Harcourt had died in 1777 and the titles passed in turn to his two sons. Mrs Harcourt, widow of the elder son, found that the Harcourt estate was mortgaged to pay huge gambling debts accrued by her late husband and the Selwyn estate, left to her husband by her father, had also been staked and lost in a gambling game. Mrs Harcourt managed to pay off the debts and was left with £30. 'The Colonel' was the 3rd Earl. He was a distinguished soldier – as well as being a Field Marshal he was also Colonel of the 16th Light Dragoons – who, when he died in 1830, was the last to hold the title (until the Viscounty was revived in 1916). The estates included the manor house at Stanton Harcourt and Nuneham Park, both in Oxfordshire.

*Tempe – a valley in Thessaly, praised by the classic poets for its matchless beauty.

Bettina Harden



Llandaff House Summerhouse in Rookwood Hospital Grounds

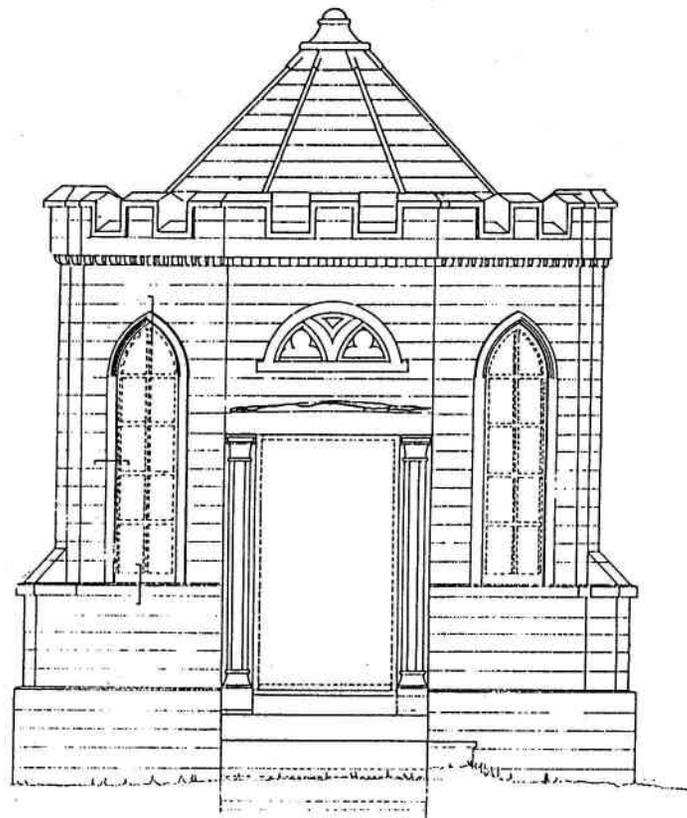
An eighteenth-century octagonal, gothic summerhouse, listed Grade II, and unique in Glamorgan, faces possible collapse and destruction if next winter brings harsh weather.

The summerhouse is marked on an estate map of 1776 at the easternmost tip of the garden of Llandaff House. Its owner, Thomas Edwards, was an attorney, clerk of the peace for the county of Glamorgan, and agent to Lady Windsor in Cardiff Castle. In the mid-nineteenth century a later generation sold the house, its gardens and lands, in separate lots. The summerhouse, still elevated on its mound, found itself within the boundaries of Rookwood, a nineteenth-century mansion built for Sir Edward Stock Hill, whose wealth came from Cardiff's Dry Dock. In the twentieth century the former garden and orchard between Rookwood and the still surviving Llandaff House was built over, with roads and houses. Rookwood itself (and the summerhouse) is now the property of the local Health Authority.

Under the summerhouse, within the mound, is an enigmatic vaulted chamber. Whether this was a small-scale ice-house is a matter for discussion. Watercolours by Paul Sandby of Cardiff Castle and its grounds show a very similar summerhouse, still complete with pinnacles and pillared entrance. Whether the two buildings are one and the same, removed to Llandaff, is another point which has not been resolved.

A fence of heavy wire mesh has been put round the mound by the Health Authority to protect the building from vandals, but gives no protection against the elements. The stone facing of the building is already cracked and beginning to crumble. The pinnacles have gone (although they were reported to be in store) and continuing deterioration has been recorded over the past decades.

