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WELSH HISTORIC GARDENS TRUST.

NEWSLETTER NO.2. October 1990.

WELSH WALLED GARDEN SURVEY.

by Dr.J.P.Savidge.

Here is a chance for members of the *Trust* to take an active part in a new survey. The main aims of the Survey of Walled Gardens in Wales are:

i) to compile an inventory of walled gardens in Wales.

ii) to make a study of the development of walled gardens in Wales from the Monastic period to the present day. This part of the survey will deal with the structural components of the garden as well as its herbs, fruit, vegetables, flowers and tools.

iii) to select one or more of the best preserved walled gardens in Wales with the hope that the *Trust* would actively use it to demonstrate a range of walled garden features and techniques and grow some of the more interesting species and varieties of herbs, fruit and vegetables. At the present time, we envisage managing the garden in combination with another organization such as The National Trust or one of the County Councils.

We are starting on a preliminary inventory next year, and a more detailed survey of selected gardens is planned for 1992.

Types of walled garden in Wales.

A comprehensive survey would include a wide range of walled gardens from the small enclosed backyard garden of the early Tudor period to the extensive walls enclosing the large estates of the 19th century. For the initial survey we are primarily interested in the Victorian type of walled kitchen gardens which members will associate with the BBC television series of programmes from Chilton, near Hungerford. Practically all large estates would have had a walled garden, often some distance from the main house and usually close to the stable block, and a dozen or more gardeners would have been employed to provide vegetables, fruit and flowers throughout the year to the main family and with some luck, others on the estate. A few examples can still be found in Wales, but the best surviving examples are in southern Scotland.

In the survey we hope to find examples from pre-Victorian times, since there are numerous monastic sites particularly in the south-west of England, of complexes of monastic walled gardens, each of which was used for a specific purpose by the monks. In addition we are interested in finding examples of modern walled gardens in which the owners are using

the latest methods of solar heating and watering to improve on the more traditional techniques. The owners of some hotels now being developed within old estates, are making use of the original walled gardens to provide plenty of fresh organic food for residents, vistors and conference guests.

Current uses for walled gardens

We would like members to provide information on walled gardens which are now being used for other activities. For example, in some cases one or more tennis courts have been laid down within a walled garden. In the best of these, the owners have retained an interesting selection of trees, shrubs, bulbs and other flowers around the inner side of the walls. Other uses include car parks (again these may contain some of the original trees and shrubs), caravan sites and paddocks for horses or young calves, geese, ducks etc. In many cases the original plots of fruit trees and vegetables have been replaced by a series of formal flower and shrub beds.

The components of walled gardens.

Following the initial survey, we intend to examine certain walled gardens in more detail. The aim here will be to study the historic development of a range of features and to find regional patterns of variation. Some of these features will be structural, such as the materials of the walls and how the walls were constructed. The same applies to the development of cold and hot frames, mushroom beds and the development of greenhouses. Other features which may be worth further exploration are dovecotes and fish pools.

There will also be a detailed study of the various herbs, vegetables and fruits which have been grown over the centuries. This will include a survey of the varieties of apples, pears and plums, especially those of genuine Welsh origin.

We must not forget the tools of the trade. Here again, we know that there are regional variations in Wales, but we need to bring together information on the types of tools and how they became modified for different situations and purposes.

The eventual aim of the *Trust* will be to make a collection of both tools and plant species for display within typical examples of types of Welsh walled garden.

Sources of information.

It comes as rather a suprise to find that there is very little published information on the history and types of walled garden in Wales. This makes the survey all the more rewarding and there are the chances of some good discoveries. It is an obvious example of the use of 'network survey methods' in which the work of individual members

throughout Wales can be co-ordinated to enable the *Trust* to produce a definitive report which will, we hope, be of use to a wide audience. Many members will already know a number of walled gardens in their own area. Addtional information can probably be obtained from the local records office or library ,from the larger scale OS maps,or from the owners.

We would wish to reassure the owners of walled gardens that the information will not be available to the general public.It will be kept on computer files, at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and will be held under the regulations of the 'Data Protection Act'. The data will be available to the Committee of the *Trust* to carry out the aims of the survey outlined in the first paragraph. We intend the results of the survey to be published, but would certainly seek permission of the owner before making any reference to his or her garden in any documentation which would be available to the general public.

How you can help.

As an individual member you can help the survey get off to a flying start by filling in the Survey Forms enclosed with this newsletter,for any walled garden in your own area. During the next few months the *Trust* will be forming local membership groups. One of the main functions of these local groups will be to co-ordinate survey information for their locality The Walled Graden Survey could readily form part of the activities of such a local group.

The Walled Garden Survey is under the direction of its author, Dr.John P.Savidge, a member of the Executive Committee and lecturer in biological sciences at UCW Aberystwyth; further information can be obtained from him at the Dept.of Biological Sciences, University College of Wales,Penglais, Aberystwyth, Dyfed, SY23 3DA. (Ed.)

REGISTER OF HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS IN WALES.

by Elisabeth Whittle.

The Register was begun in May 1990 in Gwent, which is to be the pilot county.The initial provisional list postulated twenty-eight sites in Gwent. This list has been amended and augmented to a provisional thirty-seven, with an additional sixty-four possible sites which will need to be vetted. At least some of these are bound to be added to the final list. At the current rate of progress it is hoped that the Gwent register will be completed towards the end of 1991.The work for the Register has started with the setting up and computerizing of a standard format for Site Dossiers and Register entries. A guinea-pig site, Dingestow Court, was used to try out the system. It appeared to work satisfactorily, so it is now in use for all sites. Work on the sites

involves documentary research, fieldwork and entering of the results onto a Site Dossier and Register Entry. Sites are graded I, II and II*, as for Listed Buildings.

