

[Article by Jean Reader for WHGT website to mark the 150th anniversary of Reginald Cory's birth]

Reginald Cory (1871-1934) and his involvement with horticultural matters in Wales

Introduction

Sunday 31st October 2021 marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Reginald Cory, the man who, with assistance from the landscape architect and garden designer Thomas Mawson (1861-1933), created [Dyffryn Gardens](#) in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Outside Wales Cory is known for his very remarkable support of such organisations as the Royal Horticultural Society, Cambridge University Botanic Garden, the Linnean Society and for his sponsorship of plant hunters, notably George Forrest (1873-1932). He was also a man who appreciated beautiful porcelain, some of which was left to the British Museum and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. This article concentrates on how he was involved with horticultural matters in Wales.

Garden lovers will recognise Reginald Cory's name and the contribution he made to Dyffryn but it cannot be said that his name is well-known today in Wales. The word 'Cory' is familiar in south Wales and to Cardiffians because, for example, of the Coryton Interchange where the M4 motorway meets the A470 carrying traffic to the north. The city is also dotted with locations which bear such names as Cory Place, and [Cory's Building](#) in Bute Street. There is also the world-famous [Cory Band](#), so named because of the support given to it by Clifford Cory, one of Reginald's brothers. Such a proliferation of the name is a result of the family's success as industrialists and the exceptionally generous donations they made to charitable organisations. It is to Cory Brothers, the company they founded, that we turn first.

Cory Brothers

The business now known as Cory Brothers was founded in 1842 by Reginald Cory's grandfather, Richard Cory (1799-1882). He was a mariner based at Bideford in north Devon and became involved in the shipping business, sailing regularly between Bideford, Cardiff, Bristol and Ireland. At this time the importance that coal was to have to Cardiff was only beginning to be recognised – it was the booming trade from the iron industry that encouraged Richard Cory to move his family to the city in the early 1830s. He set up in business as a ship chandler and provision merchant. In 1842 he added shipbroking and coal exporting to his commercial interests. In due course he was joined in the business by two of his sons - John Cory (1828-1910, Reginald's father) and Richard Cory (1830-1914, his uncle). The business was first known as Richard Cory and Sons but from April 1888, when it went public, it became known as Cory Brothers. Reginald, age sixteen at the time, was given 250 shares and named as a Director. It was a shipping and coal conglomerate which, in John Cory's lifetime, grew to have worldwide business interests and still flourishes today as the Logistics arm of the Braemar Shipping Services Group. As recently as 19 October 2021 Mike Bowden, the procurement manager of Cory Brothers, was quoted on the

front page of *The Times* in connection with an issue of considerable concern at the time this article is being written - the backlog of container ships at Felixstowe.

It must be mentioned that [Cory Brothers](#) should not be confused with [John Cory and Sons](#), a ship owning and ship broking company trading concurrently in south Wales but established in 1872 by another John Cory (1822-1891).



Opened in 1889, Cory's Building in Bute Street, Cardiff was designed by the architects Bruton & Williams for Cory Brothers.

<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/18396/>

Reginald Cory's family

Reginald was the youngest of the four children of John Cory (1828-1910) and his wife Anna Maria Cory (1836-1909, née Beynon). Anna Maria's parents were John and Elizabeth Beynon from Newport, Monmouthshire. Records of the period describe John Beynon as a Master Mariner, ship owner and coal owner. Reginald's siblings were Herbert Cory (1855-1926), Florence Cory (1858-1936) and [Clifford Cory](#) (1859-1941).

Reginald Radcliffe Cory was born at Lambert House, Great Malvern, Worcestershire on 31st October 1871. The choice of Worcestershire for the birth seems surprising because his parents had made their home in south Wales since their marriage in 1854 and, at the time of the 1871 census, almost seven months before the birth, the family were living in the St John's area of Cardiff. Lambert House at the time appears to have been a guest house so the most likely explanation would seem to be that Anna Maria was taking a holiday in Great Malvern and that her son's arrival in the world was far earlier than anticipated. Lambert House has, over the years, been named Fairholme, Langland and Clanmere. It is [Grade II listed by Historic England](#).

Life in the Cory household

Reginald was born just as the family's financial affairs were becoming stratospheric. In the years of his infancy, John Cory built [Vaendre Hall](#), a seven-bedroom, Italianate mansion in St Mellons, at the time a rural area between Newport and Cardiff.