The Royal Commission (RCAHMW) has been asked to make a survey of the summerhouse, and its vaulted chamber, as a matter of urgency. Whether it will do so is not yet known. The South and Mid Glamorgan branch of WHGT is now encouraging a



concerted effort by the many individuals and organisations which have expressed concern in the past, to devise a plan of action, before it is too late.

The branch is also looking across the Bristol Channel to the Avon Gardens Trust which is faced with a similar task for its Ham Green summerhouse, of comparable date, but lacking the mound and vaulted chamber. At Ham Green, however, the summerhouse was associated with a small laboratory used by Dr Bright, who gave his name to Bright's disease. It is therefore of interest to medical history and appreciated as such by the Health Authority which owns it.

Patricia Moore

Laburnum Again

Some years ago the pages of this Bulletin discussed the laburnum hedges of Cards., Carm. and Pems. Magnificent stretches are to be seen in flower in May and June.

The English Countryside Agency recently published a report on its endeavours to identify and to preserve characteristic hedgerows of the English countryside. Example were given of damson in Hertfordshire, holly in Warwickshire, lilac in coastal Suffolk and fuchsia and tamarisk in the South-West.

When I enquired what was being done in Wales, Richard Kelly of the Countryside Council told me that CCW and Cadw were jointly funding the Archaeological Trusts in Wales to make a preliminary survey of regional boundary types. Presumably both built and planted types would be covered, dry-stone walling, stone-cored banks, laburnum and *Spiraea*, for instance. It is to be hoped that Planning Departments would then be encouraged to preserve and perpetuate appropriate building and planting.

The surveys are at a preliminary level only. If funding could be made available, however, more detailed surveys would be undertaken. Perhaps members and branches could express approbation of this initiative (letters to CCW), and assist with information.

Patricia Moore

Have you seen these Greenhouses?

Richardson and Company erected glasshouses around the world in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. They were of very high quality and probably the most up-market of all. The first few pages of their catalogue consisted of a list, in order of social precedence, of their customers. The catalogue, believed to be of 1900, listed the following clients in Wales:

- The Most Hon the Marquess of Bute, Cardiff Castle
- The Most Hon the Dowager Marchioness of Londonderry, The Plas, Machynlleth
- The Hon F.G. Wynn, Glynllifon Park, Carnarvon
- Sir Llewellyn Turner, Parkia (Parkla?), Carnarvon
- Sir Henry B Robertson MP, Pale, Corwen
- Edward Davies, Plas Dinam, Montgomeryshire
- Capt Harcourt Wood, Caer Beris, Builth

In addition I have located the following which were probably erected at a later date:

- Admiral Vivian, Clyne, Swansea
- Mirhouse, Angle Hall, Pembroke
- Lloyd, Penty Park, Pembrokeshire

I would be very pleased to know if anything survives of these or if others have been found.

*Gerry Hudson,
Cleveland, Begelly, Kilgetty, Pembrokeshire SA68 OHY*

Editorial

The Editor has enjoyed an unusually bulging postbag in the last few months. Mr William Wilkins, Director of Operations, Aberglasney has written to express his dissatisfaction at Dr Steven Briggs' article (Reviewed Bulletin Spring 1999), and comments the article contains no reference to Aberglasney Archaeologist Kevin Blockley's findings and interpretation. A brief refutation of Briggs' article will appear in the *Journal of Post Medieval Archaeology*. Blockley's full work will be published as a *British Archaeological Reports Monograph*. This debate is being conducted through the scholarly journals and many readers will be interested to follow it. In the meantime it is perhaps regrettable that popular sources, such as *A View of Wales, Holiday Magazine 2000*, (A WTB publication) continue to propagate myths. Feature writer Roddy Llewellyn, in a lavish feature article describes the "Yew tunnel over 1000 years old, one of the oldest living garden structures in Europe"!

A vigorous debate has also been stimulated by Mr Dillwyn Miles, who has reprimanded the editor and the author for the spelling of Penlleghare, or rather, Penllergaer, and other similar misdemeanours. This topic opens a substantial can of worms, and I hope to publish some of the letters I have received in the next *Bulletin*. Other members may also wish to contribute to this debate, which is, in essence, about when and whether to correct the spelling of place names and estates in line with Dr Elwyn Davies' *A Gazetteer of Welsh Place Names*. Further contributions on this topic will be welcome.