There is a wide range of type of site in Gwent. In time they start in the sixteenth century with gardens such as those at Raglan and Pencoed castles and Treowen House, and end up with the marvellous series of gardens made by H.Avray Tipping in the early years of the present century at houses in the south-east corner of the county. In between we have the multi-period sites like Tredegar House, the famous picturesque layout at Piercefield and several great (and many lesser) Victorian parks and gardens, of which The Hendre is a prime example. An unexpected and exciting discovery was a garden designed by Edward Milner, one of the leading late Victorian landscape architects, at Dingestow Court. Not only is there a beautiful coloured plan by Milner at the Court, but most of his layout survives. In scale the sites range from large parks such as that of Tredegar House, The Hendre, Piercefield, Clytha, Llanarth and Llanover, to small parks such as Llantilio Court, Llanwern and Dingestow Court. We have earthwork sites such as the sixteenth-century gardens, ruined gardens, beautifully maintained gardens (and a special prize should go here, as far as the gardens I have so far visited are concerned, to Mr and Mrs H.Clay of Wyndcliffe Court, which has a wonderful Avray Tipping-influenced garden, who manage to keep this large garden going all by themselves with only a little part-time help),and gardens whose historic nature has been heroically maintained under very difficult circumstances (Gwent County Council at Mounton House, an Avray Tipping garden, and now a school for emotionally disturbed children).

Inevitably not all sites are in prime condition,and some features in particular are crying out for attention and restoration. The most important that I have come across so far are the shell hermitage at Pontypool Park, the timbered pavillion at Mounton House, and the cast iron fountain at The Hendre. However, neglect or the turning over of a site to pasture (or even a golf course) has in some cases actually aided the survival of a historic park or garden. The January 1990 storms inevitably took their toll: two very old cedars and other historic trees fell at Dingestow Court (but are to be replaced), and trees in the Victorian arboretum at The Hendre went,for example.

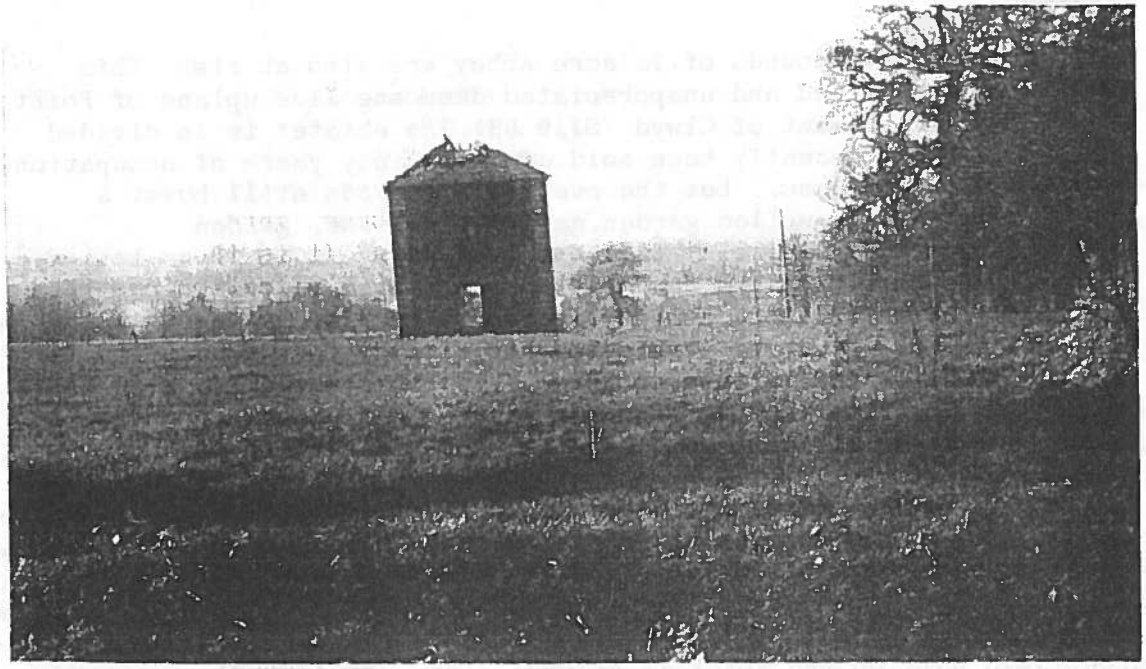
The present use of many of the sites is far from the original: there are schools (Troy House and Mounton House), a race course (part of Piercefield), golf courses (The Hendre and St Pierre), a dry-ski slope and rugby pitch (Ponytpool Park), and two scheduled ancient monuments (Abergavenny and Raglan castles). However, despite the move of some private parks and gardens into corporate ownership there are still many in private hands. The impression gained so far is that more survives than one might have dared to hope. Let's hope that this will hold true for the rest of the county and for the rest of Wales.

This is the first in a series of regular bulletins reporting the progress of the Register. (Ed.)

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF TWO PROTO-REGISTER SITES IN CLWYD:

LEESWOOD AND TALACRE.

by Sara Furse



Leeswood Hall Dovecote.

Planning permission is being sought for the conversion of the Grade II listed pigeon house at Leeswood Hall, Mold, Clwyd (SJ 2561) into a dwelling by 'the addition of a linked house behind a screen wall'. the dovecote is freestanding in agricultural land, prominent on the rising ground and an integral part of the grand lanscaping, almost certainly by Stephen Switzer, for Sir George Wynne circa 1730*. Pennant in his *Tours of Wales*, writes enthusiastically about Leeswood, and Nehemiah Griffiths' drawings have proved to be extremely accurate. The estate is in divided ownership and the farmer who owns the dovecote sees conversion and extension as the only way for him to finance the repair and maintainance of the building. A two storeyed building with a slate roof and erstwhile lantern, it is square in plan, octagonal internally and built, like the Hall and remaining stable block, of small scale eighteenth-century bricks with dressed stone quoins and facings. It is very subtly sited on the main axis of the walled garden but in such a way as to suprise and impress the traveller of the time travelling up or down Leeswood hill (judicious tree felling would make this more apparent). From the steps of Mold church most of the estate can be seen sloping gently up from the Alyn valley. Theatre Clwyd gets an even better view from its first and second floor refreshment areas.