Reginald was sixteen years younger than Herbert, thirteen years younger than Florence and twelve years younger than Clifford and must have been considered the baby of the family which may have resulted in his siblings, particularly Florence, adopting the role of carer for him in his childhood and adolescent years. In later life the two shared the house at Dyffryn for many years so there must have been a degree of fondness between them, a situation which almost certainly changed drastically after Reginald's marriage in 1930. However, one of the most important factors in his upbringing must have been that, as the private wealth and social status as the family business burgeoned in the 1870s, he had the advantage of being able to do almost anything he wanted in adulthood.

Religion:

The family were deeply religious: Richard Cory (snr) moved from the Church of England to United Methodists; John Cory became a Wesleyan Methodist and Richard (jun) a Baptist. Morning prayers were said daily at the Cory Bros office.

Temperance:

John Cory was a leading advocate of the Temperance movement and one of the first in south Wales to 'sign the pledge'. The consumption of alcohol was strictly forbidden and became a tenet to which Reginald Cory adhered throughout his own life as mentioned by Henry McLaren, 2nd Baron Aberconway (1879–1953) in the obituary he wrote for the Linnean Society. (Linnean Society. (1933-4), *Proceedings*, 146th Session, 151-154).

Charitable donations:

John and Anna Cory were both exceptionally generous donors to charitable organisations. The people of Cardiff even raised sufficient funds for a [statue of John Cory](#) to be made of him by Sir Goscombe John (1860 –1952). It was unveiled in 1906, four years before Cory's death and still stands near City Hall.

John Cory's will (1 January 1910) requested that his children should give not less than one tenth of their income each year to religious and charitable causes. It was a request to which Reginald Cory appears to have acceded diligently.

Reginald Cory's education

No records have been located of attendance at any school, so it is presumed that he was educated privately at home. The 1881 census for Vaendre Hall records the presence of Elizabeth Maitland, a governess, so it appears she was the person who provided his early education.

However, the person of most importance to his education and to his awareness of life for most people in Wales at the time was probably [Thomas Edward Ellis](#) (1859 - 1899), a man whose name is revered in Wales but whose early death meant that his considerable talents were never fully developed.

Born in Bala, his first language was Welsh and he was educated at the universities of Aberystwyth and Oxford. In 1885 he was employed by John Cory as a tutor for Reginald and seems to have spent a year instructing him at Vaendre Hall before being elected Liberal MP for Merioneth in 1886. The Cory family were Liberal supporters so it appears to have been an enlightened and fascinating choice of tutor for Reginald and is likely to have had considerable influence on his interests and activities in later years. Ellis was appointed Liberal Chief Whip by Gladstone in 1894 – he remained in touch with the Cory family for the rest of his life.



(Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru – The National Library of Wales)

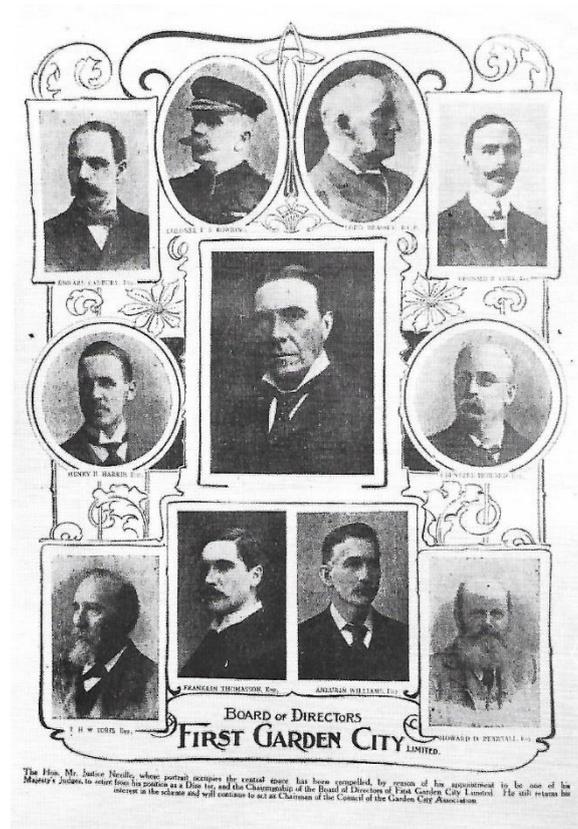
Cambridge

Reginald Cory was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1892. Some records of his life suggest that he did not pass his examinations, but evidence has now been confirmed that he studied for the Ordinary B.A. (that is, without honours), passing examinations in Law in 1896. During his time at Cambridge he became a frequent visitor to the [Cambridge University Botanic Garden](#). He was to spend much of his adult life supporting this organisation, as described by a representative of the Botanic Garden in an article in the *Daily Herald* (4 January 1935):

He often visited us here and was a frequent and generous benefactor. He told me that he owed the gardens a great debt of gratitude because it was here that he first acquired his love for horticulture when he was an undergraduate at Trinity.