Caroline Palmer

Pembrokeshire Branch Potting Shed Sale

The National Trust holds an annual Plant Sale at Colby Woodland Garden, this year on Sunday 14th May. This sale is primarily directed at members of the public (who pay an admission charge to visit the garden), and attracts stalls from private and semi-amateur growers who devote time during the year to raise plants in aid of the National Trust, as well as a few professionals.

One of our Pembrokeshire members grows plants for this Sale and this year asked if the National Trust would allow a special stall for the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust, all takings to be shared equally between the National Trust and the Gateway Project of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust.

The Gateway scheme has already arranged several visits to Colby and the Garden Manager willingly agreed, so two six foot tables were borrowed from a Church Hall and branch members were asked to contribute plants for sale. The response was splendid, the weather was fine, and the public came in good numbers. We held good numbers of *The Guide to the Historic Parks and Gardens of Wales* on the stand, and the WHGT got a good advertisement too.

Almost above all, the day was great fun. Our neighbouring stall holders were friends, we all bought each other's wares, we met lots of nice people, and we received splendid and interesting plants from members who take little part in the more social parts of the Branch's programme.

Our 'take' was a resounding £180 odd, so the Gateway Project gained £90. This is more than it may seem at first sight, because the rules for 'matching funding' mean that Bettina Harden can multiply it three or four times with contributions from our donors.

'Go, and do thou likewise'!

Richard H. Gilbertson

Chairman's report

The Gateway continues to produce gold in all sorts of unexpected ways. Gold, in the form of hard-earned cash, has come in from several branches following plant fairs, sales &c. Many thanks and congratulations to Ceredigion, Clwyd, Gwynedd and Pembrokeshire for producing a total of £850, this yields £3,400 in match funding.

Metaphorical gold has also appeared thanks to a Gateway visit by the Dinas Cross branch of Age Concern in Pembrokeshire to the National Botanic Garden at Middleton Hall. Their Chairman, Mrs Sheila Lacroix, sent us an extract from an extremely rare book in the library of her historian husband. This is reproduced in full in this issue of *The Bulletin*.

Other highlights of the last few months have been a very successful AGM held at Insole Court, Llandaff, Cardiff. Members were delighted with this Victorian mansion, and its still extensive gardens with some fine trees and shrubs. Our pleasure at Belinda Jupp's lecture on Irish gardens was only matched by hers at encountering the unusual climber *Schizophragma viburnoides* ramping some 30 feet up one of the tall Scots Pines in the garden. After the meeting, members had the benefit of Peter Elmes and Patricia Moore's expertise in introducing the gardens of nearby Rookwood house, and the threatened Summerhouse in the grounds.

Friday 21 July saw the official opening, by our patron HRH The Prince of Wales, of the Great Glasshouse at the National Botanic Garden, an occasion blessed with the finest of summer weather. The glasshouse was ablaze with summer annuals from Chile, Australia, South Africa and the Mediterranean, and the 220 metre broadwalk is now flanked by well established and beautifully composed swathes of herbaceous border. This week we look forward to the Royal Welsh Show, where WHGT once again have a stand in the Floral Tent, thanks to the generous support of British Gas.

Bettina Harden

Ceredigion Branch Potting Shed Sale

The Ceredigion Potting Shed Sale shared in the venue of the annual Llanerchaeron Volunteers Plant Sale, which was held on Sunday 28 May. The Volunteers do a brisk trade in plants propagated from stocks in the walled garden and in fresh-cut herbs from the borders. WHGT therefore sold everything but plants, and members had certainly rummaged far into the recesses of their sheds to produce antique sieves and tools, old iron pots which would make wonderful planters, pea netting, plant pots and diverse miscellanea. We also sold a lot of second hand garden books, some new publications, and a certain amount of bric-a-brac.

Showery weather made us very glad of the loan of two square pavilion-type tents, which tested the co-operation skills of the Committee during their erection. The stall raised just over £190 during the day, money which can draw down a further £570 in Gateway Lottery funding.

Caroline Palmer

Gwent Branch

The branch Committee has re-convened, with two new members of Committee, and several new members of the Branch.

The Branch has received a grant for the restoration of the Nelson Summerhouse Garden in Monmouth. This will be a mammoth task in which we hope many members will become involved. The garden will become a Registered Charity, and will be publicly re-opened in due course.