*Jane Furse & David Jacques: *The Historical Importance of the Garden and Grounds at Leeswood Hall*. Garden History Society. 1981

Talacre.

The gardens and grounds of Talacre Abbey are also at risk. This apparently unrecorded and unappreciated desmesne lies upland of Point of Ayr on the north coast of Clwyd (SJ10 83). The estate* is in divided ownership, having recently been sold after seventy years of occupation by a closed order of nuns, but the overgrown grounds still boast a grotto, tower folly, walled garden, gardener's house, garden boys' accommodation, kennels, mill and home farm. It is these latter, Grade II listed, buildings for which a planning application has been received: eleven units of holiday accomodation are envisaged. There is talk of chalets. Planning permission has already been granted to turn the Abbey, built 1824/9, into an hotel. The local authority have insisted on further consultation over the car parking and access arrangements. A garden survey or at least some research work is vitally needed.

* At one time the estate included the colliery itself. It was given to a younger son of the Mostyns of Mostyn in the early years of the sixteenth century. The Mostyns of Talacre retained their Catholic faith after the Dissolution of the monasteries: they however owned Basingwerk Abbey and one of the eighteenth century dowagers used the stones from it to build Greenfield Hall on the coast at Holywell (now demolished).

As Roman Catholics they were debarred from public office. Despite having been heavily fined by the Commissioners at the time of the Commonwealth, they retained their property and the owner Mostyn of the day was created a Baronet in 1670. So far the only reference found to the gardens is in a deed of 1617 ; "A delightful house at Talacre, a barn, a stable, and three gardens".

Inauguration of the Clwyd Group.

The Clwyd Group of the Trust is to hold its inaugural meeting at Nerquis Hall, Mold on the 3rd November at 2.00.p.m. Speakers include our Chairman Mr William Wilkins, Mrs Gillie Drummond of the Hampshire Garden Trust and Mr Peter Goodchild of the University of York. A small exhibition of archival material is being arranged by Clwyd Record Office. All welcome.

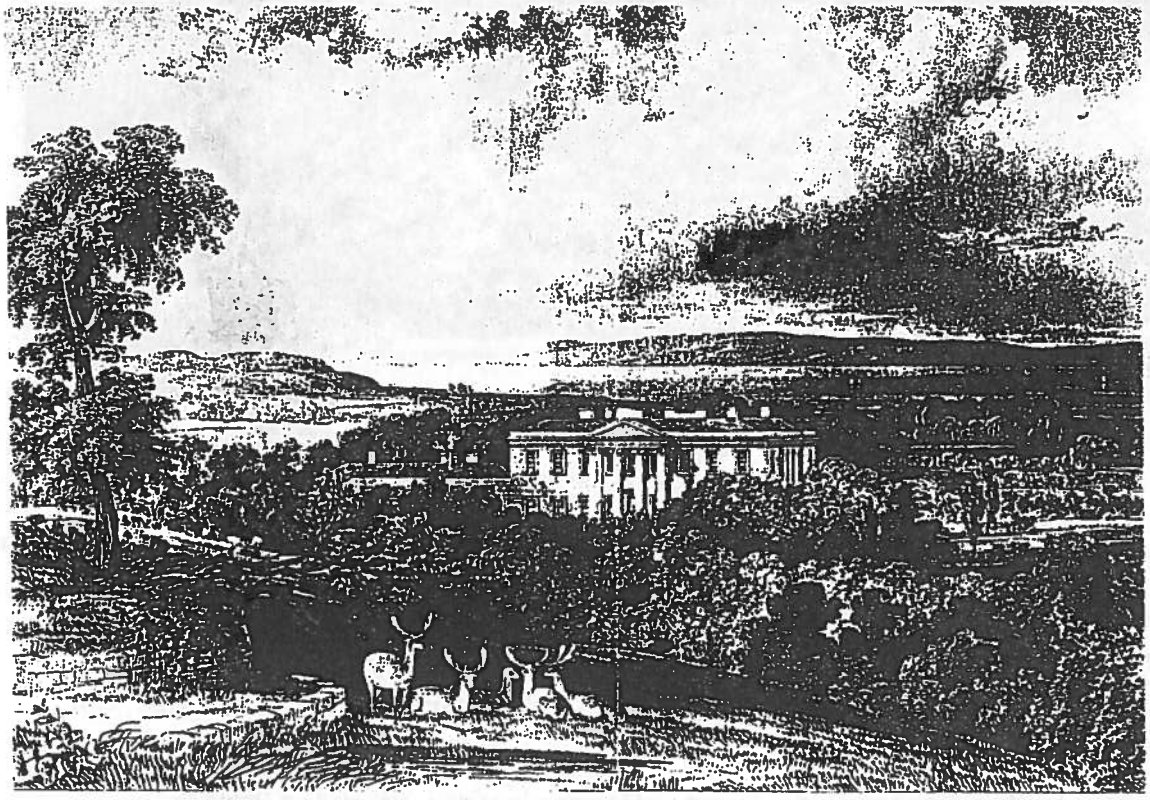
The following article is reprinted, by permission of the author and the editor, from the Avon Garden Trusts' Newsletter 7 (Summer 1990). We are convinced that, although it draws its examples from the Bristol area, its remarks are of more general interest, and we republish it to alert readers to a potential source of development problems. It is followed by some observations kindly made in response by Mr Nigel Ford, Head of Design Practice at the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

HOSPITAL SALES THREAT TO HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS.

by Stewart Harding.

A surprisingly large number of historic parks and gardens have survived to the present as the grounds of institutions. Many of these have come into the ownership of the National Health Service which now finds them surplus to requirements so that new uses need to be found for the land and the buildings, and the conservation of their historic character is in jeopardy.

