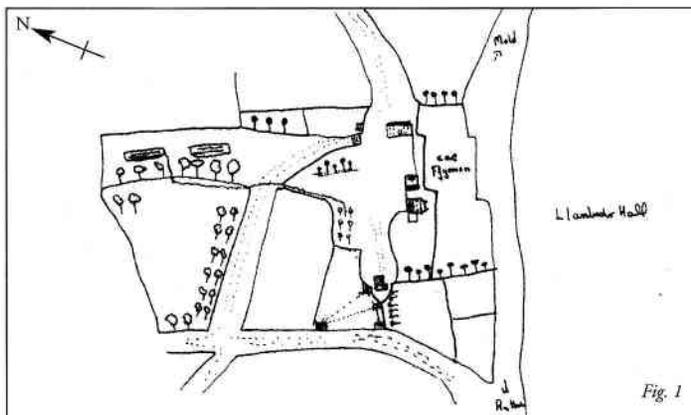


Llanbedr Hall and its Garden

by Shirley Walls

Plas Llanbedr is on an ancient site, situated on the southern side of the Clwydian Hills above the town of Ruthin, in the parish of Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd. The ancient family of Thelwell owned Bathafarn as their main seat, and also owned Plas Llanbedr or Llanbedr Hall, from the 16th Century, until it was sold by Rev Edward Thelwell in 1786.

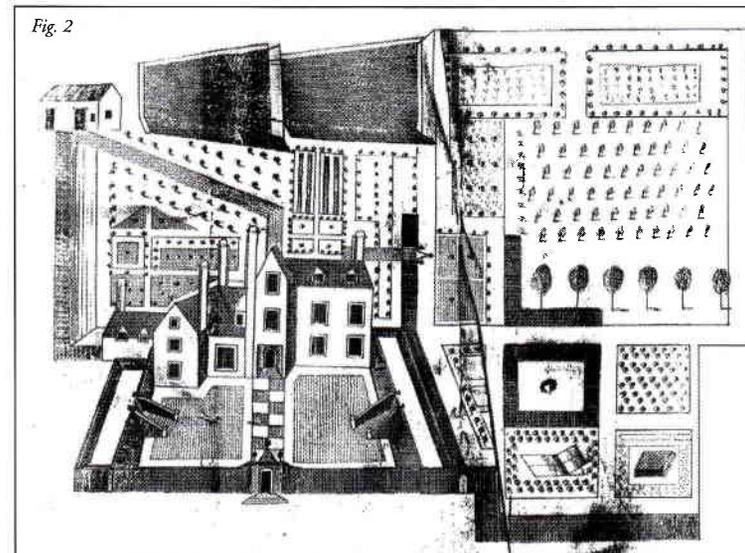


The first known plan of Llanbedr Estate, is dated 1744 and shows two views of the garden.¹ A sketch (Fig. 1) copied from this, shows the parkland area around the house. The drive to the house is shown with an avenue of trees to the left (north) side. Also to the north are two ponds from one of which a stream goes into the garden. Other trees, which are drawn like matchsticks, may illustrate evergreens, probably yews. The house is shown with a square enclosure at its side. The stable block to the east is at the top of the picture, close to the back drive.

A detailed drawing, (Fig. 2) shows the hall and its garden. This detail cannot be precisely identified with the house depicted on the estate map or with the present house. However it gives an idea of what the garden then looked like, with raised terraces and walkways, and steps down to a lawn or gravel area flanking the front entrance. The area to the right of the house, with steps down into a vegetable or fruit garden, could be the present site of walled garden. The cartographer has drawn the different types of beds in detail, showing cold frames, beds of carefully laid-out vegetables or fruit, an orchard, and possibly seed beds. The area at the back with wavy lines may indicate water in two ponds. This illustration is reminiscent of a sketch of Mostyn Hall, Flintshire by Thomas Dinely, who accompanied a visit by Duke of Beaufort in 1684.² This house had similar raised terraces and walkways, and a flight of steps leading down into the entrance courtyard.

In 1786 the estate of Bathafarn and Llanbedr was purchased by Josephr Ablett.³ His family originally came from Suffolk but his father flourished as a prosperous manufacturer of thread and fustian in the north-west. Ablett's inheritance at an early age enabled him to retire to the Vale of Clwyd, where in 1809 he

became High Sheriff. He was a patron of the arts, travelled and entertained extensively, and was a benefactor of various projects in the area, donating land for the Denbigh Asylum for Lunatics (the first in Wales). He travelled extensively in Europe, mainly in Italy, and was well acquainted with the local gentry. In 1837 he published privately a book called *Literary Hours by Various Friends*. This carries a flowery dedication to Mrs Ablett which begins "It is now a great many years since we began to gather flowers and compare their beauties". The book included works by two poets of the romantic movement; Leigh Hunt and Walter Savage Landor, as well as by Bishop Reginald Heber, the hymn writer and prebendary of St Asaph. Ablett took Landor to the Lake District to visit Wordsworth, who had previously visited and toured North Wales in 1791 in the company of his Welsh college friend the Revd Robert Jones of Llangynhafal near Ruthin.⁴ Ablett also



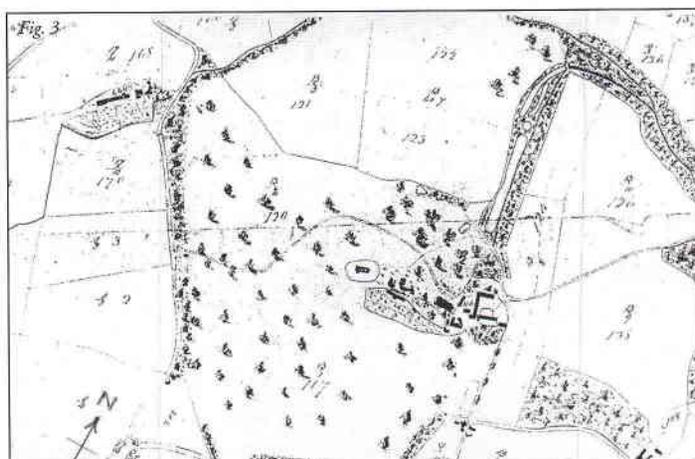
financed an English translation of the Mabinogion by William Owen Pughe of Nantglyn, and subscribed to his English-Welsh Dictionary. He commissioned the statue of Proserpine by John Gibson, the Welsh sculptor, which had pride of place in the Hall, alongside portrait busts of Landor, Landor's daughter, and Ablett himself.