Gwenllian Jones

The Work Diaries of Joseph Martin Farley, Foreman Gardener at Insole Court, Llandaff, Cardiff, 1910-1912



by Hilary Thomas

Survival is the keyword in the exploration of the history of a garden. Survival of the garden itself or of a reasonable number of features to recall past heydays. Survival of estate and family records to chart the fortunes of a garden through centuries or decades. Survival of artistic and photographic representations of gardens. And survival of documents describing the day-to-day activities of gardeners in planting, propagating and general duties. Indispensable as is the work of the gardener to the life of a garden, relatively few work diaries or journals compiled by individual gardeners are known to exist. The work diaries of Joseph Martin Farley, which were discovered by his family only after his death, provide a rare insight into the daily routines of a hands-on gardener. They have been edited and privately published by his son-in-law T.C. Young.

Joseph Martin Farley (1885-1976) was born in Worcester and spent most of his working life as a gardener. As his career progressed he moved from one estate to another. Between 1902 and 1914 he was employed successively at Witley Court, Worcestershire; Holehird, Windermere, Cumbria; Clumber House, Worksop, Nottinghamshire; Annesley Hall, Nottinghamshire; Joyce Grove, Nettlebed, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire; The Court (Insole Court), Llandaff, Cardiff; Stubben Edge, Ashover, Chesterfield, Derbyshire; and Shakenhurst Hall, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire/Worcestershire, where he was employed as head gardener from April 1913 to January 1914. And it is with his departure from Shakenhurst that the diary entries all but cease.

From Shakenhurst Joseph Farley moved to Glasgow to take up an appointment in Queens Park with the City Corporation, his period of employment being interrupted by military service from 1915 to 1919. In 1923 he was appointed gardener at Oatlands house in Lancaster and in 1945 he took up his last appointment at Ripley Training College in Lancaster. But it is in family memory rather than from his own writings that Joseph Farley's gardening activities from the 1920's onwards are preserved.

The diaries reveal many aspects of the day-to-day routine of Farley and his colleagues at a time when country (and town) house gardens were still enjoying a golden age. His descriptions of orchid

houses and vinerias, well-stocked kitchen gardens, orchards and ornamental gardens recreate the splendours of the gardens in which he worked, the scale of the operations conducted there and the demands of the house owners for constant supplies of fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers. In many respects the diaries are as much a social as a horticultural record.