1903: Letchworth – the First Garden City

This Company was registered at Somerset House on 1 September 1903. The plan for it had been drawn up for it by Ebenezer Howard who was one of the members of the new company's Board. Two men with Welsh connections were also members of the Board of Directors: Reginald Cory and Aneurin Williams (1859-1924). The latter, born in Dowlais, was the son of Edward Williams (1826-86), a Liberal and member of the Temperance movement, regarded in Wales as 'one of the giants of the iron age' and a subsequent purchaser of the Linthorpe Ironworks in Middlesbrough. It appears to have been Reginald Cory's first appointment to such an organisation. His experience at Letchworth must have inspired him to initiate the creation of a garden village at Peterston-super-Ely a few years later.



The Board of Directors of First Garden City Ltd, 1903. Reginald Cory is in the top right-hand corner; Ebenezer Howard, below Cory; Aneurin Williams, third from the left, bottom row. Source: Miller, Mervyn, *Letchworth, The First Garden City*, (Phillimore, 1989)

Duffryn, Dyffryn or Dyffryn Gardens?

During the time the Cory family lived at the property it called 'Duffryn' or 'The Duffryn'. In recent times the name has been adapted to 'Dyffryn', the Welsh word for a valley. The site has been cared for by the National Trust since 2013 and is referred to in their records as 'Dyffryn Gardens'. The site had a very long history before the arrival of the Cory family.

640 AD - mid 16th century: National Library of Wales records suggest that it was the residence of the Bishops of Llandaff.

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries the site became the home of the Button family, the most famous member of which was [Sir Thomas Button](#) (1555-1634), the Admiral and explorer.



(Wikipedia)

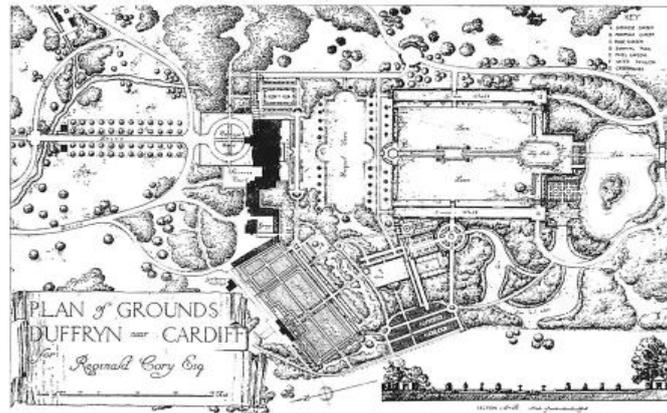
1749-1891: It was the home of Thomas Pryce and his descendants (the Bruce and Bruce-Pryce families).

The Cory Family at Dyffryn

1891: John Cory purchased the 2,000-acre estate at Dyffryn three years after Cory Bros had become a limited company. He immediately called in a Newport architect, E. A. Lansdowne (1837-1904) to make changes to the mansion. These were made between 1893 and 1894, after which it is understood to have become the principal home of John, Anna Maria, Reginald and Florence Cory. By this time Herbert and Clifford had their own homes.

1896: Reginald Cory returned to Cardiff from Cambridge. John Cory was probably anxious to involve him in the affairs of Cory Brothers (of which Reginald was a Director until after his father's death). However, he appears to have been more interested in matters horticultural and the first changes in the garden began to take place in the final years of the nineteenth century and he joined the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) in January 1899.

1904: The conversion of the gardens could not have progressed as fast as John Cory had hoped so he employed Thomas Mawson (1861-1933) to redesign the 55 acres of gardens at Dyffryn. Both Reginald Cory and Thomas Mawson were fascinated by what they had heard of Italian gardens but neither had been to Italy so they went on an extended research trip to collect ideas for Dyffryn. It gave Mawson inspiration for his design of the garden at Dyffryn and cemented the friendship of the two men for the rest of their lives.



Plan of Dyffryn Gardens by Thomas H. Mawson
Published: *The Art & Craft of Garden Making*, 5th edition, 1926

The site surrounding the house at Dyffryn is flat and Mawson realised that, with no hills in sight, his main task had to be to create something to carry the view from the house into the distance. His solution was to keep the main garden paths near house and design 'a great lawn' which extended from the south front of the house. He put a canal in the middle of the lawn, a feature designed to give an interesting view from the principal rooms and so make up for the lack of more distant landscape views.

Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century work progressed to ensure the implementation of Mawson's plan and the gardens at Dyffryn developed into those we know today. Perhaps the most well-known features are the 'garden rooms' on the western side of the site. Each of these has a different concept behind it and is separated from its neighbour by a range of boundaries – things like clipped yew hedges, walls or arches. One that was certainly inspired by the Italian visit is the Pompeian Garden.

Cory, with an eye to the future, employed Neame Roff of Walmer in Kent to take photographs of the gardens both before the First World War with the result that there is a fine collection of black and white photographs of the Dyffryn gardens in [Glamorgan Archives](#).

In the summer of 1923 he also commissioned Edith Adie, an artist, to paint a series of watercolours of the gardens at Dyffryn. These were considered lost for many years but finally discovered in the RHS Lindley Library where they remain today. They

have been of huge importance to our understanding of the garden rooms and have been vital in the National Trust's restoration of the garden since 2013. An article entitled *Edith Helena Adie (1864–1947)* by Ray Crozier, Sandra Crozier and John Devonshire, [available online](#), tells the story of Adie's career and her involvement with Dyffryn.

Gradually, Cory's gardening knowledge and confidence grew and in 1913 he offered to arrange a trial at Dyffryn for the RHS to demonstrate the value of dahlias in the garden. This resulted in the arrival of between 7-8,000 plants, representing 1,000 varieties, from growers in Britain and abroad. Arthur Cobb, the Head Gardener, was responsible for potting up the arrivals in different sized containers. Plants were not placed in rows as was usual in trial plots but spread throughout the gardens. When the representatives of the RHS and Dahlia Society arrived they concluded that they had presented 'a glorious display'.

Of course, the progress of the ornamental areas stalled during World War I when, like most large estates, horticultural activities turned to producing edible crops for both the household and local people. The gardens produced plants for locals and were frequently open to the public.

1909: Glyn Cory – the Garden Village of South Wales

Cory's experience at Letchworth may have inspired him to consider the possibility of setting up a model village on land his family owned a few miles from Dyffryn, on the south side of the River Ely, opposite and overlooking the village of Peterston-super-Ely. An entry from the village school logbook from 22 July 1902 reads: 'Sent a plant and photograph of the school gardens, a report on school gardening as taught here and a collection of vegetables to the Nature Study Exhibition, Botanic Gardens, London.' It has not yet been possible to discover who was responsible for sending this work to the Exhibition but Cory's proximity to the village and his desire to promote horticultural endeavours amongst the young makes it likely that it was he who encouraged its submission.

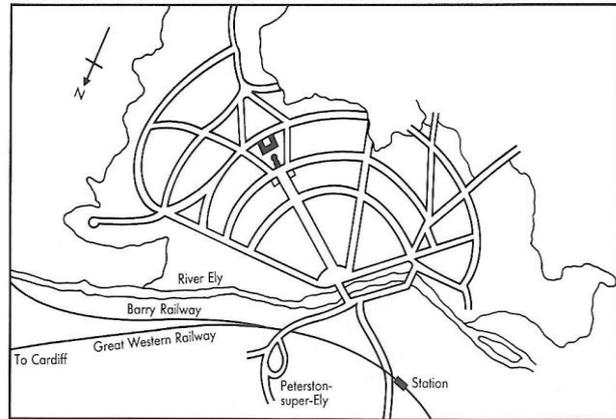
Thomas Mawson was engaged to design a Garden Village for Peterston-super-Ely and came up with a plan which was published under the title *Glyn Cory, The Garden Village of South Wales* (Western Mail Ltd, 1909). It was designed as a teetotal commuter village for businessmen and clerks who would be able to take the train into Cardiff to work each day. There were to be villas on the heights and cheaper terraced houses on the lower slopes. The plan was to reserve about 80 acres for conversion into playing fields including about 70 acres to be laid out as an 18-hole golf course. It was planned to accommodate between 5,000-6,000 people in 1,400 houses.

By the time work started, Mawson was spending much of his time in the USA so, when problems arose, he was not available for consultation. Cory called in Thomas Adams (1871-1940) had served as secretary to the Garden City Association and been the first manager of Letchworth. Adams (who was later to become the Director of the Regional Plan for New York) made modifications to Mawson's plan which included moving housing well above the flood level. Initially, development went well but John Cory died in 1910 and, although he left funds for the project, progress slowed and only twenty-four houses had been completed before the outbreak of war in 1914.

