

William Latham in North Wales

by Stephen Briggs

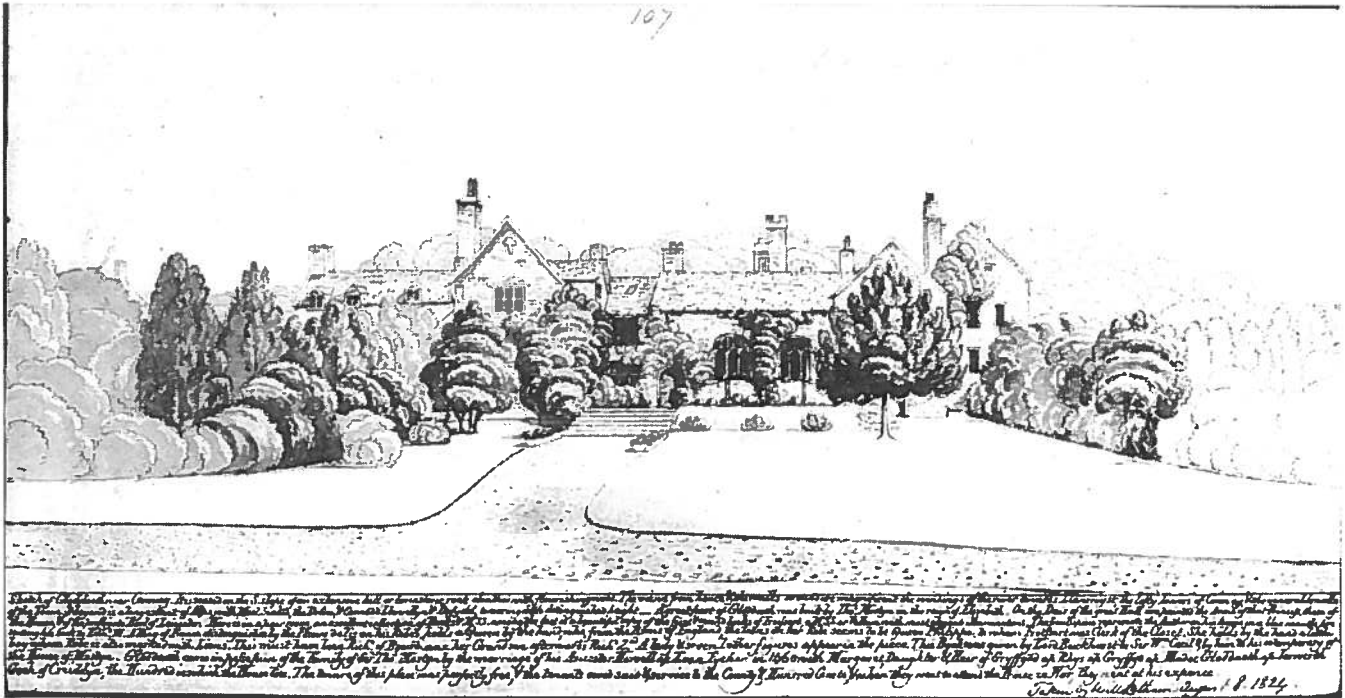
In the summer of 1816, following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, William Latham, a captain in the Lancashire Militia, visited Golden Grove, Flintshire, the seat of Edward Morgan. Latham may have been familiar with North Wales. He certainly returned later, in 1824. An accomplished topographical draughtsman, sketches from his distinct hand are to be found at the Lancashire Record Office, in Manchester Public Library, the National library of Wales, and Douglas Library, Isle of Man. Although, in common with many others practising the genre, his work is felt to merit little artistic distinction, his landscape records and sketches of buildings are nevertheless components of an important documentary legacy for studying landscape change and regional architectural history.

Not a lot is known of Latham the man, beyond that he was a Roman Catholic of Lancashire recusant stock, who, remaining unmarried, joined the Militia later in life. He was to serve both in the Mediterranean and at British and Irish army depots, and

seems rarely to have missed the opportunity of exploring his environs with a sketchbook. Among friends and acquaintances whose homes he drew on his travels were several members of leading Catholic families.

