the BULLETIN

WELSH HISTORIC GARDENS TRUST YMDDIRIEDOLAETH GERDDI HANESYDDOL CYMRU No. LVIII Spring 2010

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plus THE DUCHESS OF RUTLAND BEGINS OUR INSPIRING NEW COLUMN

and ONE MAN'S WALLED GARDEN

from THE EDITOR

Jonathan Miller once dismissed the term 'Renaissance man' as vulgar: his point was that the multi-talented individual ought to be a universal ideal not an exception of note. We live in an age of specialization. The corporate culture of many workplaces, which increasingly impacts on everyday life, commends – indeed requires – singleness of purpose and focus. The implications of this exclusivity of interest should not be overlooked.

Here at the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust we are fortunate in being able to call on a significant body of specialist knowledge among our members. We do not, however, assume that this knowledge defines any of you. An interest in the walled gardens of Pembrokeshire, for example, need not preclude a passion for point-to-pointing, early Worcester china, the operas of Bellini, Queen Anne furniture or rough shooting. So in this spring issue of The Bulletin, we cast our net a little wider than previously and broaden our focus. I hope that you enjoy the results and that I am not mistaken in my conviction, shared by many officers of the Trust, that those of us who are interested in garden history and the protection and preservation of beautiful or noteworthy man-made landscapes across Wales, also enjoy architectural history, the history of fine and decorative arts, music, literature and the broad compass of both country life in general and Welsh life in particular. We enjoy the royal patronage of a polymath prince. Let us be inspired by his example.

You will, as always, find in the current issue a full gazette of Trust activities. In addition, we are fortunate to have a number of distinguished contributors. Do look at Simon Conway's elegant appraisal of imagined Welsh landscapes in the short stories of early-twentieth-century Welsh writer Dorothy Edwards, and Elizabeth Smart's plea for help in her research into the life and work of William Williams. I am very pleased that the Duchess of Rutland, who grew up in Radnorshire, agreed to write the first of a new column, 'My Welsh View', in which writers will discuss what the natural and man-made landscape of Wales means to them, and that the Trust's ex-chairman Michael Tree has produced the first of our other new column, 'Notes from my Welsh Garden'.

The Trust is deservedly proud of the work it continues to do in defense of gardens and parks across the Principality. This work demands money. In this my first Bulletin, can I persuade you all to spread the word about the Trust's work and encourage everyone you know who shares our interests and concerns to join the Trust and help to fund our important and ongoing task?

MATTHEW DENNISON

from THE CHAIRMAN

The recent demolition of the walled garden and other buildings at Plas Dulas, Clwyd, illustrates the constant nature of the threat to the designed landscape in Wales. This is all the more poignant in view of the very recent removal of the threat to Ruperra, and illustrates the need for constant vigilance by the Trust.

This is the first edition of The Bulletin produced by our new editor Matthew Dennison with an exciting new format – and in colour! I am confident that it will be much enjoyed and we wish Matthew good luck. I would like to thank Carol and Mike Francis of Llanfyrnach for their unstinting design assistance. I must also thank Caroline Palmer, our former Bulletin editor, for the many years of stimulating reading she has provided, in addition to her generosity in sharing her expertise and advice in many different areas.

The work of reinforcing the administration of the Trust continues apace. The new membership database will now ensure that we have accurate and speedy access to information which will be helpful in the Trust's efficient running. My thanks to Rhodri Griffiths for his generous advice and time in this area. John Borron's article in this issue makes it plain why this is important: the role of increasing membership is crucial both to our immediate financial wellbeing and our long-term survival.

Our branches, as ever, have risen to the challenge with exciting programmes. Please remember that members from any branch may attend meetings throughout the country. I hope to see many of you at our AGM at Powis Castle on June 5: a talk by Peter Lord will be followed by two excellent garden visits. Booking details are included in this issue.

Finally, I would like to record the Trust's gratitude to Richard Kelly of CCW, who will soon be retiring. He has been a wise and helpful supporter of the Trust over many years. We wish him a very enjoyable retirement.

GWYNETH HAYWARD

SISTER ACT

In the first quarter of the last century, two unmarried sisters filled spring and summer days on Anglesey with gathering and painting specimens of the plants and flowers which grew on the island. MATTHEW DENNISON admires the watercolours of Gwenddolen and Edith Massey, now in the collection of Oriel Ynys Môn

On 10 July 1911, Edith Massey and her sister Gwenddolen found themselves on Ilkley Moor. The sisters – both unmarried, both in their late forties – were on a motoring tour of Yorkshire. The climate and landscape reminded them of home. Passionately interested in botany, they could not resist the opportunity to collect specimens of those plants they encountered on their travels. 'We dug up a plant of Black Cranberry, with which the Moor was covered,' Edith wrote in the illustrated journal the sisters compiled together. 'I wish I could make it hang down the Rock at home as it did there in thick masses of green.'

