

No. 49
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Nantlys - a Robinsonian Garden

by Elizabeth Smart

Nantlys, Tremeirchion is set on land sloping downwards from the B5429 north-west of Bodfari in Flintshire. It was built by Philip Pennant Pearson on property he inherited from his godfather, David Pennant of Downing. After attaining his inheritance he was allowed to assume the surname Pennant by Royal Licence. He chose Thomas Wyatt as his architect to build a house of asymmetric design, incorporating Elizabethan and Gothic elements, which was completed in 1875. The site was previously arable land, part of Nant Gwilym farm. The house was built across the site on a north-west to south-east axis between two small valleys, Hendre Wood and Nant Mostyn. The land between house and road, some fourteen and a half acres, formed the parkland approach. Through the parkland a curving, oak-bordered, drive was made from the road to the house. Here was created a 'diamond' of trees in 1897 to mark Queen Victoria's Jubilee. A 'Garden Book' kept from 1895 until 1909 (mainly by May Philip Pennant's daughter, May) notes, "We planted a diamond of trees to commemorate the Jubilee[sic] in front of Nantlys, various sorts of trees including larches beeches and chestnuts etc." Some of these trees remain, including oak, chestnut and beech.

The two wooded valleys provide the underlying structure of the garden. They are probably ancient woodland (a number of plants growing in the woodland that are indicators of, and associated with, ancient woodland have been identified including Dog's Mercury, Enchanter's Nightshade, Geum rivale and Lysimachia nemorum). In a Robinsonian manner these woodlands were enhanced with a variety of trees, shrubs and conifers (copies of some contemporary orders from Pennant and also some invoices from Dickson's, nurserymen, of Chester survive). At the front of the house itself and to one side terraces were created with shrub planting; later herbaceous beds were added on the south-east terrace (above Hendre Wood) and also in front of the house. Much of the early shrub and

coniferous planting survives.

An ingenious, possibly unique, system of 'rabbit-proof' protection was created, incorporating a series of connected elements from the entrance gate, which had rabbit proof netting. The gate connected to a brick wall which led to a stone built revetment in Hendre wood. Next came rabbit proof netting, then a wooden footbridge closed by a gate and connected to a further, fenced, revetment below the terrace. This led to the wall of a small kitchen garden, also gated, (there was also a larger kitchen garden to the north east of the house) followed by further walls around the domestic courtyard eventually returning, to the entrance gate. Although it is currently incomplete, sufficient elements of the 'protection' remain for it to be easily traceable. This may be another debt to Robinson, who inveighed eloquently against rabbits.

Adjacent to the house, on the north-west, the small kitchen garden, with walls for growing fruit, was created; an original label for a Hardwicke Nectarine survives on one of its walls. The main kitchen garden to the north east of the house is now covered by farm buildings. The 'Garden Book' mentioned above records details of plantings in and of produce from these two kitchen gardens.

In 1902 Philip Pennant's son, David, married Lilla Rogers of



Nantlys photographed circa 1990



© Elizabeth Smart

Fortune's Double Yellow Rose in the Nantlys conservatory 2006

Riverhill in Kent. The Rogers family were notable horticulturists and Lilla's grandfather, John, had been a member of the committee which sent Robert Fortune on a plant-collecting expedition to China (R.H.S. Minutes, 1843). As a member of this committee

John Rogers was allowed to receive surplus seeds and plants from the expedition. Amongst them was 'Fortune's Double Yellow' (*Rosa odorata pseudoindica*, Gold of Ophir), a cutting of which was one of the plants that Lilla took to Nantlys. The cutting flourished in the conservatory for many years; eventually it died, but a replacement cutting was provided by a family member and continues to grow well. Some of the rhododendrons in the woods may also have been introduced from Riverhill.

Further developments possibly took place in the early part of the twentieth century. It is likely that formal beds were introduced some time later: there is evidence from parch marks that there may have been beds on both the top and lower terrace.

The surviving material would seem to show that Nantlys was a garden created in a Robinsonian style: adapting and working with the site, making sympathetic introductions (including new species and varieties), but not imposing upon it. Patrick Taylor's description of Plas Brondanw is perhaps equally apt for Nantlys: "a rare and unclassifiable garden of great beauty".

Nantlys was sold in 2006.