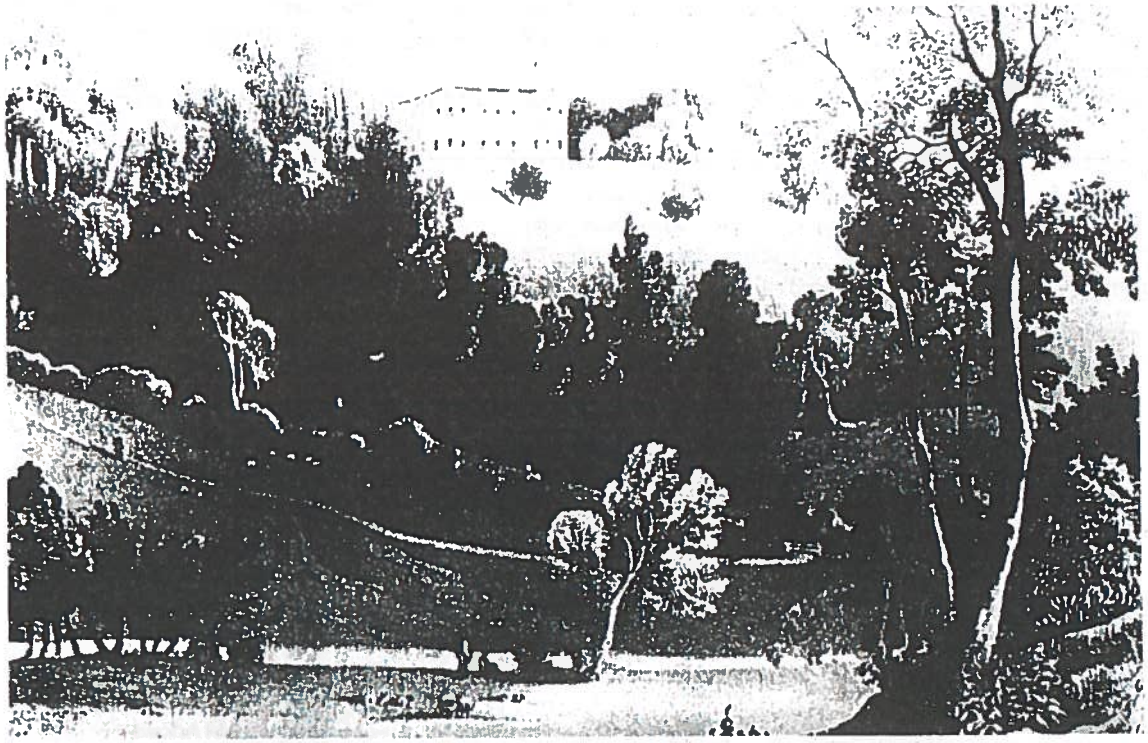
Country houses provided ideal sites for setting up self-sufficient 'colonies' where mentally disadvantaged (or abandoned, illegitimate or unaffordable) youngsters could be treated according to the late Victorian ideals; plenty of fresh air, good food and work. Their layouts provided ample residential accommodation, farm buildings, agricultural land and gardens and seclusion and protection for vunerable inmates behind perimeter walls.



Leigh Court, nr. Bristol, a mental hospital for most of the twentieth century and sold by the NHS in 1986. (Chilcotts' Descriptive History of Bristol 1844).

The rise in institutional care coincided with the effects of the great agricultural depression which set in during the 1880's and continued until the present system of price fixing and subsidies was introduced during and after World War II. The initial reaction amongst landowners was to sit out the slump as they had done before. This time, though, prices never recovered so that from the turn of the century onwards the market was increasingly flooded with peripheral estate land and whole estates. Many were sold to tenant farmers and a great number were finally lost in the building boom of the 1920s and 1930s.

Around Bristol, the Rev'd. Harold Nelson Burden, this country's pioneer of the colony system of care, was able to buy cheaply many important historic estates by private treaty after they failed to reach their reserve prices at auction. These include Brentry Hill, Hanham Hall, Heath House, Leigh Court, Stapleton Grove and Stoke Park. These former residences are typical of NHS properties throughout the country.