It appears to have developed an infirmity later in life, so journeys to North Wales probably included an element of pilgrimage to St Winifrede's Well, which he drew. However, the attraction of Latham's repertory lies in his penchant for the mundane. He would record minor architectural structures as well as tourist sites, but even there, he could find corners topographers failed to reach before or since. His eclectic interests ranged from quarantine hulks and army camps, through churches, manor and country houses, to lighthouses.

In Caernarvonshire and Flintshire, his taste included popular antiquarian features. Taking in castles, some crosses and gravestones, more pertinently to our immediate interest, he drew several panoramic views and left what may be the best

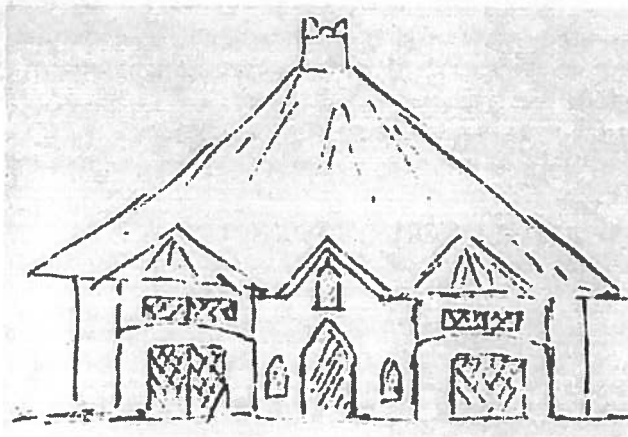


Latham's sketch of Gloddaeth.

Manchester Central Library

record of the Jubilee Tower on Moel Famau. Comparisons with better-known records of the more celebrated sites show his accuracy to have been generally consistent, though on occasion intricate architectural detail could be poor—possibly due to deficient eyesight. Most importantly, however, North Wales offered good subject matter for house and architectural landscape studies; among them were Gloddaeth and Marle Hall in Caernarvonshire, Denbigh Town and Castle, Golden Grove, Mostyn and Talacre in Flintshire. From among these, it is intended here to focus particular attention on one feature of the parkland landscape at Golden Grove, Llanasa—Latham's graphic (if somewhat stylised) depiction of the St Elmo's Summer House dated January 24th, 1824.

The building was sited at O.S. SJ 0849 8179, about 500 m NW from Golden Grove, on a prominent ridge over 700 ft above OD, with panoramic views on the north giving out over the Irish Sea and towards the Dee Estuary, as well as towards the Clwydian Hills on the south. It was approached by a footpath through woods from the house. To judge from this, the only known illustration, St Elmo's was a small cottage orne. According to the O.S. 25-inch plan of 1905, it was about 30 ft (c. 9 m) square and sat atop what was probably a prehistoric cairn or 'tumulus' within a ditch some 90 ft (c. 30 m) in circumference. The ditch is still over 1.2 m deep and has an outer counterscarp bank of 0.6 m measured from the inside and 0.8 m measured from the outside. This ditch appears to have been cut into the lower surface of the older mound, and not into an original ground surface. Interestingly, its internal vertical face is 'well-