Elizabeth Smart is a member Clwyd branch of WHGT and is currently studying Garden History at Bristol University.

Planning Casework

WHGT success at Faenol

Members will no doubt remember that the Trust gave evidence last year at the Public Inquiry into Gwynedd County Council's Unitary Development Plan specifically concerning the proposals to allocate further land for business use in the core of the Faenol (Vaynol) estate. This development, in the Trust's view, would have greatly harmed the Grade I park and the setting of the historic listed buildings and Faenol Conservation Area.

Prior to the Inquiry, objections to these proposals had been lodged by the Chairman of the Trust, the Chairman of Gwynedd Branch and members of the Gwynedd Branch including Fred Whowell, Sheila Roberts and Mary Garner. Objections were also sent in by Peter Welford, Richard Gilbertson, Thomas Lloyd, Simon Wardle and Dame Jennifer Jenkins who are members of the Trust. As a result the Gwynedd Branch (Joanna Davidson) and the Chairman (Michael Tree) attended the Public Inquiry to present the Trust's case which was largely based on a considerable body of written evidence compiled by Sheila Roberts of the Gwynedd Branch. The Trust participated in this Inquiry in conjunction with the National Trust who bore the lion's share of the costs of lawyers and expert witnesses. £2500 of WHGT members' funds was spent fighting this case.

The Trust is delighted to report that the Inspector found in our favour, ruling that the proposed allocation of land for business development be deleted from the Deposit Draft of the UDP. The main landscape grounds for his decision were based on the issues of the effect of development on the historic parkland; the buildings of architectural and historic interest; the setting of the Vaynol Conservation Area and the character and appearance of the rural landscape.

The Inspector felt that the development of the land, even with effective landscaping, would fail to protect the registered parkland as Planning Policy Wales (PPW) advises. The parkland was also considered to be an integral and essential part of the setting of the mansion and related functional buildings and he therefore conclude that if it was significantly degraded, so too would be the historic and architectural value of the buildings themselves.

Also, because the development would very substantially erode the historic parkland setting of the group of listed buildings which form the core of the Vaynol estate, there would be no scope for UDP policies to secure the protection of the interests of acknowledged importance which relate to landscape quality, the Vaynol Conservation Area and the buildings of architectural and historic interest.

The Inspector considered that the proposed business development, either on its own or in combination with landscape planting, would very significantly erode the spacious setting of the Conservation Area and would neither preserve or enhance its character or appearance in line with the objective of PPW.

During the Inquiry the Local Planning Authority had confirmed that they did not wish the present business park to be further developed as an alternative site on the grounds that it would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of that area. The Inspector responded to this objection in his report by pointing out that therefore even greater caution should be exercised when considering the effect of development which would change the character of an area of historic parkland which contains buildings of architectural and historic interest!

Although the Inspector found in our favour the Trust must remain vigilant as there is no legal requirement for the Council to accept any or all of the Inspector's recommendations, but where they do not they have to give reasons. Both the modifications to the Draft Deposit and the reasons for not accepting them will be published for a further round of consultation. We shall therefore do all we can do to ensure that the council accept the Inspector's findings and we shall keep you informed.

The Inspector's Report can be viewed online by visiting Gwynedd County Council's website at www.gwynedd.gov.uk and taking the following route: Home>Council and Democracy> Policies and Strategies> Unitary Development Plan> Inspector's Report pp 582-589

Ros Laidlaw, Planning Co-ordinator

The Citrus House at Margam Park

There can be few more evocatively tragic sights than that of the Citrus House at Margam Park, a unique 150-foot long glasshouse with a pavilion at each end. It was built in 1801, to grow wall-trained fruit additional to the hundred large standard trees in Anthony Keck's magnificent Orangery. Among celebrity visitors in 1803 were Admiral Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton. Impressed, Nelson gave the gardener three shillings.