It is probable that Ablett commissioned the present landscaping of the grounds around the hall. One would like to think he was influenced by the landscape gardener Repton. A sketch of the house in 1809 gives no details of the garden. However a sketch by Charlotte Sneyd, dated 1828 and entitled "From Mr. Abletts garden" shows balustrades in the foreground, a curved terrace, (the present walled garden), and the church beyond.⁵

Ablett ran a strict household, as the range of fines on a slate from the servants' hall illustrates:

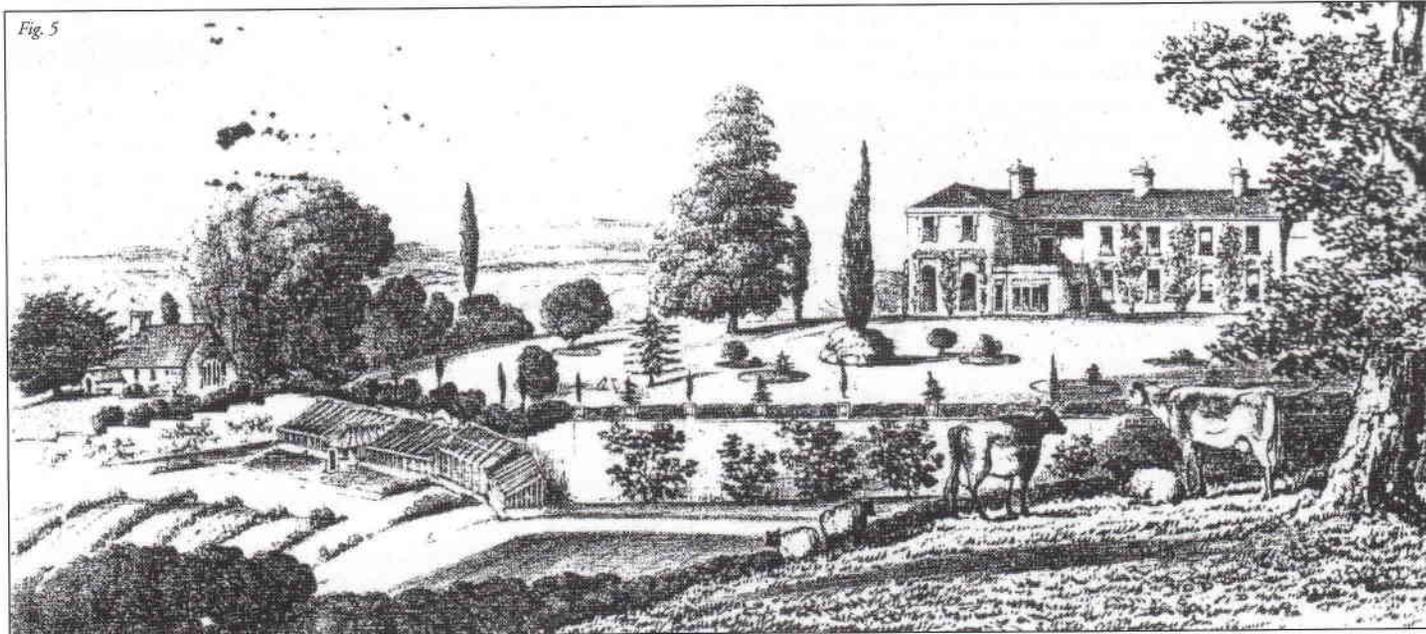
No Welsh to be spoken in this hall 1p
 For taking the lords name in Vain 6p
 For cursing and swearing 3p
 For quarrels or swearing 3p
 For dirtying this hall 1p
 Leaving bread after meals 2p
 To ask for a meal taken and then leave it 2p
 For telling lies in this hall 3p
 To come clean to meals or pay 2p
 To come to meals 5 mins late after bell is rung twice 2p
 All the above fines to be paid by order J Ablett May 1829

His strict attitude is also illustrated by the lawsuit he took against his gardener Nowlan in 1830.⁶ Nowlan had been previously employed at Kew. In November 1830 Mr. Ablett told Nowlan and the apprentice Hamilton that he was dissatisfied as Nowlan had charged him "for four packets of Prims from Kew, two were spoiled with frost and only one of them paid for by Mr. Ablett for £19.2.8." The court case was brought because Nowlan would not accept notice to leave Ablett's employment. One of the witnesses in the case was a Thomas Pritchard who described himself as "having been at Kew, formerly gardener at Llanbedr and later at Garn (Henllan) till the death of his employer." Pritchard also



mentions that, in 1829, when Nowlan was building a new range of hot-houses, he had worked occasionally to superintend them. This could be the same Thomas Pritchard who was a head gardener at Erddig in 1830 and is commemorated by a portrait in the servants' hall.⁷

On the basis of this evidence the first glasshouses may be dated to 1829. The 1838 tithe map (Fig. 3) shows a range of glasshouses which stand in the same position that they occupy today.⁸ The walled garden shows the path layout, and dipping pond in the middle. To the north, the two ponds have become a more complex



water feature, and there is a circular outline to the west of them which is identified, on later maps, as an ice house. The main drive is sinuous, though not as circuitous as it is today, and there is a building at the site of the lodge at the west entrance.