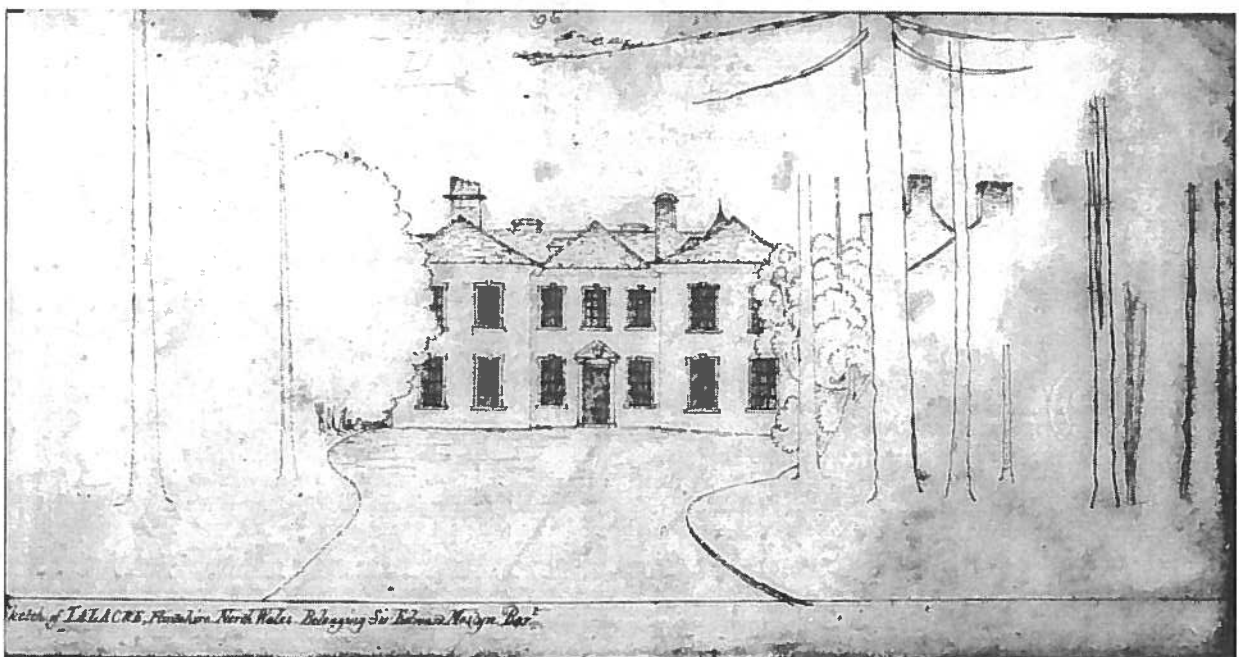


St Elmo's summer house.

formed with braces of stone revetting, indicating that it may have been re-cut in modern times'. It almost merits functional definition as a *haha*. Significantly for dating purposes, until recently a late eighteenth-century animal gravestone was incorporated into the perimeter bank on the east. Inscribed 'Alas Poor Frisk', it has been moved to within the curtilage of the house for safe keeping. An outer ditch about 75 m in diameter and 5 m wide, visible only from aerial photographs, is probably (though not certainly) testimony to the site's Bronze Age origins. Although nothing survives to explain its internal arrangements, a Latham pen and grey wash view of Golden Grove at the National Library is stated to have been 'Taken from the staircase window at St Elmo' in June 1816. So presumably it had a cramped upper storey right under the thatched roof. It would be interesting to learn of what material the lattice fenestration was fashioned.

The Summer House has long since disappeared. When visited by Wilfred Hemp during the 1920s, then later by Canon Ellis Davies for his *Prehistoric and Roman Remains of Flintshire* (1949, 212–3), its site was felt to have been originally one of a pair of Bronze Age ridge-top cairns. Some sort of whimsical structure survived substantially until the outbreak of the Second World War, when it was demolished and replaced by a small radar building, which, though still extant when the Ordnance Survey visited it in 1959, was ruined beyond recognition by the time the present writer saw it in 1982.

A handful of views of Golden Grove at the National Library taken in 1816 and 1817—one in polychrome—show the



Latham's sketch of Talacre.

sixteenth-century seat of the Morgans largely obscured by trees, whilst offering a valuable impression of its contemporary parkland and summer house setting.

As already mentioned, Latham sketched several other interesting houses. His undated 'Sketch of Talacre, Flintshire, North Wales, belonging to Sir Edward Mostyn Bart' of a plain Palladian triple-hipped facade is of considerable interest. According to Samuel Lewis, writing in 1833, this house was 'a former mansion...built in the reign of James I...considerably enlarged in 1710...taken down in 1825, and a new one erected on its site, which was destroyed by fire in 1827.' In 1833 it was 'still being rebuilt...in the Decorated Style of English Architecture'. Accounts as to the date of demolition differ. However, Latham's sketch of this early house is valuable because only one other is known: that by Moses Griffiths (taken around 1760). Latham's detail is sufficiently close to his (if not rather more delicately executed), to offer confidence of its reliability as an architectural record. To judge from his known whereabouts, Latham probably sketched it in 1816, 1817 or 1824. He has left a valuable contemporary view of an elevation cluttered with trees—including fir—and approached by a neat carriage drive.