By 1888 the Citrus House was used as a winter garden for promenading in dull weather, still with trained citrus against the wall, and a riot of camellias, fuchsias, and other conservatory plants. The structure survived remarkably well and when it was restored in 1977 as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations it still retained much of its original metalwork, and the characteristic 'beaver-tail' glass panes, with rounded outer edges. In June 1998 with the support of the then leader of the Neath Port Talbot local authority, (which had bought the entire site in 1973) an agreement was drawn up for the use of the glasshouse as the home of Fuchsia Research International, the leading NCCPG collection of wild fuchsias, (species, subspecies and naturally occurring hybrids). Chief executive of the charity, retired horticulturalist Arthur Tickner devoted his considerable skills to creating within the confines of the greenhouse a naturalistic representation of the Andean mountains with trickling water and four water features. Like Victorian guests, visitors to the County Park could walk through this rare and exquisite collection. Serious Fuchsia experts and collectors were delighted with the authenticity of the display. Indeed when I visited it in 2000 there were thoughts of increasing the magic of the place with hummingbirds, the natural pollinators of many of these plants.

Today the picture is one of dereliction and despair. The whole glasshouse is isolated by ugly security fencing and warning signs, panes of glass lie shattered on the ground, and when I visited in October, beautiful rare woody species of Fuchsias reared through

the holes in the roof.

The present management of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council have refused to honour the maintenance contract entailed in the 1998 agreement with Fuchsia Research International and two years ago the structure was declared dangerous and closed to visitors. After much negotiating they agreed to provide the Fuchsia collection with an alternative home, a new

£25K polytunnel behind the severely neglected vinehouse, so this important plant collection has not been lost, (though the urgent move did result in the loss of two irreplaceable plants). But for the restoration of the historic building there are no plans whatever.

Just eight years ago it seemed an ideal use had been found for this elegant and important greenhouse. So much effort and goodwill has gone to waste, the public are denied a choice jewel (for the new polytunnel is open only by appointment and lacks the ambience of the historic building and montane reconstruction) and it seems desperately unlikely that the council will prioritise this historic structure above the many other demands upon the public purse.

The Citrus house is itemised as one of the primary reasons for grading Margam Park grade I in the Cadw Register of Parks and Gardens. This fact is insufficient to secure its protection.

Caroline Palmer



© Caroline Palmer



The Citrus House at Margam in October 2007

© Caroline Palmer

Plas Boduan, Pwllheli, Gwynedd

Knight Frank of Hereford are the selling agents (Tel 01432 273 087) of one of the most historic houses on the Lleyn peninsula: Boduan. Prior to 1967 it was one of the many family seats of the Wynn family. As one would expect, the house and gardens (both Grade II listed) are thus something of a palimpsest of enlightened endeavour over the last five hundred years, and even boast strong connections with Anne Boleyn. But it was at the beginning of the 18th century that the family fortunes made a dramatic advance, with the marriage of Thomas Wynn to Frances Glynne, heiress of the far grander Glynllifon.

Early in the 19th century E. Hyde Hall described the then house (built circa 1736) as 'a building of small pretension', but this building has been largely incorporated into late 19th century

extensions by the Hon. F.G. Wynn. It is an attractive house and the garden is enchanting, extending to some twenty five acres with numerous ponds, abundant natural water, bridges, cascades, water features, underground tunnels, and mature plants of significant variety. Thus what you see is a very mature garden created and recreated over the centuries when ample funds were available from one of the great landed estates of Wales. The cost of creating such a garden these days from new, would be unthinkable, which is why such heritage items are truly irreplaceable, and provide such exceptional spiritual and visual amenity. What good fortune awaits a new owner with two million to spend.

Michael Tree

National Events for 2008

AGM and Pembrokeshire Weekend

Saturday 7 June

11:00am to 2:00pm visit to Picton Castle, AGM, lunch and garden visit introduced by head Gardener Roddy Milne.

3:00pm to 5:00pm visit to Upton Castle Gardens.

7:30pm Dinner at Trewern Arms, Nevern.

Sunday 8 June

10:00am to 11:00am visit to the recently restored Shell House at Cilwendeg. Guided by David Ellis. There will be the opportunity to view the un-restored fowl house nearby.

11:30 Visit to Rhos-y-gilwen to view their recently rescued walled garden and meet members of the Trust working on the project.

1:00pm Lunch and close of meeting

The cost for the AGM and lunch on Saturday will be £25 per head. Dinner on Saturday night and lunch on Sunday at cost. Members should make their own arrangements for accommodation with Hotel and B&B details available through local tourist offices. Guests will be most welcomed at a supplement of £10 each day, to include free WHGT membership for a year!