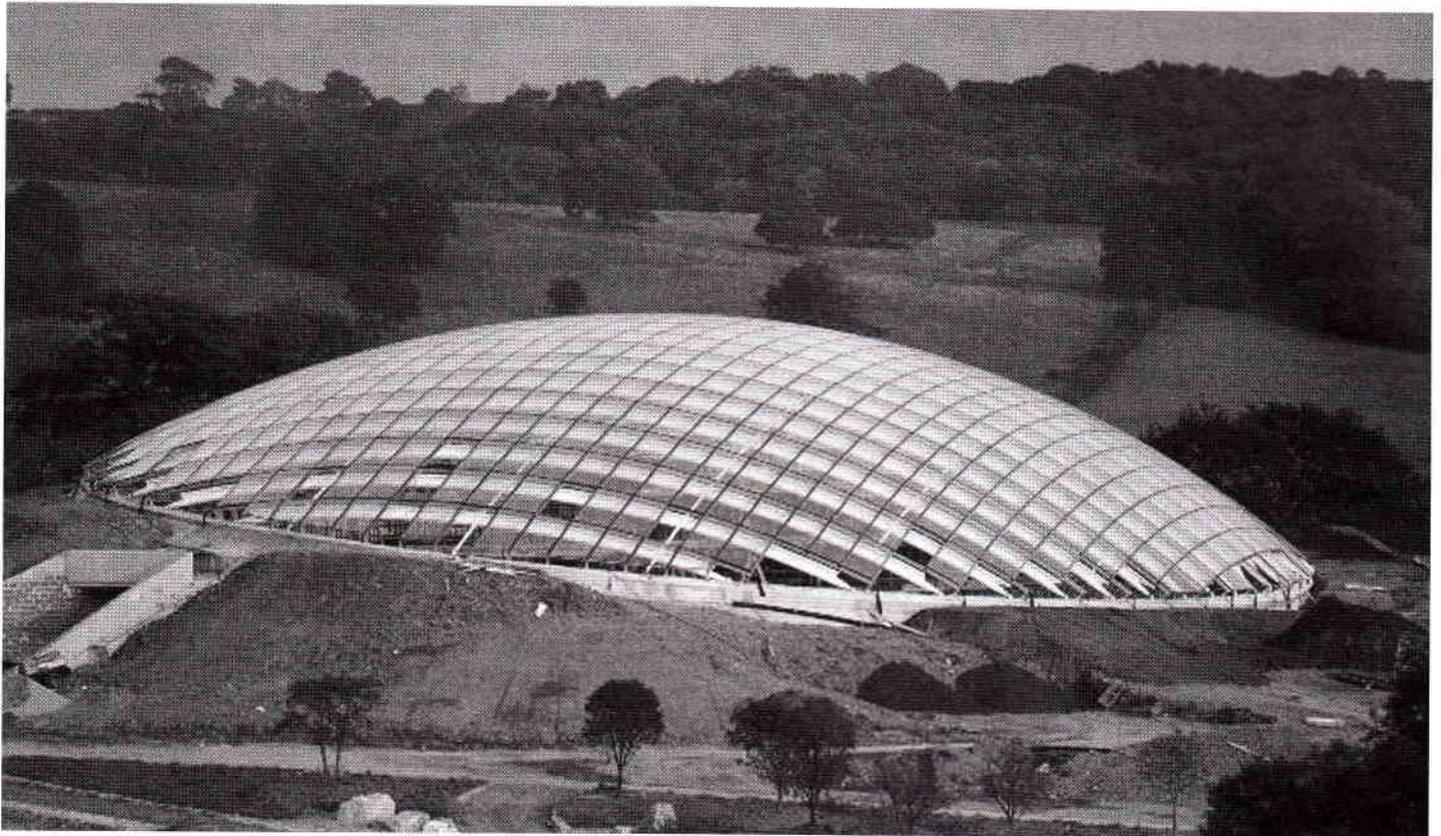
Particularly detailed are the entries relating to The Court (Insole Court) where Farley was employed as foreman gardener from December 1910 to November 1912. His employer here was George Frederick Insole whose family wealth derived from the exploitation of coal in the Rhondda Valley. Little now survives on the ground to recall the magnificent garden landscape that emerges from the pages of Farley's diary – the orchid house and vinerias, peach cage and glasshouses, the orchards, kitchen garden and ornamental gardens. Propagation and planting-out figure largely in the pages of the diaries, and particularly valuable are the itemized lists of the contents of the gardens and glasshouses. Farley gives the names of over 190 different orchids, the varieties of bedding plants for the ornamental gardens, the quantities and species of bulbs bought for forcing. There are lists of the named varieties of fruit trees and bushes grown in the gardens (standard apples, cordon pears and cherries, peaches, nectarines and plums among them), and of the quantities and price of the named varieties of vegetable seeds, the majority of which were supplied by Suttons. Work on the rockery, traces of which still survive, is also mentioned.

THE WORK DIARIES OF AN EDWARDIAN GARDENER, Joseph Martin Farley (1885-1976), edited by T.C. Young, comprising a full transcript of the diaries with an introduction, notes and index has been privately published and copies placed in appropriate libraries and other institutions. As a result of the interest shown in the original, limited print run, T.C. Young is arranging for further copies to be printed. These will be sold through Mid and South Glamorgan Branch of WHGT. Price: £7.25 (incl. p&pp). Please send all requests for copies of this publication together with your cheque (made payable to WHGT) to:

*Hilary M. Thomas,
Brookside Farm, Llandough, Cowbridge,
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The National Botanic Garden of Wales.

Ed. Andrew Sclater. Harper Collins Illustrated 2000, price £24.99. ISBN 0-00-414091-5.



It has become part of the publicity machine that the opening of a major attraction, such as this one, should be accompanied by a book, a mug and a t-shirt. This book is the response to that expectation. Edited by Andrew Sclater, and assembled by professionals in book design, it is a colourful, attractively produced volume in coffee table format. At £25 it is not cheap. It consists of a series of essays, arranged in five concept groups, Origins, Plants and Landscape, Design, Science and Society, Nature and Future, contributed by the great and the good. It is leavened with many full colour photographs, and a series of poems commissioned from the poet, Gillian Clarke.