Another engaging sketch of Latham's is of Gloddaeth, a relatively well-known property. This one combines his ability both to convey a record of a house enveloped in plantings, and to project his own perception of a homely picturesque. Here is a gravel path leading to wide steps on to a low terrace, neat lawns and shrubs, potted-out flowers and well-groomed ornamentals. Beneath is a legend extolling the beauties of its setting and the magnificence of views to be had from the site. A joint meeting of the Clwyd and Gwynedd branches of the Trust will be held at Gloddaeth on April 12th (see page 5), when it should be possible to explore the surviving garden features and share Latham's enthusiasm for the place.

It is hoped that publication of these illustrations may help stimulate research into other neglected collections of topographical drawings with a bearing on historic landscapes and gardens.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Miss Jean Ayton (formerly of Manchester Public Libraries) and Miss Ann Heath, the current archivist, for permission to publish the illustrations, and to Mrs Sara Furse, Mr Mervyn Steele-Mortimer, Mr Paul Parry, and National Monuments Record staff, R.C.A.H.M. Wales, for assistance in various ways.

Sources

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Letter to the Editor

The Database

Dear Editor,

The response to the article 'Introducing The Database' in the last issue of *The Bulletin* has been gratifying, not least because it means that it has been read and remarked on. However, I must confess that I did not make some of my remarks as detailed and clear as I should have done, especially in relationship to the *Cadw/ICOMOS Register of Parks & Gardens of Special Historic Interest*. I received a very helpful letter from Mr Tom Cassidy, Chief Executive of Cadw, which goes a long way to clarify the situation and which I extract here:

'your article...was a very helpful summary...but there was one point that might be misinterpreted by those not in the know and I thought that I should flag it up, to avoid confusion in future. Gardens are, of course, being treated in exactly the same way in Wales as in England. It might be a bit misleading to refer to parks and gardens as being 'subject to statutory consultation in the same way as listed houses'. Listed building consent is very different from the arrangements which exist in England under the GDO and in Wales, for the present, on a voluntary basis (awaiting completion of our Register). Local authorities consult and receive advice—but it is up to the local authority planners whether or not they take account of that advice. Listed building consent, of course, is much more rigorous and authoritative, and for that reason we generally like to refer to parks and gardens as 'registered' rather than 'listed'.

On the question of Inheritance Tax, it is not true to say that registered gardens—any more than listed buildings—automatically will gain exemption. Each case is treated on its merits, but the Register will help in pointing to features of importance in the property concerned.'*

I also received a very helpful letter from David Thompson, Principal Curatorial Officer of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, highlighting the value of the regional Site & Monuments Records. (SMRs) held by the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts, routinely consulted by local authority planners. It is clear that those of us involved in the preparation of the county gazetteers or records must maintain close contact with our local Archaeological Trust as we go along, and it is encouraging to know that they have now offered to contribute their expertise at this early stage in the work.

Finally, I would like to thank those members who have written to me offering their assistance in the preparation of research for the Database. I look forward to working with them in 1997.

Yours sincerely,
Bettina Harden,
Vice-Chairman

* This point was also raised by the Historic Houses Association, and I must apologise if my somewhat sweeping remark raised the wrong expectations. B.H.

Book Review

THE VISUAL JANE

Jane Austen and the English Landscape. Mavis Batey. Barn Elms Publishing. £19.99.

Ask most readers what Jane Austen's novels are about and the answer would probably be something like: social comedy, human relationships, love, marriage and the process of getting married. What few would think to mention would be nature, landscape and the countryside. Yet Jane Austen was a countrywoman born and bred. As the daughter of a country rectory, she must have been so familiar with the seasonal round of life in southern England in the late eighteenth century as to take it for granted, as the only right and proper background to human existence and when, in 1800, the family moved to Bath, the shock must have been severe. Her initial dislike of the place is probably recollected painfully in Anne Elliot's feelings in *Persuasion* under circumstances not dissimilar. She was certainly glad to escape, five years later, and happier still when her widowed mother was offered a house at Chawton in Hampshire and once again they had a proper home of their own.