Edith does not record the success or otherwise of her efforts with *Empitrium nigrum* at home on the small Massey estate of Cornelyn, Llangoed on Anglesey. Gwenddolen's painting survives, however – alongside a collection of some 506 botanical watercolours she painted over a period of more than two decades. Although Gwenddolen is responsible for all these paintings, the sisters worked together – Edith gathered and tended the specimens – and regarded the long-term undertaking in the light of a joint venture. So, too, did their friends. Marian Williams, an island neighbour at Parciau, Llaneugrad, compared them to the eighteenth-century doyenne of botanical imagery, Mrs Delany: 'she was quite like you and your sister, that intense cleverness in ideas and designs and fervour to carry them out.'

Half a century after Gwenddolen's death at the age of ninety-six, we can appreciate the scale and quality of the sisters' achievement. Their paintings, bequeathed to a family member, were acquired at auction in Somerset in 1982 by Anglesey Borough Council and are now among the treasures of museum and gallery Oriel Ynys Môn. Although they do not comprise a comprehensive flora of the Welsh island, they demonstrate something of the breadth and diversity of plant life on Anglesey before the Second World War and the wildlife depredations associated with modern agricultural practices.

Gwenddolen frequently painted in the open air. Lame, she nevertheless accompanied her sister on prolonged sorties across the island, and the Cornelyn estate in particular. Edith for her part took care of Gwenddolen's painting paraphernalia, specimen vases and jars and the generous picnics which characterize that bygone era. Often the sisters returned to the same plant throughout a growing season, so that summer and autumn foliage, buds, flowers and seedheads are all depicted.

Gwenddolen's paintings are further distinguished by their trilingual annotation in English, Latin and Welsh, thought to be unique among amateur flora of this date. Once an image was complete, executed predominantly in watercolour with heightening in gouache, the sisters mounted it on grey backing paper – with the long-term result that many of the paintings have been foxed and spotted by adhesive stains.

Unlike Mrs Delany, who created her paper 'mosaics' in response to specimens sent from Kew Gardens and the Chelsea Physic Garden, in addition to plants grown in the glasshouses of her patroness, the Duchess of Portland, Gwenddolen and Edith Massey did not advertise their project. It was essentially a private occupation – testament to a shared love of botany and the island to which both were deeply attached. For this reason, their paintings are less well-known than many similar flora. Their discovery will delight all viewers.

The Massey Collection is at Oriel Ynys Môn and is available to researchers to view by appointment.
Readers who enjoyed this article may also enjoy 'Mrs Delany and her Circle' at Sir John Soane's Museum, 13 Lincoln Inn's Fields, London WC2 until May 1; and '"A Garden Within Doors": Plants and Flowers in the Home', at Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road, London E2 until July 25.

who was WILLIAM WILLIAMS?

The early-eighteenth-century cartographer is an elusive figure, as ELIZABETH SMART discovers

William Williams' map by kind permission of Flintshire Record Office. Oxonia Depicta and Gwersyllt Park by kind permission of Lilla Pennant

In 1720, William Williams drew a map of Flintshire and Denbighshire which, according to the map catalogue of the Flintshire Records Office, 'includes rivers, hills, woods. Towns, churches, large houses (representationally), parks. County and hundred boundaries: Offa's and Watt's dykes, main roads. Dee in old channel. Insert views of Chester and Denbigh, Wrexham and Gresford churches. Illustrations of arms and some houses of principal families in borders.'

In addition to being a cartographer, William Williams has been described as an 'architectural draughtsman', responsible for the engravings for *Oxonia Depicta*, a collection of sixty-three copper-engraved, double-page architectural plans and views published in 1733. This work includes large-scale engravings of ten Oxford colleges, in several cases the only surviving record of the college's early-eighteenth-century appearance. Another known work by Williams is his book of maps and drawings undertaken for William Robinson of Gwersyllt Park in 1734.

A Miss Laura Simcock suggested that Williams came from Oswestry (M. Bevan Evans, *Publicatons of the Flintshire Society*, vol. 18, p.75), a conclusion possibly reached from information on the engraving of Williams's map of 1720: 'A New Map of the counties of Denbigh and Flint By Will. Williams, now John

Felton. L. Senexsculpt. Printed, coloured and sold by the present proprietor John Felton of Oswestry in Shropshire.'