When Walter Savage Landor visited Llanbedr in 1832 he wrote to his sister: "Llanbedr is really in all respects the most delightful place I ever was in. Magnificent trees, the richest valley in the world and the most varied hills with lofty mountains not too near nor too far." Leigh Hunt was another visitor who wrote a verse in 1832 describing the area. He also mentions that Mrs Ablett "is extremely fond of flowers" and that their gardens cost them £300 a year.⁹ In 1835 Hunt wrote a poem called *Llanbedr*, which begins:

*Quitting dear friends with homeward care
 In the sweet land that held the Druid,
 I touch'd at thee, Llanbedr fair,
 Thou lily of the Vale of Clwyd.*

*Gardens I saw, home's fringes bright -
 A homestead church, and pastoral valleys,
 And mountains green of gentle might
 Luring ascent with leafy alleys.*

And ends:

*Oh, sweet are Llanbedr's slopes,
 Its mansion rich, its manners even;
 But man's a world of boundless hopes,
 Whose heart contains both earth and heaven.*

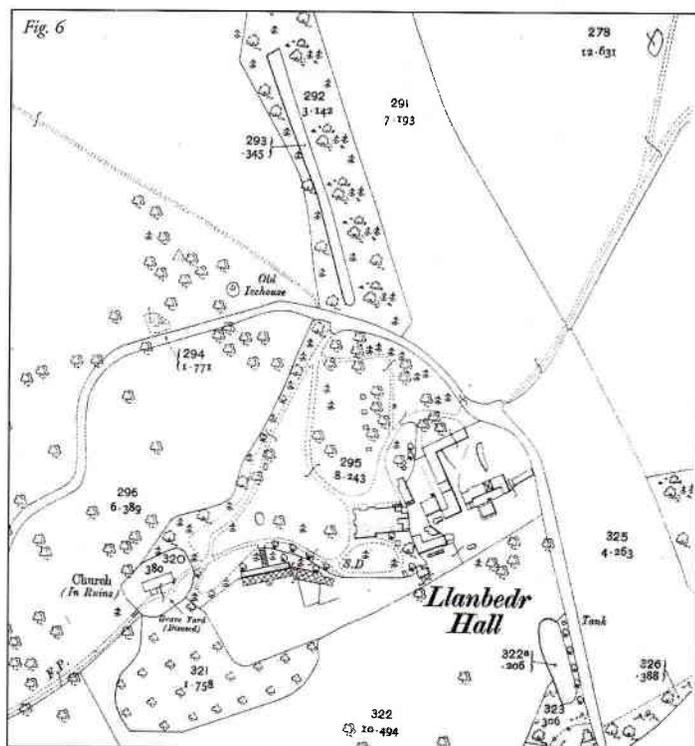


John Ablett died in 1848, and is buried in the churchyard. Prior to his death, Landor had written a verse for his tombstone.

Two lithographs from before 1856 illustrate the garden and its features at this time. One print, (Fig 4)¹⁰ shows the brick wall of

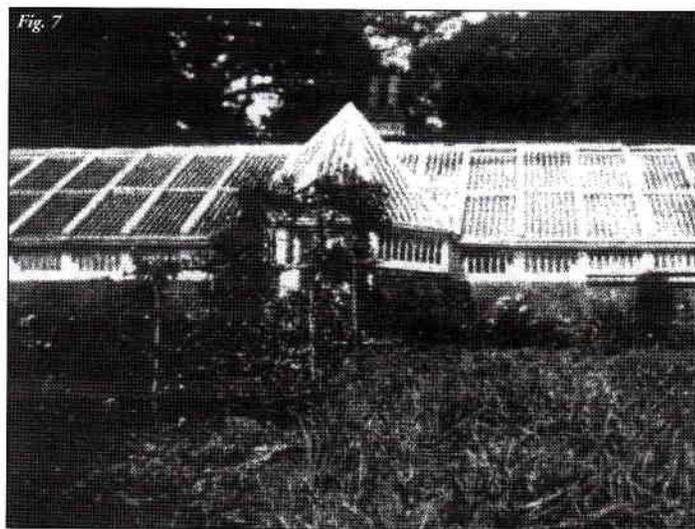
the walled garden and greenhouses, one of which is free-standing with end chimneys. Fine specimen trees are shown on the lawns and the church stands at the edge of the garden. East of the greenhouses the fruit wall acts as a retaining wall for the lawn above. A row of planters each containing some type of tree is shown on top of this wall (The balustrades between the planters could be those shown in the earlier sketch by C. Sneyd). The other print, a lithograph by Shaw (Fig. 5)¹¹ is similar, but shows the greenhouses built against the brick wall. Hedging, not balustrades, seem to link the planters at the edge of the lawn.

Ablett had no children, and the house was inherited by John Jesse, a relative, who in 1863 built another church in the village of Llanbedr and allowed the old church near the Hall to fall into



ruin. Diaries of this period give details of some of the plants grown in the hothouses. In 1866, the Hall was inherited by his son, John Fairfax Jesse, who had the house rebuilt by Poundley and Walter. By 1874 the OS 25" map shows that an orchard had been added below the walled garden. There was still a dipping pond in the garden and a hexagonal pool had been built on the front lawn. The drive had been curved away from the house towards the ice house. The water features had coalesced into a single long pond or canal. These features are also shown on the 1912 OS map. (Fig 6.)