Mavis Batey has charted the way these underlying feelings inform Jane Austen's work with sensitivity and imagination. She follows the events of Jane's life and the background to her novels side by side and relates them to the fashions and preoccupations of her day. The sensibilities of Marianne Dashwood, she compares with those of the writer, Charlotte Smith, 'a lady of sublime taste' who had learned to see 'the face of nature with the taste of a painter and the enthusiasm of a poet'. Henry Tilney, lecturing Catherine Morland on the picturesque, is shown to draw heavily on the Reverend William Gilpin 'whose published tours to picturesque parts of Britain were sought after by every person of taste.'

Passing from the pleasure shown by Austen's early heroines



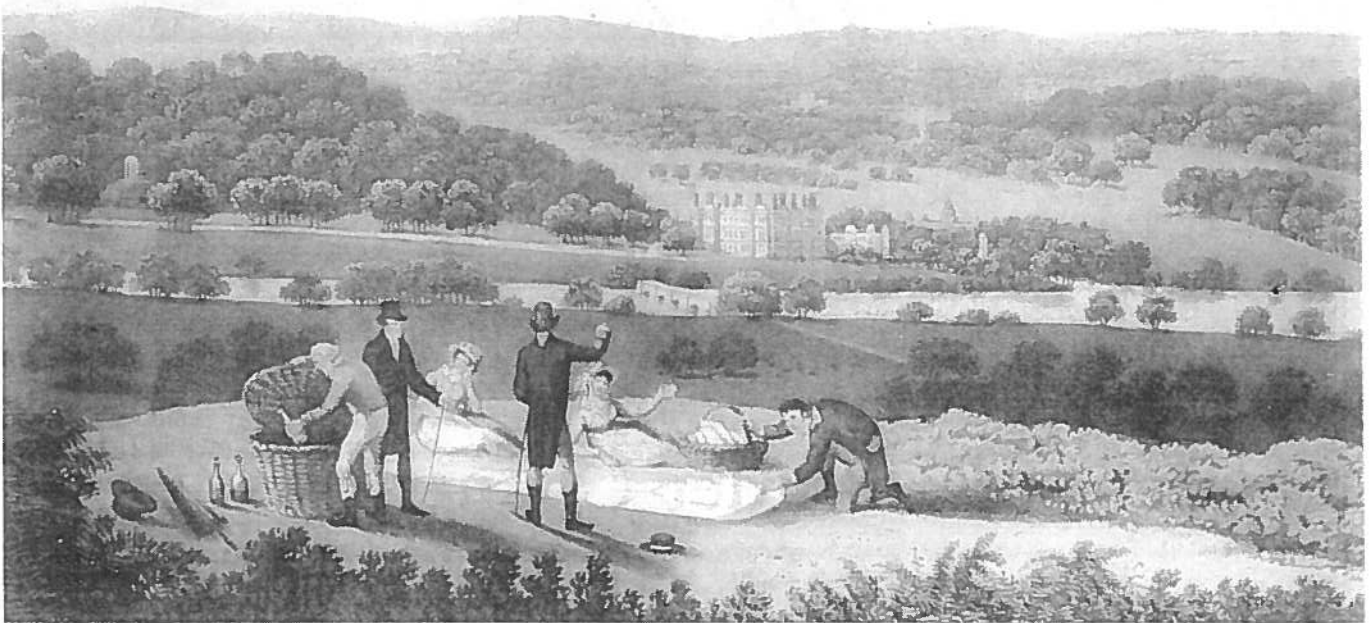
Netley Abbey, by W. Westall.

in the everyday rural scene—Elizabeth Bennet on her walk to Netherfield 'crossing field after field...jumping over stiles, springing over puddles', Catherine Morland as a child rolling down the grassy bank behind the house—the book deals in turn with the emotional sensibilities inspired by Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *The Sorrows of Werther*, with the Gothic imagination which set Catherine Morland's flesh creeping at *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, with picturesque landscapes, the great houses with their parks and gardens which provided the inspiration for Pemberley and Sotherton and the well-managed country estates of whose knowledgeable and responsible landlords Mr Knightly is the epitome. In *Jane Austen and the English Landscape* Mavis Batey gives us, in short, a swift and well-conducted tour of England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sumptuously illustrated, with modern photographs alongside contemporary prints and drawings. The result is a powerful insight, for the modern reader, into the life and ideas of the period as well as a sympathetic exploration of Jane Austen's personal world. The illustrations are well documented and there is a useful index, making this a practical as well as a delightful work.