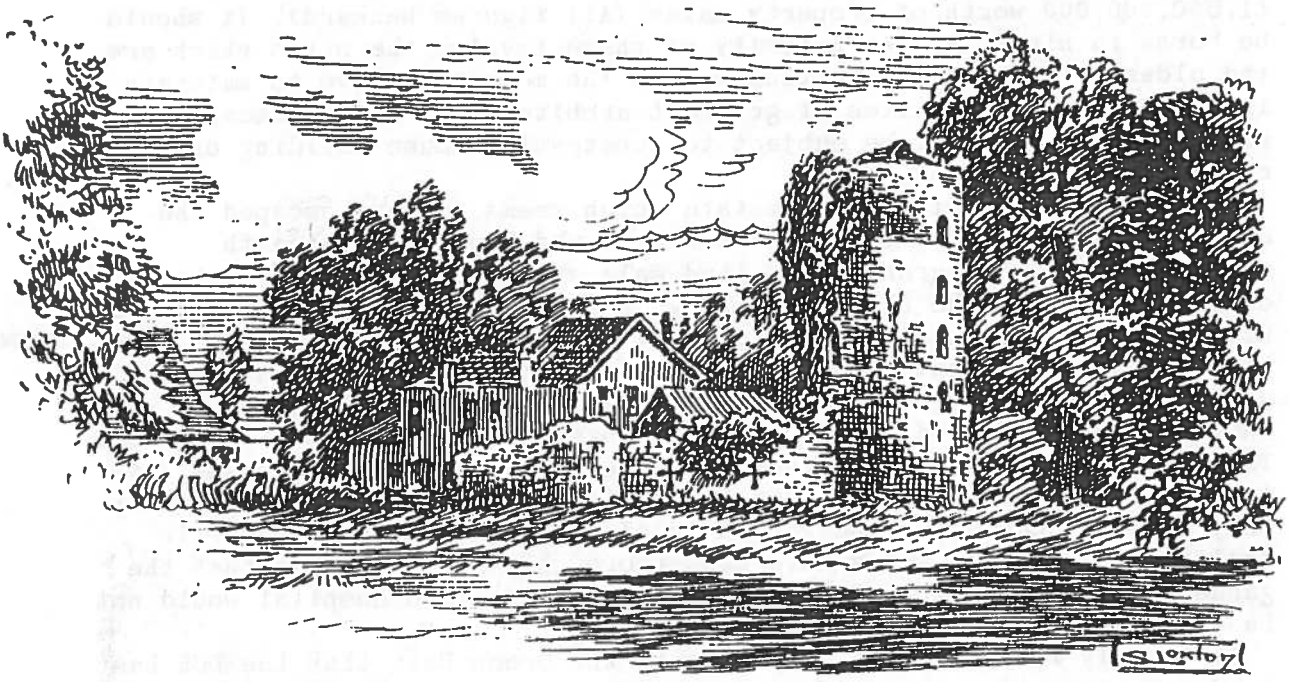


"Heath House, Stapleton. Curently the subject of proposals to build houses in the walled garden. (19th century print, collection of Dr J. Jancar)"

Another type of heritage site appeared in the 19th century in the form of new purpose- built asylums, financed by local corporations and commonly laid out in imitation of country houses set in landscaped grounds. A fine local example is Glenside Hospital with its Italianate architecture beautifully executed in local stone, its wooded park complete with drives and lodges and its riverside walks through the picturesque Frome Valley.

Taking these two categories together the NHS finds itself the reluctant custodian of a vast, diverse estate of major historic, architectural and landscape importance. Changes in style of health care provision for the mentally handicapped towards 'care in the community'

means that many 'heritage' properties have, or will, become redundant, posing questions about appropriate future uses.



"Unlisted tower in the grounds of Stapleton Grove, now Purdown Hospital which is scheduled to close in 1990-91. (S.Loxton c.1900.collection of Bristol Library)"

Via a series of legislative changes and policy directives this government has spelled out what is expected of health authorities. The main thrust is that surplus property should be sold *for maximum capital gain* to finance capital programmes. The 1984 Town & Country Planning Act enables health authorities to act like any other landowner and obtain planning consents prior to sale. This gives them a considerable material interest in testing, and breaking, the constraint policies of local planning authorities. Experience has shown that no account is taken, at least intially, of the historic value of the land when redevelopment proposals are formulated. Health authorities have shown themselves willing to take individual cases to the High Court if planning applications and planning appeals prove unsuccessful. Apart from the issue of how much public money is wasted, there are important questions raised over the effectiveness of democratic planning policies, the protection of historic sites and loss of cherished high quality local open space.

My research has enabled me not only to examine these issues but also to play a leading role in the conservation of hospital sites in Avon. Members of the Avon Garden Trust will be familiar through the Conservation Notes of the Newsletter with the prolonged battles this entails.

We have been fortunate in Avon to have the support of the planning authorities and the expertise of the Trust's committee to draw on: from what figures are available the position elsewhere seems less optimistic. There can be no doubt that on the national scale we are in the throes of

an extensive privatisation of public land. Total sales of NHS land and buildings from 1979 to 1988 reached £581,116,000 with the bulk occurring in the final two years. The forecast for the year 1988-89 alone amounts to £337,000,000 with a cumulative total to March 1992 of more than £1,500,000,000 worth of property sales. (All figures Hansard). It should be borne in mind that the majority of these involve the sites which are the oldest, the most land-extensive and the most expensive to maintain - in other words those sites of greatest architectural and landscape value. Nearly all will be subject to substantial house building or commercial development.

It is the nature of the NHS estate which seems to have escaped the attention of the accountants and managers who drew up the health regions' capital programmes and land sale strategies. English Heritage collaborated with the DHSS in setting up a database of listed buildings within the NHS which was completed in 1988. The figures then showed 808 historic/merit/ancient monument items (of which 707 are listed) at 530 sites. Half of these were originally domestic residential items, including mansions, lodges, garden buildings and terraces etc. Dr Jeremy Taylor who worked on the project, suggests that perhaps 63 of these have interesting gardens. My own research indicates that the survey picks up only those places where the garden is of acknowledged importance. In reality few hospital sites have been thoroughly researched so that the gardens at, say, Brentry, Glenside or the Homoeopathic Hospital would not be counted.

It is only for redundant hospitals in the Green Belt that the DOE has produced planning guidance for re-use. On the face of it Circular 12/87 safeguards the conservation interest of such sites. However, many planning authorities have excluded hospital sites from their Green Belts in order to use them to fulfil government quotas on available building land. Early indications are that the circular can be overcome by resorting to appeal. The first case to be decided in this way was the 155 acre site at Shenley, Hertfordshire, the park to the 18th century Grade II mansion Porter's Park. The Secretary of State allowed an appeal by the North West Thames Regional Health Authority to build 900 homes and 50,000 sq,ft. of commercial space leaving only 45 acres of open space, mostly in the form of a green *cordon sanitaire* around the development.

Outside of the Green Belt, that is in urban and urban fringe areas where the pressure and potential for development is greatest, the future use of hospital sites is to be settled in the local planning arena, with the possibility of appeals to the courts. This means that for each site there will have to be an effective and co-ordinated campaign of local pressure groups who have the determination, persistence and resources to take on the might of the district and regional health authorities with their armies of consultants, interested developers and barristers all backed by central governement policy.

Avon Garden Trust, alone or in liaison with other groups, has been reasonably successful so far in protecting garden sites on the grounds of their historic importance. This may have much to do with luck. Research which details the involvement of Thomas Wright at Stoke Park and Humphrey Repton at Brentry and Leigh Court gives a firm foundation to a conservation case. All too often the scenario will be less encouraging. One case I have been advising on involves a well preserved and very beautiful Victorian mansion and park near Middlesborough which

local conservationists are desperate to save from building. There the house is not listed, the garden is not on the English Heritage Register, there is no well known landscape designer and the attitude of the planning authority to its redevelopment is ambivalent. There is no doubt that the house and grounds are eminently worthy of conservation but in planning terms it has no protection whatever. The best hope there is to win the planners' support by an overwhelming display of public outrage at the potential loss of such a fine place.