Seminar: Planning Guidance for Historic Estates, Parks and Gardens

Thursday 1 May at the University of Wales Conference Centre, Gregynog near Newtown.

Six experts will speak on various aspects directed at good stewardship. The seminar is primarily aimed at planners and other heritage bodies, no doubt many members will be interested in attending.

Carmarthenshire Drinks Evening

Tuesday 8 April at Aberglasney. Drinks evening and lecture by Richard Keen.

It is intended that this event will mark the establishment of the Trust Office, perhaps attract some local volunteers, and stimulate the re-launch the lapsed Carmarthenshire Branch.

Provisional Information: further details will be available from the Trust Administrator.

Branch Events for 2008

Brecon and Radnor

Saturday 15th March

Branch AGM at Llyswen Village Hall. Coffee, AGM, Lecture on 'Thomas Mawson: an Edwardian landscape architect in Wales' by Janet Waymark, and Lunch followed by a visit to Llanstephan House, by kind invitation of Lord and Lady Milford to see the daffodils.

Tuesday 13 May

Coach trip to Rodmarton Manor near Cirencester. Coffee and a tour of the house, afternoon visit to Charles and Mary Keen's garden at Duntisbourne Rous.

Saturday 5th July

Summer garden party at Coity Mawr by kind invitation of Mr and Mrs William Forwood.

Saturday 20 September

A one day seminar on Edwardian Gardens in Wales. Gregynog. (See advertisement p.6)

Ceredigion

Saturday 8th March

AGM followed by illustrated lecture by Hilary Thomas, editor and author of the new WHGT book 'Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan'. 2.00pm Waun Fawr Community Hall, Aberystwyth.

Saturday 17 May

A visit to Trawscoed gardens by kind permission of the new owners Lord and Lady Edwards. 11am. Bring a picnic lunch.

Tuesday 10 June

An exploration of the gardens of Glandyfi Castle, by kind permission of the new owners Mr and Mrs P. Holmes. 2.30pm.

Sunday 7th September

Visit to Abbey Cwm-Hir house and garden, by kind permission of Mr and Mrs P. Humpherson. By coach from Aberystwyth, 9am. Organised jointly with the Cardiganshire Horticultural Society.

Clwyd

(To book contact Elizabeth Bartlett: Tel no: 01352 758023)

Saturday 8th March

AGM and Study Day: to be held in St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden. Lectures: 'The Grand Tour & British Gardens' by Stephen Desmond, 'Thomas Pennant' by Goronwy Wynne. Lunch in House.

Saturday 26th April

Show of Auriculas, Garden open at Nerquis Hall 10.00a.m. - 12.30p.m. Coffee, cake stall, plants for sale.

Saturday 21st June

Summer Visit to the gardens of Mostyn Hall. Bring a picnic or have a pub lunch.

Saturday 11th October

Morning visit to Wrexham Garden Cemetery a ten acre design laid out in 1876 with listed buildings and original trees. Lunch in Gresford, followed by a talk on the trees.

Gwynedd

Wednesday 2nd April

AGM at Plas Tan y Bwlch, Snowdonia National Park Study Centre, Maentwrog and talk by Kate Barker on her garden at Tŷ Fry. Tour of Plas Tan y Bwlch gardens after lunch.

Saturday 3th May

Annual Plant Fair, Crŷg Farm Nursery Caernarfon. 10 am - 4 pm. Home made teas and lunches, Walled Garden and grounds open.

Sunday 11th May

Visit to two Anglesey Gardens: Tŷ Fry, where Kate Barker is working towards restoring the Renaissance garden. Lunch, followed by visit to Plas Cadnant the home of Anthony Tavener.

Saturday 21st June

Garden Party at Y Gilfach, Rowen the home of Mr. & Mrs. Greenalgh.

Thursday 10th July

Our visit to Birkenhead Public Park and Port Sunlight follows the lecture by Adam King, Head Park Warden at our October Study Day.

Pembrokeshire

(Lectures are usually held at Cuffern Manor, Roch at 7.30pm.)

Thursday 14th Feb

AGM, followed by an illustrated talk 'Researching Pembrokeshire Gardens' by Gerry Hudson.

Wednesday 12th March

A talk about Haroldston Gardens by Elisabeth Whittle of Cadw.