Anne Carter



Downton Castle, Herefordshire, home of Richard Payne Knight.



A picnic party 'exploring'. From Repton's Fragments on the theory and practice of landscape gardening.

Branch News

CLWYD BRANCH

Gloddaeth

On April 12th, the Clwyd and Gwynedd Branches of the trust are holding a Study Day at Gloddaeth, Deganwy, by kind permission of the Trustees of St David's College. The speakers are to be David Jacques of the School of Advanced Architectural Studies at York and David Whitehead of the Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust.

David Jacques will speak on Seventeenth Century Gardens in Wales and David Whitehead about his Trust's initiatives in restoring privately owned historic gardens. Kevin Crowdy is to talk about the historic gardens of Gloddaeth and will conduct a tour of the gardens in the afternoon.

Tickets and further information can be obtained from Mrs Elizabeth Bartlett, Leeswood Hall, Mold, Flintshire (Tel: 01352 758023) or Mrs Margaret Mason, Penhyddgau, Pwllheli, LL53 8YH (Tel: 01758 731577).

CEREDIGION BRANCH

Trawsgoed

Attention is now focussed on the future of the estate, which has recently been sold. Following the departure of the Welsh Office Agricultural Department from Trawsgoed in 1995, the Branch produced a paper summarising the important features of the estate. Two detailed projects were carried out by a group of Branch members: a desk-top study of the historic elements of the gardens and a comprehensive tree survey in the grounds.

Plans for building houses on the site have been prepared by a company in which the Vaughan family is understood to have an interest; these have been studied by the Branch Conservation Officer, and observations have been sent to the Director of Environment and Housing for Ceredigion. It is made clear that the Branch has no objection in principle to residential development at Trawsgoed, and in fact supports a proposal of the developers to demolish a recently-built

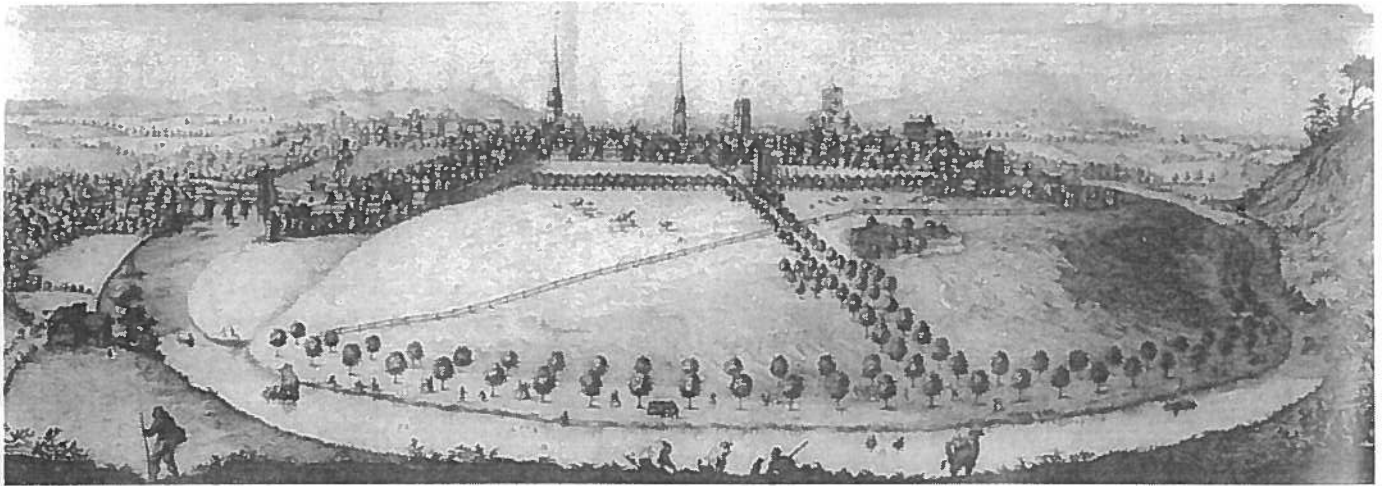
office block there, but certain aspects of the development cause concern and deserve further consideration. The Trust secretary has written to Ceredigion in support of the Branch's submissions.