John Halifax Jesse died in 1911. The estate was split into three lots and put up for sale in 1916, but the hall and parkland remained



together in one lot. The hall became a tuberculosis sanatorium, and photographs of c.1920 have survived showing the head gardener Mr. Ellis together with a well-kept flowered garden and the greenhouse (Fig. 7), which looks similar to that shown in the print of 50 years earlier. The garden was now used by convalescing patients and their visitors. Members of the comedy war time I.T.M.A. team visited Jack Train (one of their team, who was then a patient) filling the house with their jokes and laughter.¹²

When the hall was purchased in 1953 by Mr. MacQueen, it was in a poor condition. There were camellias and peaches in the greenhouses still, but the garden was neglected. The orchard had to be cut down because it had suffered vandalism. Some of the land, including the canal or the long water, was sold to finance the house. Mr. MacQueen gave the Hall to his son, who between 1970-80 encouraged members of the Findhorn Community to come down to stay, and work in the garden.¹³

A visit in 1998 by members of the WHGT (Clwyd branch) found that the square lodge with gothic windows now has a modern extension and that the drive passes the remains of the ice house in the adjoining in the field. The long water or canal feature has been reduced, and a modern house built at the end. Surviving specimen trees on the lawn included two mulberries and a large Cedar of Lebanon. The north brick wall of the walled garden was still *in situ*, in part over 12 ft high. The row of planters shown in the Shaw print (Fig. 5) remain, though the overgrown yews have caused some planters to split. There are also remnants of box hedging. The greenhouses have all collapsed. The main greenhouse was 115 ft long 18 ft deep against a 12 ft high wall. One wall was heated, but the rest of the greenhouses had iron gratings over underfloor heating. Behind the wall was a range of roofless potting sheds and evidence of four boilers. All these, set eight feet into the ground, bear testament to the work that was done out of sight. The former splendour of the garden is also indicated by the entrance, down a flight of steps from the lawn, and through two doors set into an ashlar pediment in the high brick wall. Inside, the walled garden is now too overgrown for us to discern any of its features. The sandstone church has become a picturesque ruin, hidden from the Hall by trees.

The Hall and surrounding lawns are once again up for sale so the future of this important house and garden is unknown.

I would like to thank: the MacQueen family for their permission and help, Denbighshire County Record Office, Mrs K Webb and Brian Lewis for their knowledge of local history, Mr. Ellis for permission to reproduce his photograph of the garden c 1920, The National Library of Wales for permission to reproduce the Shaw lithograph 1840, the Bathafarn 1744 drawing of the hall and garden, and Tithe map.

¹ Bathafarn Schedule NLW, MSS Maps Llanbedr

² Duke of Beaufort's Progress through N Wales 1684 D Pratt *Clwyd Historian* 25

³ W Tydeman. Ablett of Llanbedr: Patron of the Arts *Denbighshire Historical Soc.* 19

⁴ Wordsworth Llanfihangel A Fletcher *Clwyd Historian* 23

⁵ C A Sneyd sketches, Keele University

⁶ Bathafarn Schedule NLW MSS 402

⁷ Erddig Guide book

⁸ h Llanbedr Tithe map 1838 NLW, Den RO MT /41/5

⁹ W Tydeman, *op.cit.* p 157 p170

¹⁰ Llanbedr Hall n.d., engraving Newman, London published in *Vale of Clwyd* Wm Davies 1856

¹¹ Lithograph of Llanbedr Hall by I Shaw NLW. (From Handbook for the Vale of Clwyd by William Davis 1856)

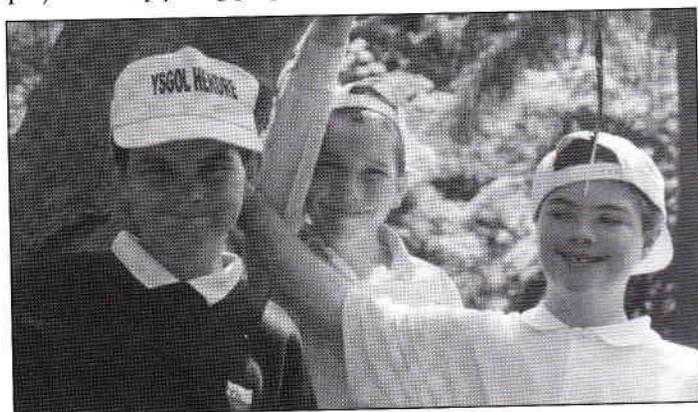
¹² I.T.M.A., "Its That Man Again" was a war-time radio comedy with Tommy Handley

¹³ Findhorn Community – A commune type of community believed in getting good from the earth and getting in touch with the spirit.

A Big Thank you to Barclays

A grant of almost £16,000 has enabled the Gateway Project to launch a new initiative focusing on garden visits for children with special needs throughout Wales. Chairman Bettina Harden says "Thanks to Barclays we are going to be able to organise at least 40 garden visits for children with special needs all over Wales. On previous Gateway visits we have learned that children relish the experience of open, traffic-free space and woodland in places such as Plas yn Rhiw, Nanhoron, Bodnant, the National Botanic Garden of Wales, the Gnoll, and Dyffryn Gardens. The generous support of Barclays will give 600 or more people, including children and young adults with Special Needs and their teachers/carers, the chance to take full advantage of the social, cultural and educational opportunities given by a Gateway garden visit."

Barclays Community Manager for Wales, Wendy O'Rahilly adds, "Barclays is delighted to be supporting such an innovative project to help young people with special needs."