In many ways, though, this book is premature. The garden was still taking shape when the book was written, and indeed parts of it still are far from complete. As a result the number of good visual images of the garden, apart from the great glasshouse, are few, and historic elements then in disarray, such as the stables (now the visitor centre), the servants' building, (now Principality House), and the drying ground, (now the genetic garden) are omitted from the record. Many of the essays deal with the generalities of landscape and landscape ideas. No less than three contributors are Professors of Philosophy, and others have similar leanings. Dipping from chapter to chapter one is invited to ponder the deeper issues, 'What is the Welsh landscape?', How is the 'natural' distinguished from the 'cultural?', 'What is a natural environment?', 'Where does gardening finish and environmental management begin?' Seldom have I read a book so replete with big questions. By contrast the essays by the 'doers' are more satisfying: the plants in the garden, by Ivor Stokes, and the chapters on design: The glasshouse by Foster and Partners, the Interior Landscape by Peter Culley, and the external landscape by Hal Moggridge. I also enjoyed a thought provoking article by Peter Harper, 'The green dilemmas in the garden' which examines the conflict inherent in creating an Environmental Visitor Centre.

The history of the Middleton Hall estate and its owners is addressed only fleetingly in Andrew Sclater's 'The Genius and Histories of Middleton': the focus of the book is not on the past but upon the future.

The twin demands of the text and the newness of the site create challenges for a picture editor. The result is a quantity of fine photographs, but many of them have little to do with the actual site. There are elegant plant portraits, pictures of noted pieces of Welsh scenery like the Gower peninsula, the Boathouse at Laugharne, Cader Idris, Snowdonia, the Elan Valley reservoirs, and Lake Vyrnwy, and fine habitat scenes of Chile, South Africa, the Mediterranean, and Australia, – regions which will be represented in the great glasshouse. There are photographs of other gardens, such as Kew, Chelsea Physic Garden, Aberglasney.

Like the pictures, the poetry seems to have been scattered through the text with a designer's rather than an editor's eye. There are a series of poems inspired by the geological sequence of Welsh rocks, which ornament the margin of the broadwalk. These seem to have been scattered through the text entirely according to size not content. Progressing through the book is a jumbled geological sequence, Silurian, Cambrian, Pre-Cambrian, Devonian, Ordovician, Carboniferous! I do not know whether she or her publisher is to blame, but surely Gillian Clarke cannot truly have written about the fossil trilobite 'looking at you with four-hundred-and-sixty-five-year-old-eyes'. A devastating context in which to omit the *million* after the five.

This book is a concept, produced for a market niche, and that niche is to be owned rather than to be read. It is a book, which, in the words of one contributor, may help us to 'understand the National Botanic Garden of Wales as an element in a wider social and cultural context'. It is only to a limited degree a book about the National Botanic Garden itself.

Caroline Palmer

Nine Green Gardens

by Gillian Clarke. Published by Gomer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion. Price £4.95 (32 pages, 16 full-page photographs in colour, and 10 smaller ones, 1 plan). ISBN 1-85902-805-5.

Those who saw the recent series of television programmes on the excavation and re-creation of the gardens at Aberglasney were perhaps surprised to find that the commentary was augmented by the some newly-composed poems. I, for one, wished I could renew my acquaintance with those beguiling lines, and now with the publication of Gillian Clarke's *Nine Green Gardens* I can do so.

The title of this slim, 32-page booklet is taken from a fifteenth-century poem by Lewys Glyn Cothi, one of the great medieval bards who wrote in the complex metres of classical Welsh poetry, praising their patrons' achievements and generosity, or mourning at their decease. Aberglasney was the home of Rhydderch ap Rhys ap Gruffudd, and the poet Lewys praised its orchards, vineyards and oakwoods, and its nine green gardens. Whether there were actually nine, we can doubt or believe as we will, but the phrase has lived through the centuries, and conjures in the mind a picture of greenery, beauty, order, and careful cultivation, part of the cultured background of the *uchelwyr* of south-west Wales in the later Middle Ages.

Aberglasney lies in the Vale of the Towy, a fertile and verdant area, notable for its numerous great houses. Some, such as Dynevor, trace their origins to medieval times, others, like Middleton, are of later creation. The eighteenth century saw the rise of Picturesque taste, and no part of the country was better fitted to attract the artist, the traveller and the writer in search of its manifestations. John Dyer, a member of the family who owned Aberglasney at that time, extolled the beauty of the surrounding landscape in his poem on Grongar Hill, the gentle slopes of which overlook the house and its lands.