As one of the residents overlooking the development site at Brentry wrote to the appeal inspector "we all love our environment, in particular the young children....we, the local residents, should have a big bearing on the decision." If only this were so we would not need the ghosts of Repton, Wright and Brown to defend what is of great beauty and value and is, when all's said and done, ours.

REPONSE TO HARDING.

by Nigel Ford.

I would certainly wish to endorse Mr Harding's observation about the NHS being a custodian (although not reluctant) of a vast and diverse treasure of sites of architectural and landscape importance. In Wales the NHS portfolio contains 835 varied properties ranging from health centres through to major hospitals.

However, our situation is different from that of Avon as not all our properties are near areas of major urban expansion - indeed one of our most interesting historic gardens, Garth Angharad, near Dolgellau, is situated within the Snowdonia National Park.

No doubt there have been instances where historic landscapes have been developed, but in an optimistic vein it should be noted that at Adelina Patti Hospital the grounds were preserved in advance of the sale of the building some years ago and are now incorporated within the Craig-y-Nos Country Park, Powys.

The Welsh Health Common Services Authority is fortunately placed by being one of only two health authorities in Britain to have an established post of Landscape Architect, and there has been an opportunity to review and monitor the landscapes of NHS holdings over a long period of time. The Landscape Architect, working within the design practice division of the authority, is uniquely placed to ensure that wherever possible new hospital developments do take into consideration the preservation of existing specimen trees and the creation of new landscapes. For instance at the Ty-Olwen Unit at Morriston Hospital, Swansea, the practice was actively involved in garden restoration work. Landscaping is seen as a crucial part of achieving a restful and domestic environment in our new community hospital building programme.

As a measure of our interest and commitment to historic landscapes the Authority are corporate members of the Trust, and at a recent presentation to some of the Committee members a number of our most interesting properties were discussed.

Also of interest: SAVE Britain's Heritage, Historic Houses at Risk. (June 1990) £5.50. (Ed.)

TREDEGAR HOUSE AND PARK: THE ORANGERY GARDEN.

by David Freeman.

The Orangery Garden is currently the subject of a very exciting archaeological excavation. The object of the excavation is to find out more about what this garden actually looked like in the early 1700's at about the time that the Orangery was constructed. We then hope to be able to restore the garden to something like its original appearance.

The excavation has already brought to light some fascinating discoveries and has revealed an early eighteenth century garden of suprising complexity and completeness. The central and perimeter paths can be clearly identified and the remains of a small mount have been discovered in the north east corner of the garden. This mount was probably designed as a viewing platform affording spectacular views of the Orangery Garden and the main facade of the House.

Evidence has also been found of two rectangular panels or parterres located directly in front of The Orangery. The surfaces of these parterres appear to have been covered with different coloured materials, such as sea shells, crushed lime mortar, coloured clays and coal dust. These were arranged geometrically and each area was probably divided by low box hedging. The materials used on such parterres until now have only been known from contemporary garden writers but here in The Orangery Garden the actual materials and the layout have miraculously been preserved. This was probably because The Orangery Garden survived largely unaltered until the 1790's when the whole of the area appears to have been covered in a thick layer of soil. This may have been spoil from excavations for the lake which Adam Mickle, the Scottish landscape gardener, created in the early 1790's.

Other features such as possible bases for statues or pots, cultivation beds for flowers and fruit and the remains of an earlier building and garden layout which seem to pre-date The Orangery Garden, have also been identified.

Further archaeological work is continuing during the Summer but excavation is a messy and not particularly beautiful process. We hope very much that we will be forgiven the current 'building site' appearance of the garden. It is unfortunately unavoidable if we are to find out more about the garden and be able to restore it to something like its original appearance.

Mr Freeman is curator of Tredegar House for Newport Borough Council; more information about it and its gardens is contained in the guidebook, which is available from the Housekeepers and Country Park Shop, Tredegar House, Newport, Gwent NP1 9YW. (Ed.)

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

FRIENDS OF HAFOD.

by Jennie Macve

The Friends of Hafod society has been in existence for about four years. It originated from a remark about the desirabilty of forming such an interest group made by 'Llowarch' in his column in the *Cambrian News* Now we have about 130 members, roughly half of whom live in Ceredigion; the remainder are scattered far and wide, and have a bewildering variety of reasons for their interest in Thomas Johnes' Picturesque paradise at Hafod.

We see our role mainly as being to raise awareness in Hafod, both locally and nationally in schools etc.,to carry out and assist research through the accumulation of archive material,and to help preserve and, where appropriate, restore remaining features of the estate. We maintain close contacts with the Forestry Commission, who are the principal landowners. They have recently set up a Garden Panel (on which the group is represented) to decide on conservation strategy for the gardens, which in the first instance will concentrate on the two historic walled garden sites.

The group has assembled an archive collection of over 350 items, to which new material is continually being added. Its contents are listed in a reference catalogue, which is sent to all members and interested institutions. Meetings are held every month, and we also produce a twice yearly newsletter. Given our rather isolated position, we are always very pleased to receive visits or correspondence from garden historians, whose knowledge and insight can increase our own understanding of the history and significance of Hafod.

The author is secretary of the Friends of Hafod (Ed.)

INSOLE COURT ACTION GROUP.

by Geraldine Watson.

Just two miles from the centre of Cardiff lies a 'secret garden', a garden frequented and well loved by the local community. Nine acres are all that now remain of the vast estate which once belonged to the Insole family and Insole Court. The family loved plants especially alpines and 100 years ago lovingly created gardens with rock formations to suit the needs of their alpine collection.