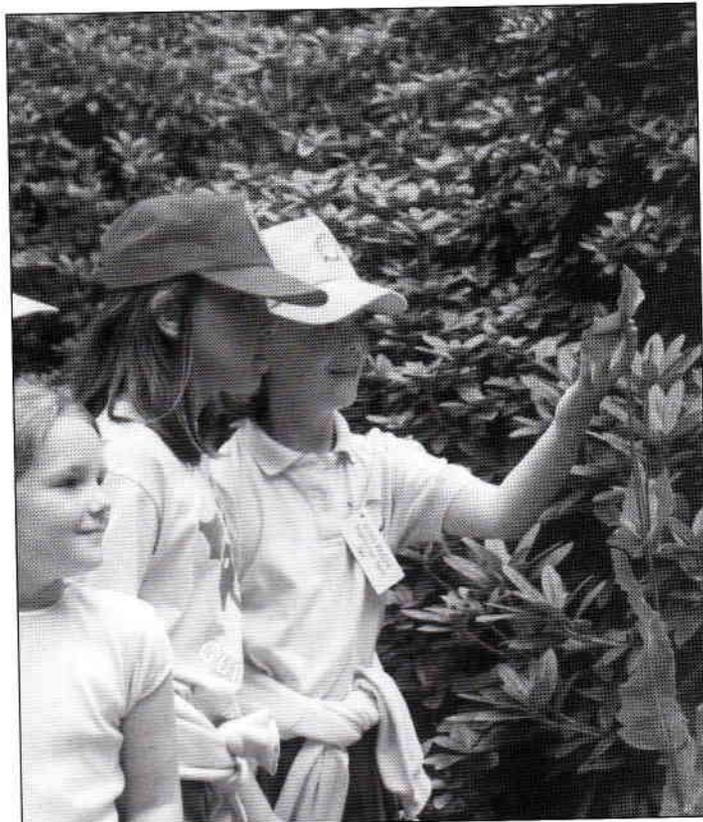
Ysgol Hendre from Neath launched the **Barclays Bank Special Needs Initiative** at Dyffryn Gardens in June.

and to our other Donors and Sponsors

This year alone, the Gateway Project team has raised some £18,000 towards the running costs of the main project including the Access Officer's salary. This is in addition to the Barclays grant and the new HLF Education and Garden Heritage Initiative. Individual donations, no matter how small, and grants from charitable trusts are always welcome. The Project does also offer a corporate sponsorship package at a cost of £500 per visit, securing a visit (costs of transport, entry fees, interpretation and light refreshments) for a group and garden of the sponsor's choice anywhere in Wales, together with the presence of Sharron, the Access Officer, or John, the new Education Officer. For further details or if you'd like to suggest a group that might benefit from such a visit, contact the Access Officer, Sharron Kerr, on 01792 390261. or e mail SKerr41170@aol.com.



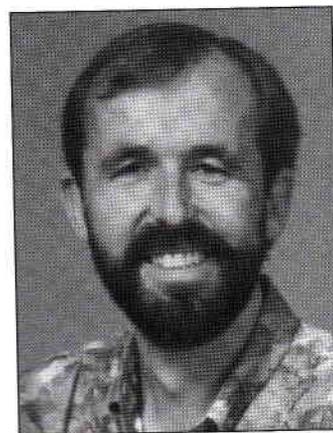
Carers from the Porthmadog Carers Outreach Centre enjoyed a June afternoon of roses at Nanhoron, home of WHGT chairman, Bettina Harden (pictured in the centre of the group). The visit was made possible by the generous support of business consultants, **Petrie and Co.**



Rhyl Brownies at Bodnant in July thanks to the support of **First Hydro Renewables**, an Edison Mission Energy Company – one of the UK's leading electricity generators.

Welcome, John Rees

Thanks to an Heritage Lottery Fund grant to the Gateway Project of £200,000 over three years for an Education and Garden Heritage Initiative, we have a new member of staff! John Rees, took up his post as Education Officer, at the end of July, and plans to introduce thousands of children and also lifelong-learners to historic parks and gardens during the next three years. He writes:



"I spent my formative years growing up in a garden-loving home half way between Clyne Gardens and Singleton Park in Swansea. These two outdoor spaces became both my treasured playgrounds and centres of informal learning. A love of geography and history particularly motivated me at school and later enabled me to gain a geography degree substantially rooted in historical themes. My post-graduate teaching certificate was followed by stints of teaching in London and Sussex before moving to Israel to teach at the international school in Jerusalem and at an indigenous school in Jaffa. Part of my life at each school has been running gardening clubs and arranging visits to parks and gardens, hoping to enable children to gain some of the same awe, delight and practical knowledge which my childhood circumstances permitted and encouraged. I am thrilled to be moving back to Wales at a time when The Gateway Project of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust is expanding even further into the world of education. I am greatly looking forward to serving the Trust and the outdoor learners of Wales over the next three years. Together with my wife Sally, I hope to meet many of you along the way."

Editorial

Though this is my sixteenth Bulletin, the Editor's task never gets easier. Every issue poses a challenge: relieved only when the pages are tidily filled, with a flexible mix of scholarship, news, reviews and essential information. I owe thanks to every contributor, and send out a plea for more. The Bulletin, although ephemeral in your own hands, is collected and archived by the National Library of Wales and other public bodies. From the regular, detailed lead article to the tiniest nugget of garden or landscape news, which might otherwise fall from view, a contribution to The Bulletin is there for posterity. Please keep them coming.