Aberglasney is one of those places which gather myth and legend to linger in the mind, and inspire the muse. This quality still persists in the twenty-first century, as the work of Gillian Clarke shows. In a collection of short poems she celebrates nine areas in the re-created gardens of Aberglasney. She touches both on legends from the past and on the practical aspects of recent restoration. There is, however, a strain of melancholy in many of the poems, which will be familiar to anyone who knows her writing. Her opening poem on Aberglasney quietly rejoices in the departure of the contractors and their machinery and the disappearance of their rubble. On the opposite page is a photograph which makes a vivid record of builders' rubbish, wire mesh and safety signs in front of the house. Each left-hand page



carries a full-page colour photograph, taken by Kathy de Witt to complement the poem opposite, and these add striking and beautiful views throughout the book. The poet's expression 'criss-cross of cobbles kisses in stone' is perfectly complemented by a photograph of the Xs in the pitched paving. The sharp detail of the ancient stonework of the Cloister Garden is a backdrop to a parade of figures evoked from the past. The poet's 'drum and dither of wild bees' is easily imagined in photographic studies of delicate grasses and flowers. Pictures of blossoms, too, complement the refrain of flowers' names in the ballad on the Upper Walled Garden. An elegy on the Five Dead Maids is matched by images of pure white snowdrops. A golden-lit close-up of the bark of a tree in the Yew Tunnel is a particularly memorable photograph, though the dendrochronologist may challenge the poetic age of a thousand years – but poets have always been free to take licence, and the myth lives on.

If you wish to read the scientific, archaeological account and interpretation of the excavations in the gardens, consult the official report when it is published later this year. If you wish to enjoy an immensely readable book on the site, its history and that of the families associated with the house, Penny David's *A Garden Lost in Time* will give you pleasure. For a poet's vision, responding to William Wilkins' present-day patronage, and a photographer's joyous record, this modestly priced booklet, with its generous provision of beautiful photographs, should be added to your shelves.

Patricia Moore

The Flowering of the Landscape Garden

English Pleasure Grounds 1720-1800 by Mark Laird
University of Pennsylvania Press 1999. Price £38.95
ISBN 0-8122-3457-X.

None who reads Mark Laird's marvellous book will ever look at eighteenth century landscapes in the same light. The vision that some of us had of Georgian landscapes coloured only by shades of green with cows up to the house is shown to be nonsense. Superbly illustrated and documented this study shows the vital part that flowers played in the Georgian attitude to parks and gardens. The effect that garden designers tried to create is shown by Laird in his own drawings. Although these are too diagrammatic to recapture the full effect nonetheless one can sense

the use of colour in the borders and shrubberies. It is, however, in the innumerable pictures, plans and prints that Laird revolutionises ones concept of the eighteenth century garden. The view of the Prince Regent's garden at Carlton House is a revelation in how an eighteenth/early nineteenth century garden could look.

It is not merely in depicting the use of flowers that Laird illuminates the garden history of his era. His detailed analysis of how the graduated border developed in the years 1700 - 1750 and how the shrubbery evolved would alone make reading this book worthwhile. In both cases concepts which we take for granted but few of us realised how they developed.

This is a book that all who are interested in garden history should read and read and read again.

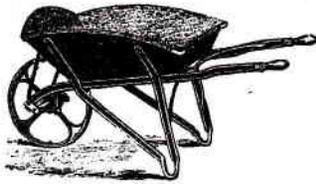
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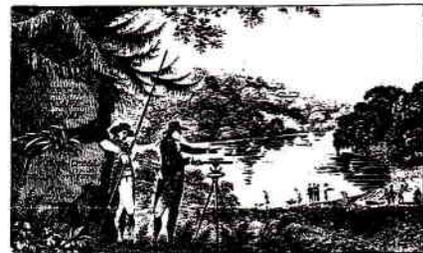


The Turkish Tent Painshill Park 1779 by Frederik Piper

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REPTON IN ESSEX



A gazetteer of sites associated with Humphry Repton within the county of Essex. This illustrated work is a result of research undertaken by the Essex Gardens Trust with contributions from Georgina Green of the Woodford Historical Society and is edited by Fiona Cowell.

The document, 75 pages in length, will include explanatory text, maps and illustrations (black and white, and colour) and is due to be published in April 2000.

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