It is important to preserve the historic integrity of the gardens, and to give proper consideration to the spatial elements of the site and their visual relationships, when determining the location of any new buildings. The gardens themselves, if well maintained, could become an enjoyable and informative attraction for visitors. Members desiring fuller details of the case should contact the Branch Conservation Officer: Ros Laidlaw, Ty Leri, Talybont, Ceredigion SY23 5ER.

Visit to Nanteos

Sunday, 16 March. Sunday lunch, followed by a tour of house and grounds, with Caroline Palmer and Ros Laidlaw. 12.30 pm for 1.00 pm. Cost £10. Details from Penny David, Fern Cottage, Lampeter, Ceredigion SA48 7RX. Tel: (01570) 422041.

Book Review



View of the Quarry walks, Shrewsbury, in 1732 by S. and N. Buck.

Gardens of a Border County

Historic Parks and Gardens of Shropshire: Paul Stamper. Shropshire Books. 124 pp. £12.99

For anyone living in the border country of Mid-Wales, the landscapes of Shropshire and Hereford are as familiar as their own backyard. Border roads wind in and out, now in England, now in Wales, and parks and gardens on both sides count stretches of the other among their borrowed views. So an historical survey of the parks and gardens of Shropshire is a welcome addition to our knowledge. Paul Stamper works for Shropshire County Council's Archaeology and Museums Service and much of the detail in his book is based on work done by this body between 1993 and 1996 for the County Environment Department and English Heritage. The undertaking resulted in two publications, a desktop study of some 280 sites and a compendium of more detailed studies of about fifty of the most interesting, incorporating site reports and archival research.

The outcome is a slim, densely informative and fascinatingly illustrated paperback which is both scholarly and attractive. The chronological arrangement not only sets the various sites in context but, by drawing on a wide range of historical and literary sources, provides a detailed resumé of the general development of gardening theory and practice in an English rural county. Anecdotes and quotations abound, personalities emerge—grandiose, passionate or wrong-headed—and sink back into the rampant undergrowth as money fails, families die out and houses fall.

Paul Stamper's ultimate outlook may be bleak; he sees small hope for the future of these monuments to individual endeavour, most of which can now only be maintained by public support, but he writes of their past with a vividness and attention to detail which make it hardly possible to turn a page without coming on some gem. Dr Charles Burney writes of the vicarage garden at Conover, made in the early 1700s by the 'Jacobitical, musical, mad Welsh parson', George Llywelyn, that 'he cherished "the mournful family of yews" to a risible

degree: having at each angle of his parterre, trees of that species cut into the shape of almost every bird and beast that had been preserved in Noah's ark; with satan, the prince of devils, in the centre, for which it was said by the country people he had been offered £1,000; and in a flower bed, just under his parlour window, King David playing on a harp, was cut in box.'

As might be expected, the town of Shrewsbury features largely: its town gardens, summerhouses, the Abbey Gardens which impressed Celia Fiennes with their elegance and the Quarry walks, laid out in 1719 with avenues of limes on what was already a fashionable promenade beside the river Severn. Then there are the great picturesque landscapes: the Leasowes (then in Shropshire), Millichope Park, Acton Burnell, Hawkstone and many more, some surviving, some long gone. Not all were great.



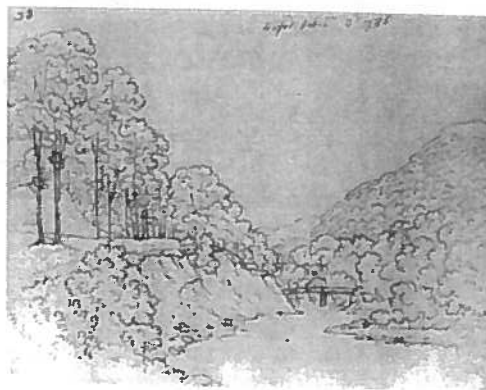
Pyramidal hen house, Vauxhall Farm, Tong.

The unfortunate Mr Weaver M.P., of Morville Hall, near Bridgnorth, seems, if we are to believe Thomas Percy, to have got it slightly wrong: 'In view of one of his windows grew a large, spreading ash, which though the spontaneous gift of nature was really a fine object, and by its stately figure and cheerful verdure afforded a most pleasing relief to the eye; you will stare when I tell you that Mr W. had this tree painted white, leaves and all. It is true the leaves soon fell off and the tree died, but the skeleton still remains, as a monument to its owner's wisdom and ingenuity.'