Sadly as the plants have aged, they have not been replaced. The grounds although beautiful with camelia,cedar of Lebanon and magnolia have been replanted with low maintainence plants covering the rock formations and hiding their potential,

The Victorian house reflects the love the family had for botany; animal and plant life can be seen carved into the masonry and woodwork on both the inside and outside of the house.

This house and grounds are the only public facilities the Llandaff community has and they are now under threat. Two years ago at a large public meeting an action group was formed and money provided to save both house and grounds from 'public tender'. The grounds we have now been promised are secure and the Council has recommended that further consideration should be given to the house and its possible future development.

However the fight is not yet over. We in the action group feel that Insole Court is a unique, small, manageable asset, in the heart of the city. The gardens could be restored to their former alpine glory, which would attract specialists and enthusiasts from afar, perhaps creating income generating alpine centre that would add to, and yet maintain, the tranquility and beauty of a Victorian garden, in the heart of a Victorian city, for generations to come.

The author is a member of the Insole Court Action Group which is attempting to save this example of our garden history; advice,expressions of support and requests for more information to:The

Membership Secretary, Insole Court Action Group, 116 Fairwater Grove East, Llandaff, Cardiff; Tel 0222 551836. (Ed.)

A DAY TRIP TO MIDDLETON.

by Phyllis J.Guskin.

A clipping from the *New York Times* was my first introduction to Middleton. Paula Deitz's article of June 10th 1990 described in enticing detail the recently discovered water gardens. During summers in Radnorshire, we had often driven along the picturesque valley of the Tywi, admiring the landscape of curving river, majestic oaks and the frieze of castles perched on rocky crags, presided over by Paxton's Tower, but we had no idea that hidden in the woods was such a fascinating eighteenth century landscape creation, an elaborate series of cascades, waterfalls, lakes and streams, also the work of Paxton.

What remains is in many ways a ghost,. There is a void where the neo-classical mansion stood, its platform site now marked by heap of tyres weighing down the manure pile - sic transit gloria!. The elaborate double-walled garden encloses grass, and the vegetable, vines and fruit trees that once filled it have left behind only a few traces, such as the metal fruit lables which were retrieved from the orchard.

In going round the gardens we were lucky to be guided by Susan Lloyd-Fern, the discoverer and historian of this hidden treasure. The illustrated guide book prepared with Paul Davis gives a vivid account of the past of this great estate. As we toured the grounds she re-created for us the sense of a living landscape, with the great house supplied with all necessities and luxeries, from running water to ice stored in the remarkably preserved ice house, discovered when a member of the team almost fell through its roof. We mulled over the intriguing elliptical enclosure, attached to the walled garden, with its elegant piered entrance and presiding weeping ash tree, and tried to evoke its purpose. An enclosure for herbs, possibly the Indian herbs and spices that Paxton might have learned to enjoy during his two decades amassing a fortune in India ?, or a quiet pleasance for the ladies to have tea in ?.

Sadly the combination of a dry summer and the storm damage of early 1990 had left the lakes low and the cascade dry. However this meant that we could look closely at the skull carved head, again almost Indian, carved at the top of the cascade. We could also get close to the ruined grotto that seems to have been a dam and waterfall connecting two of the lakes that once encircled the mansion.

One of the illuminating experiences of our tour was to consider the differences in the siting of the earlier Middleton Hall, established circa 1600, and the eighteenth century mansion of 1785. The first almost certainly located by Susan Lloyd-Fern, lies tucked into a slope on the far side of the water, nestled into a south facing platform site, protected but viewless. The mansion built by Paxton sat on a rise with

spectacular views in all directions, a confident presence visible for miles.

The contrast of water, woods, views and vistas evoke the experience of an eighteenth century landscape visitor. The circuit along the stream, across bridges and waterfalls, illustrates the fusion of nature with art that the period held up as its ideal. The gardens clearly show Paxton's enthusiasms. His little bath house on the edge of the lake had almost totally disappeared, leaving only two bricks visible on the surface. Susan Lloyd-Fern, who walked the land for two years, noticed them and excavated the remains of a bath lined with soft blue glazed tiles - even part of the plug-hole was still there!. Paxton's interest in spa baths is well documented. His plans for the estate included turning the chalybeate springs into a public spa, a project that might have developed the area into a major spa centre to rival Leamington and Tunbridge Wells.

To discover such an extensive period landscape garden is a major achievement. Visiting it reminds one how much may possibly be found and preserved of the many aspects of the past still immensely appealing to the twentieth century.

Dr. Guskin is an independent scholar who divides her time between Bloomington, Indiana, and Radnorshire. Paula Deitz's article mentioned in Dr. Guskins opening sentences, written during her stay at The Welsh Gardens Under Threat *conference in April, has attracted many American visitors to the landscape sites of Dyffryn Tywi. (Ed.)*

EVENTS IN THE REGION.

If you have an event that you feel would be of interest to members, we will be happy to include it.

WALES LANDSCAPE GROUP.

Land Reclamation; a talk by COMTEC. 7.00.p.m. 18th October at The National Sports Centre for Wales, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff.

Fertlisers; An Essential Mangement Tool; a talk by Mr John Hinton (BASF). on the 15th Novemeber at the same venue.

GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY.

The Garden History Society and Stowe Advisory Committee: *Garden Conservation and Restoration;* Conference at Stowe School on Saturday 20th October 1990.

For booking form, please send s.a.e. to *Geoffrey Evans, The Orchard,, Pollards Hill, Limpsfield, Oxted, Surrey RH8 0QX.*

THE INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED ARCHITECTURAL STUDIES:

The Centre for Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens offers a wide range of short courses throughout the Winter and early Spring; November 12-15 a course on *History of Gardens and Landscape Design in Britain.* As well as short courses the Institute also offers higher degree tuition.

Details can be obtained from *The Secretary IoAAS, The Kings Manor, York, YO1 2EP.*

WELSH HISTORIC GARDENS TRUST.