In the last Bulletin, chairman Bettina Harden announced the

news of a three-year partnership agreement with the NFU Mutual insurance company, which is contributing generously to the costs of the Trust's work. One immediate consequence of this is the improved paper quality of this edition, which, I hope, will yield enhanced quality of photo reproduction. On this page we welcome the first of an occasional series of NFU Mutual articles, which may set members musing about their policies. The Autumn Bulletin will be accompanied by an NFU Mutual mailing, designed specifically for WHGT members, which could not be produced in time for this issue. We are sure that the partnership will prove to be valuable to all concerned.

Caroline Palmer

Rich Pickings

by Nicki Whittaker

There was a time when the only things worth stealing from a garden were the contents of the garden shed and it was often the humble lawnmower which fell prey to opportunist thieves. Now, however, people are just as likely to have antiques in their garden as they are in their home - a fact of which 'green fingered thieves are well aware.

As a nation, we are spending more and more of our time in the garden and, as a consequence of this, the value of the items within our gardens has risen - making it a prime target area for thieves.

From roof-top gardens and small backyards, to period properties with palatial grounds, gardens across the UK are being adorned with an impressive array of ancient (and sometimes not so ancient) statues, stone troughs, urns, saddle stones, fountains, sundials and other objects.

Of course, if you have ever tried to move a stone trough or a piece of garden statuary, you are probably wondering how such heavyweight objects come to be stolen at all. The bad news is that no matter how heavy or impossible to steal an item might seem, garden thieves are aware of its value and will go to extraordinary lengths to remove it.

From its figures, NFU Mutual estimates that garden theft alone has cost British Householders over £71 Million in the past three years. Furthermore, the company is concerned that many householders neglect to treat 'outdoor furnishings' in the same way as interior furnishings when it comes to insurance and may find themselves out of pocket if the items are stolen.

Sid Gibson, Underwriting Manager of NFU Mutual is concerned about the growing incidence of garden theft and urges homeowners to treat outdoor furniture and antiques in the same way as items within the home:

"most homeowners will automatically check their home and contents policy when they buy an expensive antique or valuable item for the interior of their home" he comments.

"Unfortunately, a recent survey of our branch offices confirmed that many homeowners give little or no thought to whether the items of value in their garden are adequately covered under their home and contents policy".

Research conducted by NFU Mutual reveals that certain items seem to be favoured by 'green thieves': these include staddlestones, ornamental cast iron garden furniture and antiques, statues and stone troughs. The size and weight of an item also seems to be no deterrent to determined thieves. Indeed, one of the most expensive claims received was for antique stone statues worth £16,000, whilst an 18th Century fountain worth £7,700 was stolen after thieves carefully dismantled it piece by piece during the night.

In addition to being missed by the householder, some garden antiques are also sorely missed by other garden visitors, as one lady soon discovered when an antique

birdbath was stolen from her garden.

Circa 1890's, the birdbath had been given to the lady by a tenant farmer and had taken pride of place in her garden. Needless to say, the lady's disappointment at its disappearance was shared by the local wild bird population.

Following the theft, the owner was unsuccessful in finding an identical replacement for the bird bath and so began to scour the local auction houses and garden shows in an attempt to recover the item.

It was only when she visited a garden show some months later that she found out about Salvo - a company which recovers antique garden ornaments. Fortunately, the lady had taken a photograph of the bird bath and was able to provide both her local police and Salvo with a copy. As luck would have it, the bird bath turned up in a sale at Sotheby's in Sussex and Salvo spotted it in the sale catalogue, with a guide price of £400 - £600.

Fortunately, the owner and her beloved bird bath were re-united; however, many items stolen from gardens are never recovered and NFU Mutual is so concerned about what it regards as a growing problem for homeowners that it has taken positive steps to address the problem.

- Firstly, unlike many home & contents policies, which provide limited cover for items in the garden, NFU Mutual recently raised the amount it will pay for garden theft to £1,500 for any one claim, with more expensive items being insured separately.
- Secondly, in attempt to deter thieves, NFU Mutual is issuing the following advice to homeowners:
- Be aware of the limits of your home & contents policy and ensure you have adequate coverage for items which exceed that limit.
- Wherever possible, secure items of value to an immovable object, or concrete them in position.
- Give careful consideration to where you position items in your garden and wherever possible, ensure that items of value are located out of sight.
- Take photographs of valuable garden antiques and statues and datatag, or mark the item with your postcode to aid recovery in the event of a theft.
- Consider planting prickly or inhospitable plants and bushes around garden statues and ornaments. In this way you can still achieve an attractive backdrop and make the thief's job more difficult (and uncomfortable) at the same time!
- Fit good locks to garden gates and ensure you use them!
- Fit motion sensitive security lights to areas where items of value are located.
- If you are going away, alert a neighbour or your local police station.
- Wherever possible, lock items of value away in a well-secured garage or garden shed.
- Finally - enjoy your garden!

For more information, or to enquire about any of NFU Mutual's range of home, motor, personal and business insurance, contact David Jones on 01286 673377.

Hawthorn Cottage, Hafod, gets a new lease of life

This little cottage and its neighbouring pond, concealed in a narrow declivity between two hills only 300m from the mansion site, form a delightful picturesque scene of the domestic kind – proof, if needed, that Thomas Johnes was not solely preoccupied with thoughts of wilderness.

The cottage, more properly known as Pendre Isaf (its suburban English name was inflicted upon it by Sir Henry Hoghton, owner of Hafod 1846-55), has a complicated history. Its dilapidated, one-storey east wing is thought likely to be a remnant of a longhouse, and as such could well pre-date Johnes's arrival in 1783. An illustration on a Crown Derby plate of 1788 depicts a simple cottage with a pond and describes it as the "Menagerie". The Menagerie's denizens were nothing more ferocious than exotic fowl, while the cottage itself was probably occupied by a farm worker, such as the dairyman. It appears to have been enlarged by Johnes, as in 1834 it is shown occupying the same footprint as the present cottage. There is no documentary record of later alterations, but the existing, two-storey main structure is assessed as being of one build, from the late 19th century – i.e. the work of John Waddingham. Johnes's home farm stood on the small plateau above and behind Hawthorn Cottage (until broken up in 1806), and nearby a new house, Pendre Uchaf, was built for the bailiff. From contemporary images and documents it is clear that the hillside framing the cottage to the rear consisted of pasture with groups of trees.