Thursday 10th April

A visit to Picton Castle Gardens from 5pm followed at 7.30pm by an illustrated talk 'Historic Gardens Of Pembrokeshire' by Tom Lloyd, and by a buffet supper.

Wednesday 14th May

A visit to the gardens of Treffgarne Hall. 2.30pm.

Wednesday 11th June

A visit to the gardens at Haverfordwest Priory, 2.30pm.

Thurs 11th Sept

An illustrated talk 'Edwardian Gardens and Harold Peto', by Robin Whalley.

Thurs 9th October

An illustrated talk: 'Old Apple Trees' by Gerald White.

South and Mid Glamorgan

Programme to be announced.

West Glamorgan

Tuesday 29th February

Social – Buffet and Musical Items.

Wednesday 13th March

AGM and talk by David Lambert 'After the Heritage Lottery Fund?'

Thursday 8th May

Talk by Elisabeth Whittle 'Arts and Crafts gardens in Wales'

Sunday 6th July

Strawberry Tea at the home of Dr and Mrs Hudson, 9 Eastcliff, Southgate, Gower.

Summer visits to Westbury Court and the adjacent Arts and Crafts gardens, Durham Park, Bath and to Ilfracombe to visit gardens in North Devon. (To be arranged).

Saturday 20th September

Study Day: 'The regeneration of Penllergare Valley Woods'.

Members are welcome to attend events outside their own Branch. For full details approach the appropriate branch contact (see page 8).

Gwynedd Branch Study Day – Parks for People

13 October 2007 at Llangefni

This year's day school was on the subject of Parks for the People, a change from the private enterprise that has been previously celebrated on these occasions. Many of us worried that the subject would prove rather worthy but this was far from the case.

The setting was the Bull Hotel in Llangefni. This was chosen because it allowed us to visit a very successful local scheme which has regenerated an area of amenity woodland in the heart of the town.

Our first speaker Adam King, Head Warden at Birkenhead Park, was inspiring, taking us from the beginnings of municipal parks, of which Paxton's Birkenhead was a pioneer project, through the funding and the concept of a development where the town, the environment, the public and the developers were all winners. Few of the audience were aware of the intricacies of the planning of a park, with success depending on the sale of surrounding housing developments and the value of these houses being reliant on the profile of the park. It made an interesting contrast with the ultimately unsuccessful park at Treborth in Bangor, also designed by Joseph Paxton. Following the fortunes of the park through its post war decline to its current regeneration was fascinating and was echoed in our final talk and tour of the Dingle in Llangefni, which has undergone a much needed transformation.

For our second speaker we were privileged to have Elizabeth Whittle of Cadw who put into context the myriad of parks within Wales. Most of the examples illustrated were in the industrial areas of South Wales, many being donated by wealthy industrialists in response to the growing concern with public

health in industrial cities. A number of these city parks have fallen into disrepair for all sorts of reasons including to the rise of the car and the fact that recreation can now take place in the wider countryside. However with the example of Birkenhead still in the front of our minds it was impossible not to feel a certain amount of optimism.

We ended the day with a short talk by Gwynne Morris Jones on the Dingle in Llangefni. This was followed by a guided walk for the stout hearted, as by this time the rain was falling heavily. For those who remember the Dingle of five years ago the transformation is astonishing, it has changed from the seedy haunt of drug takers to somewhere to walk with the family on Sundays and in the evening. The emphasis is firmly on wildlife conservation, this theme attractively embellished by sculptures of giant wooden seedpods placed adjacent to the paths, and of dragonflies marking one of the several entrances. Mr Morris Jones was a delightful and knowledgeable guide with a fund of stories about the Dingle in the past and a great passion for the current scheme.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson to be learnt from the day's proceedings is that, in order to flourish, municipal projects have to engender a sense of personal ownership within the community. Through individual involvement and use a communal pride and sense of collective responsibility can emerge. 'It's My Park' is the current Birkenhead slogan and it is just as relevant in the Dingle and can hopefully be applied to our other neglected public parks.

Joanna Davidson

Brecon and Radnor Branch Study Day

The Edwardian Garden in Wales

A one-day seminar at the University of Wales, Gregynog, Newtown.