Glyn Cory changed little until around 1961 when it was acquired by Wyndham Radcliffe and renamed 'Wyndham Park'. There are, however, Cory's influences still to be seen, such as the impressive avenue of horse chestnut trees and in the names of the Cory and Dyffryn Crescents.



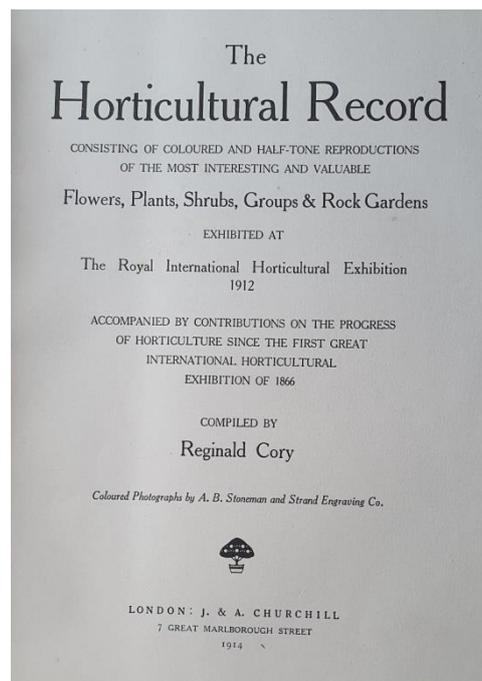
Original plan for Glyn Cory



Diagrammatic plan of the site

The Horticultural Record

Reginald Cory wrote only one book, *The Horticultural Record*, published in 1914. This was the report of the first International Exhibition supported by the Royal Horticultural Society since 1866, an event now generally agreed to have been the forerunner of the Chelsea Flower Show. It contains 178 pages of information on specific plants; over 300 pages on the Exhibition itself; 116 coloured illustrations and 71 black and white illustrations. It covers not only Britain and Ireland but also some European countries. For anyone researching the history of horticulture in the early years of the twentieth century the Report is treasure trove.



To take an example specific to Wales, the section on Horticultural education illustrates the contribution the Agricultural Department of Aberystwyth University College made in supporting horticultural education at the time. No returns were sent for Carnarvonshire (sic), Denbighshire, Flintshire or Glamorgan but Brecknockshire, Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire, Merionethshire, Montgomery, Pembrokeshire and Radnorshire all reported their links with Aberystwyth University College, together with support from their own County Councils. (pp. 238-9).

Reginald Cory's later years:

As the 1920s progressed he seems to have spent less time at Dyffryn. He took on a pied-a-terre in London which he always described as his 'rooms'. This was a time when he was deeply involved with Cambridge University Botanic Garden where he funded, and took a very detailed interest in the building of 'Cory Lodge', a house for the Director. He was also involved in a number of projects with the Royal Horticultural Society and the Linnean Society.

In 1930 Reginald married Rosa Kester (1901- 1998), a woman he had met at the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. The marriage was a very private event with only two witnesses present; the event seems to have come as a great shock to his family - it is reported that the first news of the event that those at Dyffryn knew of it was from a newspaper report. John Cory's will had ensured that Florence Cory could live at Dyffryn for her lifetime but that, after her death, the estate would pass to Reginald. It is not known whether Rosa ever visited Dyffryn. Reginald bought a house at Wareham in Dorset where the couple settled, intending to make a garden.

Reginald died, very unexpectedly in 1934 in Wareham. His will, dated 6 January 1932 instructed his executors that

... all letters found in a wooden box sealed with a blue seal in my rooms at No 1 St James's Place ... should be burnt and destroyed unread and ... the same shall be done as regards all letters or papers found in my desk or in my drawers or in any files in what is known as the Red Library at Duffryn ...

Florence lived at Dyffryn until her death in November 1936. Much of Cory's wealth was destined for the Cambridge Botanic Garden. It was thought at one time that Dyffryn might become a National Botanic Garden for Wales. In 1937 all the contents of the house and garden that could be moved were sold at two on-site sales. The house and estate were sold to Sir Cennydd Traherne who leased the house to Glamorgan County Council for a nominal rent. The conditions attached to this agreement were that that the site should be used for educational purposes and to further the interests of horticulture and botany. The gardens and walks were to be cared for the enjoyment of the public. This has been the aim of the three local authorities (Glamorgan, South Glamorgan and the Vale of Glamorgan) who cared for it over the years and continues to be the aim of the National Trust who took on the site in 2013.