In the 1940s and '50s, when the mansion fell empty and into neglect before finally being demolished, the Hafod estate cottages remained occupied. When the Forestry Commission took over in 1950, some had already been sold off, and one by one the others followed suit – with the exception of Hawthorn Cottage. Opinions vary as to why this was, and to when it was last permanently occupied. The roof of the main building has been kept in reasonable repair, but in other respects the structure has been allowed to deteriorate, and it is not in a habitable state (though the lone squatter who took up residence last winter might beg to differ).

Clearly Forest Enterprise did not have funds available to rehabilitate the cottage (which is now Listed, Grade II), yet its history and location at the heart of the designed landscape demanded that it should not be allowed to fall into ruin. The Hafod Trust has therefore taken over responsibility for the building and



surrounding land (excluding the pond) on a 25 year lease. We plan to repair and restore the cottage as a home, retaining as many original features as possible and leaving the external appearance virtually unchanged. It lacks the most basic amenities – no bathroom, no kitchen, and in places no roof and no floor – so considerable expense will be incurred. To date the Trust has raised about £12,500; the rate of progress of restoration will depend on how quickly we are able to raise further funds.

Hawthorn Cottage may at one time have had a vehicular access across the fields – a 1940s photo shows beside it a structure looking suspiciously like a garage – but the Trust decided at an early stage that it would be an unacceptable visual intrusion to have a car parked close to the building. The 1½ acres of land leased to us with the cottage extends to the back drive, and a path will lead up to that drive where FE is constructing a parking bay.

In front of the cottage is a small level garden, currently grazed by sheep, but the rest of the plot is steeply sloping, and was covered with a dense mass of *Rhododendron ponticum*. We have recently cleared some of this, bringing into the open some standard trees of various ages, rock outcrops, and earthworks that merit closer investigation. At the highest point of 'our' garden is a superb viewing platform commanding a view across Pendre Meadow; a huge but long-dead sycamore beside it has had to be cut down for safety reasons. Whether the whole plot should be let with the cottage is yet to be decided, but if so, there would need to be restrictions on its manner of use. We are

very aware that Hawthorn Cottage and its grounds are in a highly sensitive location and in part visible from a many areas of the estate. Although under separate tenure, its future management is being considered with careful regard to its place in the designed landscape as a whole.

Jennie Macve

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- 1832 Hafod Sale Catalogue; 1834 estate map (National Library of Wales)
- NLW MS 1340C: a Tour to South Wales in 1801 (Thomas Martyn)
- Hallett, Roger: "A Note on the Hafod Service", *Friends of Hafod Newsletter* 2, 1989
- Ludlow, Neil: *Hafod Mansion; an Archaeological Audit*, Cambria Archaeology, 1999

Anyone who would like to contribute to the restoration fund for Hawthorn Cottage should contact Michael Norman, 01558.650735. All donations, large or small, would be most gratefully received and could be enhanced by 'Giftaid'.

A Welsh Glasshouse Found

Responding to the item in the Spring Bulletin, Mr Peter Davis has written to point out that the ferro-concrete glasshouse in the west walled garden at Llanerchaeron bears the impressed name plates

Hendy Quarry Co. Ltd.
Pontyclun, Glam.
Pat. Nos 594822
594875 586218
585226

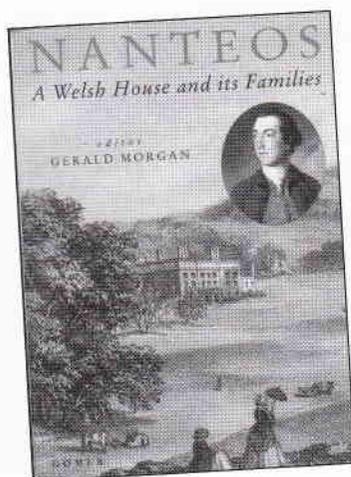
Although not universally admired, this greenhouse, believed to date from the 1950's is shortly to be restored by the National Trust.

Book Review:- Nanteos: A Welsh House and its Families

edited by Gerald Morgan, Gomer Press £17.50

Nanteos has long been one of the most famous of Welsh houses and the bringing together of so much information on it is to be warmly welcomed. There has been little published information on Welsh estates. Moreover the anecdotal tradition started by H M Vaughan in his *South Wales Squires* has had too long a survival.

The book has been well-produced by Gomer Press and edited by Gerald Morgan, who contributes an admirable introductory chapter on the early history of the Powell family. Welcome though the book is, it has some of the disadvantages of its composition. There is too much concentration on the idiosyncrasies of the odder owners with the result that one never gets a rounded picture of the Powell family. In this context it is unfortunate that Richard Moore-Colyer's article on the estate was reproduced from *Ceredigion IX*, 1 (1980) without being revised. Although Gerald Morgan covers some of the ground in his first chapter, the agricultural development of the estate is central to the whole history of Nanteos. It is a pity,



therefore, that Moore-Colyer's article was solely on the period of decline 1800-1930. It would have been valuable to have a matching article on the rise of the estate in earlier centuries.