Saturday 20 September 2008

CALL FOR PAPERS

A one-day seminar of twenty-minute papers is being planned by the Brecon and Radnor Branch around the theme of Edwardian gardens in Wales and their legacy, with a particular focus on style and context in the Welsh landscape.

Contributors are invited to submit proposals or abstracts to the organisers,

Robin Whalley whalley@cwmoergwm.fsnet.co.uk

or Jane Woodley rjw821@btinternet.com

Closing date: 31 March 2008.

Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan,

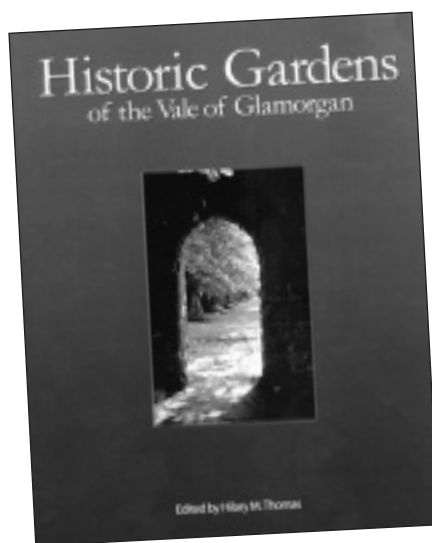
Editor: Hilary M. Thomas

ISBN -978-0-9558021-0-2.

Available from the publisher, South and Mid Glamorgan Branch WHGT, c/o Mwyndy House, Mwyndy, Llantrisant CF72 8PN. Price £25

Four years ago, the Ceredigion Branch of WHGT set the ball rolling with a slim volume on the historic parks and gardens of that county. Our budget was limited and our cover price £10, but into these 96 pages we managed to squeeze an account of 31 gardens of varying size and importance. As an author of that volume I am therefore consumed with envy. The Glamorgan team have undertaken a similar scope: describing 21 substantial gardens (16 of which are on the Cadw Register), plus group entries for town gardens of Cowbridge and village gardens at Llanblethian and St Hilary. They have allowed themselves 250 pages, a substantial 20x24cm format, and full colour wherever they need it. An extremely handsome volume, lavishly illustrated, is the result.

The vale of Glamorgan is that fertile bump of coastal land, immediately west of Cardiff which projects into the Bristol Channel. It has a history of human occupation stretching into antiquity, and the greatest threat to its gardens has perhaps been the cavalier tendency to demolition in the mid 20th century and pressures of population and development since. The selected gardens include some like Duffryn and St Fagans, in fine fettle, and other fascinating pieces of lost history such as The Court, St Fagans, redesigned by Lady Llewellyn through correspondence with Gertude Jekyll, and recorded in handsome photographs of the 1930s. Now an old peoples' home, its setting is a rugby pitch and a development of executive housing. Equally tragic is the account of The Ham, Llantwit Major. The Victorian gothic mansion by M.D. Wyatt and its lavish gardens are recorded in numerous photographs by Bridgend photographer Edwin Miles and now in the possession of the Glamorgan Record Office. The account culminates in two pictures, displayed together, of the outlook from the loggia over the fountain pool. In the first, the view frames the formal gardens and



imposing mansion on the skyline. In the second, the mansion is gone and we see instead serried ranks of static caravans, with their tiny lawns, sheds and rotating clotheslines.

The bulk of the entries are by Hilary Thomas and she writes pleasingly, while lightly dispensing much choice and rare information. Her background as senior archivist at the Glamorgan Record Office has perhaps left few stones unturned, - it is impressive the frequency with which her accounts include the names of gardeners, details of wages or of plant acquisitions, only obtainable from obscure primary sources. Whenever possible she has involved the owners, often including a paragraph or afterword by the present owner after her historical account.

Four other main contributors have written complete entries on their gardens, or gardens which they have researched. These authors are Brian Ll. James (Coedarhydyglyn, Cwrtyrala, Cowbridge town gardens, Wenvoe Castle), Murray McClaggan (Merthyr Mawr House), Derrick Kingham (Talygarn, Hensol Castle) and Jeff Alden (Llanblethian village gardens).

Many of the historic images have never been published before, and the format of the book does justice to the quality of hand drawn estate maps, many still in private hands, and the ebullient watercolours such as those of Merthyr Mawr by Mary de la Beche Nicholl (1867) and the of Duffryn gardens by Edith H. Adie (1923).