By the nineteenth century, many of the old gardens were being refurbished in accordance with a new taste, and new money in the form of manufacturing and property speculation was creating gardens of a different kind. These were not great estates but houses on the edge of towns, like The Mount, at Shrewsbury, home of Dr Robert Darwin, father of Charles. The Quinta, near Oswestry, rebuilt for Thomas Barnes M.P. in the 1850s is chiefly remarkable for its half-scale, not entirely accurate model of Stonehenge. Of the iron masters' houses around the Ironbridge Gorge, the improbably named 'Sunniside' was built for Abraham Derby around 1750 and the gardens ambitiously upgraded in the nineteenth century. A herd of deer was kept in what one visitor first described as a 'park and fine sheet of water' then crossed it out and substituted 'paddock and fish pond'.

The final chapter deals with gardens from 1880, by designers such as Gertrude Jekyll, Russell Page and others. The author also conducts a rapid gallop through the development of public parks, takes a brief look at nursery gardening, the war, golf courses and the prospects for the future. His conclusions are not unduly hopeful but this book should at least help to kindle the kind of interest which he sees as the necessary spur to protective action.

A.C.



Forthcoming Reviews

Books to be reviewed in the next issue include:

An Attempt to Describe Hafod by George Cumberland, a bicentenary edition edited and introduced by Jennie McVee and Andrew Slater, from which the above picture is taken. Published by the Hafod Trust. £9.95

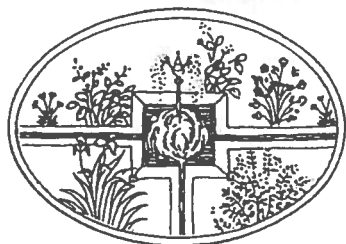
Cuttings. A Gardener's pot pourri from Wales by Caroline Palmer. Gomer Press £8.95

The Penguin Book of Garden Writing. Edited by David Wheeler. Viking £20.00

Owing to pressure of space, the promised review of Sylvia Landsberg's *Medieval Gardens* has also been held over to the next issue.

Of interest to members

Journal of Garden History



An International Quarterly
Vol. 17. No. 1 Spring 1997

The current issue of the Journal of Garden History, under the guest editorship of David Jacques, deals with 'The Techniques and Uses of Garden Archaeology'. The articles are reprints of papers given at the ICAMOS/English Heritage conferences held at Strawberry Hill in June 1995, and range from reflections on Archaeology and Garden Restoration by Brian Dix to a description of research and management of the fifth-century garden complex of Sigirya by Senake Bandaranayake.

Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies
University of York

Care and Upkeep of High Quality Gardens
18 February 1997

A one day event for Head Gardeners and others with a keen interest in high quality gardening. A selection of issues will be covered and the day will be chaired by Stephen Anderton, National Gardens Manager of English Heritage.

Cost: £100 inclusive of lunch, refreshments and course papers.

Managing the Landscape on Rural Estates
20 February 1997

This seminar will review how the different aspects of landscape character (e.g. functional, ecological, historical, aesthetic, archaeological, recreational) are taken into account and balanced in the management and development of rural estates. It seeks to identify present trends and will ask whether improvements are needed and how they might be effected. It is designed for those with a professional involvement in land management and conservation.

Cost: £100 inclusive of lunch, refreshments and course papers.

Contact: Terri Tooms Tel: 01904 433982, Fax: 01904 433949

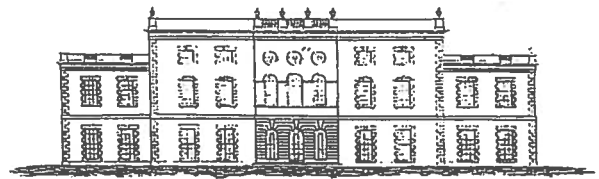


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Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 5RP
(01982 570279)



Annual General Meeting



The Annual General Meeting
will be held at Nanteos
on 10 May 1997

Speaker:
David Jacques on 'Georgian Gardens'.

A tour of the gardens will be included in the day's events.



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— Francis Bacon: Essays

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