An afternoon guided tour of Aberglasney, on Sunday 18th November at 2.30.p.m. with William Wilkins, Chairman. Will members interested in this trip please contact the Membership Secretary on 0267 211307, who will supply details of how to get to the site.

THE PRESIDENT AND COUNCIL

by William Powell Wilkins.

The Committee is delighted to announce that Lord Morris of Castle Morris, Principal of St David's University College Lampeter has accepted it's invitation to become President of The Welsh Historic Gardens Trust. Lord Morris participated in some of the earliest discussions leading to the formation of the Trust. He is Chairman of The Museums and Galleries Commission and a member of the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

The Committee has also invited a number of eminent people to form the Council of the Trust and it is greatly honoured that the following have accepted.

The Marquess of Anglesey. Chairman of The Historic Buildings Council for Wales.

Lord Aberconway. Past President of the R.H.S.

Dame Jennifer Jenkins. Chairman of The National Trust.

Sir Roy Strong. Past Director of the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Mrs Mavis Batey. President of the Garden History Society.

R.A.E.Herbert Esq. President of the R.H.S.

Professor John Dixon Hunt. Director of Studies in Landscape History, Dumbarton Oaks.

D.B.Clay Jones Esq. Broadcaster and consultant.

Profssor Ghillean T.Prance. Director of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew.

W.Lawrence Banks Esq. Treasurer of R.H.S.

MEET THE COMMITTEE

by William Powell Wilkins.

The Executive Committee and its officers.

I have been asked to write a short biographies to introduce the Committee and its officers to members of the *Trust*.

Vice-Chairman: Richard Keen.

Born and brought up in South Wales. Assistant Keeper of Industrial Archaeology at the National Museum of Wales, before joining the National Trust as Historic Buildings Representative for South Wales. A T.V. broadcaster and writer his enthusiasms are legion and include, music of all sorts (he plays in a Country & Western band) his three year old daughter and flying.

Honorary Secretary: Gerard Dent.

Married to Charlotte Dent, also a committee member, he works 3/4 days a week in London running his city based consultancy in the Lloyd's insurance world. The rest of his time is spent farming at Alltyferin near Carmarthen. Particularly proud of his ecclesiastical connections: a great grandfather was Archdeacon of St David's. In addition to the Welsh countryside and historic gardens he has a passion for cricket.

Honorary Treasurer: R.R.Rockingham Gill.

Known to his friends as 'Rocky'. Head of the Department of Philosophy at St David's U.C.Lampeter where he has taught for the last 18 years. He undertook the organisation of our conference 'Welsh Historic Gardens Under Threat'.Co-editor with Susan Lloyd-Fern (q.v.) of the Newsletter, he was also responsible with Andrew Sclater (Committee member) for our successful storm damage initiative. As Treasurer he is engaged with Michael Norman, the Trust Executive (q.v.) in publicising the Trust and its drive for membership and funds.

Trust Executive: Michael Norman.

Brought up in Montgomeryshire he would probably have farmed had not National Service led him to discover tanks. He stayed in uniform for a further 25 years, retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Recruited by a Service charity he went on to work with other charitable institutions including St Michael's Hospice and the Samaritans. He and his wife Georgina have already restored one Grade II house and garden and are now at work restoring the long neglected garden of their home in Cardiganshire.

Executive Secretary: Susan Lloyd-Fern.

After early years as a sales consultant, time spent in Greece and Italy prompted her to take an Hons. Degree in Classics and Archaeology. She subsequently worked on many excavations around the country, finally taking up a post with the Dyfed Archaeological Trust as Education/Publicity Officer. She was responsible for the original research on Middleton Hall and wrote the guide book together with Paul Davis. Her new book 'Lost Churches of Wales and the Marches' has just been published. All aspects of Welsh heritage interest her and she has worked on historical drama for BBC Radio 4.

Finally, the Chairman William Powell Wilkins, introduces himself as follows:

Childhood spent divided between what was Camarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. He is a professional artist with a lifelong passion for architecture and landscape. After teaching for some time, spent ten years working as an architectural journalist, exhibition organiser etc. Occassional author and lecturer he prefers painting, gardening and opera to anything else. Now entirely based on his family home outside Llandeilo which he and his family have beeen slowly restoring over twenty years.

The remaining members of the Executive Committee will be introduced in our next newsletter. (Ed.)

THE TRUST NEEDS YOU.

We close our newsletter with several requests. First we still need more people to take an active part in the Trust. We are happy to announce that three local groups are now established, in Gwent, Glamorgan and Clwyd. We would still like to hear from members in Gwynedd, Powys and Dyfed, who feel that they could help organise and run a local group in their area.

Those members who live in Glamorgan and Gwent and would like to participate in their local group should contact; Glamorgan: *Mr Michael*

Littlewood, Mission House, 34a High Street, Yatton, Bristol, Avon, BS19 4JA. Tel; 0934 876260.
Gwent; Mrs. C. M. A. Boyle, Penpergwm Lodge, Abergavenny, Gwent, NP7 9AS. Tel; 0873 840208.

Secondly, if we are to produce high quality newsletters then we desperately need equipment. We therefore ask any one who has any of the following items, which they feel they could willing donate to the cause, to get in touch with us. We are in need of computer equipment, an Amstrad 1512 or Amstrad 1640. Wordstar Software and Printer suitable for copy editing and letters.

Needless to say we will be enormously grateful for any help in this matter.

Finally we are anxious to set up a photographic archive, so if you have any photos or prints that we could copy we would like to hear from you.

We would like to take this opportunity of thanking all those members who have so kindly volunteered to distribute our brochures and help with a myriad of important tasks that the Trust is undertaking.

STOP PRESS.

We have just been informed by the Welsh Office of the award to the *Trust* of funding under the Special Grants (Environmental) Programme to support its administrative expenses for the next six months.

This is the first grant received from a major funding body - but only the first, we hope !.