Every editor finds a few mortifying errors when their book has left their hands, and in this book I noticed a few in the botanical captioning of contemporary photographs. The spreading conifer at Llandough castle is certainly not a yew - I would suggest

Thuja dolabrata - and the palm tree at Dunraven Castle (p. 86) is definitely a yucca. But these are most minor details obviously erroneous to a few, and of no interest to many readers. The strength of the book, over and above its lavish production and wealth of imagery, is the quality of the archival research, and the wealth of detail about designers, gardeners, and the gardening owners. You may read many a history of a house which dwells upon heredity, wealth and power. The Welsh Historic Gardens Trust publications fill a real gap, they explain how and why a garden, large or small, took the form it did and celebrate the owners (or their wives), who expressed themselves through their gardens, and the gardeners, nurserymen and suppliers who made it possible.

Caroline Palmer

Have you heard of Ralph Hancock?

Bob Priddle, lecturer in horticulture and garden history at Neath Port Talbot College is researching the work of Clarence Henry Ralph Hancock, generally known as Ralph Hancock. Born 1893 in Cardiff, he is best known for designing a number of important gardens including the roof garden at the Rockefeller Centre in New York (1933) the roof garden at Derry and Toms in Kensington, London (1936) and a roof garden at Windsor Castle. He was a regular Gold Medal winner at Chelsea and exhibitor in the Ideal Home Exhibitions 1936-38.

In the Vale of Glamorgan, Bob has already discovered two forgotten Hancock gardens, one on his doorstep at Twyn-yr-Hydd, Margam (now part of Neath Port Talbot College's department of horticulture) and another at St Quentin's Cottage, Llanblethian.

Other Welsh gardens may also have been built by Hancock in the period 1936-1950 and if so, Bob Priddle is anxious to learn of them.

Phone: 01639 648261 or e-mail Robert.Priddle@nptc.ac.uk



The new WHGT Office is at:
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The Parks and Gardens Database now needs your material!

Parks & Gardens UK (PAGUK), the new national web resource on historic landscapes across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, is being given its public launch this spring.

Representatives of WHGT and other interested organisations had a preview in October of PAGUK, which will form a permanent home for thousands of garden history records from the UK's 36 gardens trusts and other heritage organisations.

The three-year project is an initiative of the Association of Gardens Trusts and the University of York, and is supported with £1million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It will link local, regional and national records, and enable the sharing of information across geographical boundaries.

PAGUK now holds information for 4,000 sites. New data is being added constantly, so that by August 2008 records for some 7,000 historic parks and gardens will be online, with in-depth information on some 500 sites.

The records will be linked to a variety of images, including historical documents, maps, illustrations and photographs. There will also be some 2,000 profiles of the people historically linked with gardens, including designers, gardeners and nurserymen.

Nick Bennett, Chairman of the AGT, who attended the October preview, said, 'PAGUK will showcase the work that gardens trusts do, and make the information available to a much wider audience than has been possible so far. This will help to increase awareness of historic gardens, and improve their protection and conservation.'

WHGT Branches are currently considering how their locally-held records can best be incorporated into the database. Information derived from the Cadw Register of Parks and Gardens will be entered into the database by trained data entry staff, but further information, and especially imagery, will be an essential contribution from the Branches. It can be submitted online from the Branches, or sent as paper copy to York.

There is still much to be discovered about historic gardens, and encouraging new volunteers to get involved in researching gardens is one of the project's key aims. A Volunteer Training Manual has recently been distributed to WHGT branch conservation officers, as a practical guide for volunteers at all levels of experience in researching and recording gardens. The manual also gives guidance on how to contribute information and materials to the PAGUK database. Caroline Palmer, and other PAGUK staff will be available to run training sessions to help members get started with data entry.

To view PAGUK records, visit the website at www.parksandgardens.ac.uk and use the facilities 'browse' or 'search' to explore the gardens. Basic summary entries have not yet been completed for all regions of Wales, but an exploration of the website will reveal the potential waiting to be fulfilled.

To find out more about contributing to the database, go to the Home page > Get Involved, or contact your regional Volunteer Co-ordinator, Caroline Palmer at WHGT.

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