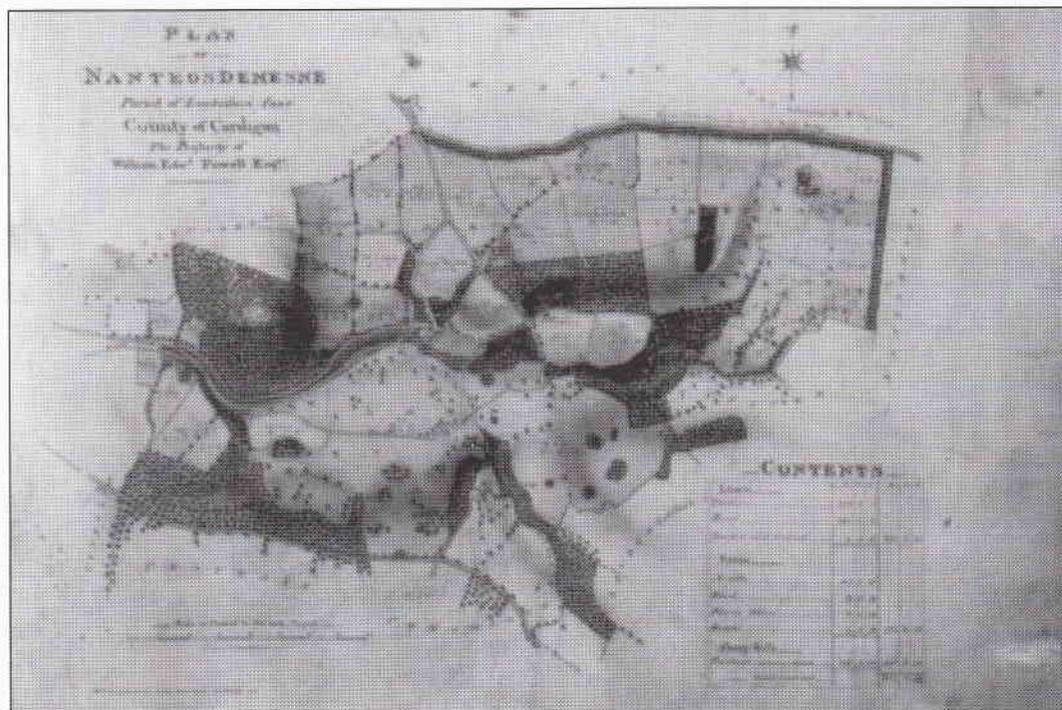
For members of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust the most interesting article will undoubtedly be Caroline Palmer's account of the development of the demesne from the eighteenth century onwards. It is especially valuable to have the story of the park and gardens brought

up to date. It is to be hoped that this example will be followed, so that we can have similar accounts of the development of parks and gardens throughout Wales.

The article by A J Parkinson on the house itself is less satisfactory. It is not clear whether this was written some time ago, but the use of the 1978, rather than the 1995 edition, of Colvins's *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects* suggests that this may be the case. Use of the later volume would have proved Haycock's involvement at Glynllifon, for instance. It would also have made clear that his Welsh country house practice was wider than Parkinson suggests. This reader was left unsure whether the rather scrappy nature of the article was due to lack of evidence or whether the documents available were uncatalogued and therefore difficult to research.

In spite of cavils about the rather disjointed nature of the book it contains much of interest. Hopefully it will be followed by further studies of Welsh estates so that their development can be properly studied.

John R E Borron



Gerddi-WWW.

Since the last issue I have been made aware of two more sites which I have found particularly useful in researching the gardens.

If you know of any more interesting sites, please contact me. Please note my new e-mail address:
Tel: 01446 775794. e-mail: val.t.caple@care4free.net

<http://www.rcahmw.org.uk/data/>

The Core Archaeological Record Index, contains the CORE information from the full database of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW) and the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) of the four Archaeological Trusts.

To find the gardens in your area, select Advanced search, and CARN database.

Search for:

Broad class: Gardens, Community: the name of the Unitary Authority or Community. I suggest that you do not use the old County as the maximum number of hits you are allowed to see is 100 – any more hits will be lost!

<http://www.hmc.gov.uk/nra/nra2.htm>

The Historical Manuscripts Commission UK National Register of Archives is useful for checking what documentation is archived in Record Offices throughout the UK about a house or family.

And another site of general interest

<http://www.historicgardens.freereserve.co.uk/>

The Historic Gardens Foundation is a non profit-making organisation set up in 1995 to create links between everyone concerned with the preservation, restoration and management of historic parks and gardens.

Val Caple

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Gazetteer Subcommittee

A Trust Subcommittee is working on a project plan to obtain the funding to set up and maintain a computer database of Gardens in Wales, especially those that are not in the Cadw Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales. Gardens will be surveyed and reports, historic and contemporary images collected and stored locally and centrally.

Because of confidentiality issues the database will only be available to members of the WHGT. However, when authorised by the garden owner, a part of the information will be used for:

Planning — by depositing material on gardens of local importance in Records Offices and in the Site and Monument Record (SMR) of the four Archaeological Trusts: Cambria, Glamorgan Gwent, Clwyd, Powys and Gwynedd. This information can then be used when assessing planning applications.

Education — by making information available to students, local people and visitors via the Internet or publications to

ensure that they are aware of the importance of the historic gardens in the locality.

If we want to do a 'proper' job, we will need dedicated hardware and software with each Branch and with the Administrator, Ros Laidlaw.

However a greater need is for dedicated **PEOPLE** to help with the recording.

Please let your branch committee know:

- if you own a historic garden, or know of any in your area, that you believe should be recorded in the database.
- if you can help with obtaining information on the gardens, such as:

family documents pertaining to an historic garden
archive research of the gardens and local social history
preliminary or detailed survey and/or appraisal of present condition.

Val Caple