A page of the website of The National Library of Wales relating to architectural drawings in the Library's collection describes Williams's map as 'the earliest large-scale Welsh county map' and one which 'also displays detailed elevations of Clwyd's country houses around its periphery in an attempt to promote its purchase amongst the gentry.' This notwithstanding, requests for biographical information, or any other information, relating to William Williams have drawn blanks from The National Library of Wales Aberystwyth, the British Library, Bodleian Library, Ashmolean Museum and the head of antiquarian books at Blackwell's, Oxford.

Have any WHGT members any further suggestions or information?

Elizabeth Smart is Branch Chairman of the Clwyd branch of the WHGT

LANDSCAPE OF THE MIND

SIMON CONWAY explores the role of idealised landscape in the short stories of Welsh writer Dorothy Edwards (1903–34)

Looking out at a rain-soaked garden that 'lies exhausted, like a young girl who has tasted too much the pleasures of love', Dorothy Edwards' narrator sighs helplessly, 'There is no describing the voluptuous feeling a garden gives one.'

Throughout Dorothy Edwards' short stories, such splendidly tangled images of nature and heartbreak shine out from page after page. For Edwards always sets her tragedies (more often than not the fraught intricacies of middle-class love) within a beautiful interwar mish-mash of country estates, walled gardens and rolling fields; exhilarating landscapes where birch trees stand 'like a regiment of young amazons', pink flowers are 'like children looking up to the sky' and lilies blaze out 'like a procession of tall, wicked nuns pushing out their worldly tongues'.

This disconnection between fertile surroundings and decomposing human relationships embodies in tangible form Edwards' preferred theme: the difficulties – often the impossibilities – of making genuine contact with other people ('only disconnect' could stand as subtitle to her work). Indeed, one of the most affecting moments in her collection *Rhapsody* comes with the realization of precisely this at the end of her story, 'The Conquered'. The narrator, an unnamed male (nearly all of Edwards' narrators are men) suddenly understands why he cannot relate to a beautiful woman met on a trip to the country: there are 'gay people and sad people', he reasons, 'and however charming and beautiful the gay people are, their souls can never really meet the souls of those who are born for suffering and melancholy'. Such desperate mismatches – whether between the aesthetic and the ignorant (in 'A Country House') or the young and the old (devastatingly sketched out in 'Summertime' and 'Sweet Grapes') – lie at the centre of all the stories. The poignancy of this is profoundly deepened by the knowledge that Edwards herself was very much one of the 'sad people', finally throwing herself beneath a train at the age of thirty-one.

Despite Dorothy Edwards' strong Welsh nationalist bent, none of these rich landscapes (with the exception of 'The Conquered') explicitly identifies its Welshness, with some, indeed, purporting to take place elsewhere in the country. Yet it is inconceivable that Glamorgan-born, Cardiff-educated Edwards should not have reached back to the Wales where she spent the major part of her short life for such creative luxuriance. She does, in fact, point us in exactly that direction with characters like her nostalgic novelist in 'Days', who finds success writing only 'about the people and the scenes of the district around his old home', and who, on visiting the places he played as a child, finds within himself 'a new energy and power which it would be difficult to describe to anyone'; or again, the tortured engineer in 'A Country House', falling wretchedly in love with his patron's wife, and explaining 'when one likes a place, it is because one went to it in childhood or something of that sort'. Reconsidered in that light, Edwards' black rocks and rose trees, brutal cliffs and forests reveal themselves as what they are – the spectacular, complex realization of a modernist Welsh pastoral.

Simon Conway is a barrister at law and occasional reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement
'Rhapsody' by Dorothy Edwards is published by Parthian Books (www.libraryofwales.org)

'PENLLERGARE – A PARADISE ALMOST LOST' Study Day

2010 is the bicentenary of the birth of John Dillwyn Llewelyn, award-winning amateur photographer, scientist and creator of what Cadw has described as 'a very important Picturesque and Romantic landscape of the mid-nineteenth century'. That landscape, at Dillwyn Llewelyn's former home of Penllergare, has enjoyed a chequered recent history: this year also marks the tenth anniversary of the foundation of The Penllergare Trust in response to the site's vulnerability and significance. In 1836, the house at Penllergare was remodelled by Edward Hayock and enlarged by the addition of a conservatory. At about the same time, Dillwyn Llewelyn fitted up an orchid house within the walled garden. His illustrated article about his orchid house was subsequently included in the first ever issue of the Journal of the Horticultural Society.

On May 15, the West Glamorgan Branch of the WHGT, in conjunction with The Penllergare Trust, will hold a joint study day in Swansea. Tickets cost £25 for members (cheques made payable to WHGT), from Rita Lees, West Glamorgan WHGT Branch Secretary, Coedmor, 2 Cwmbach Road, Llanelli SA15 4EF. An sae is requested.

my WELSH VIEW
The Duchess of Rutland

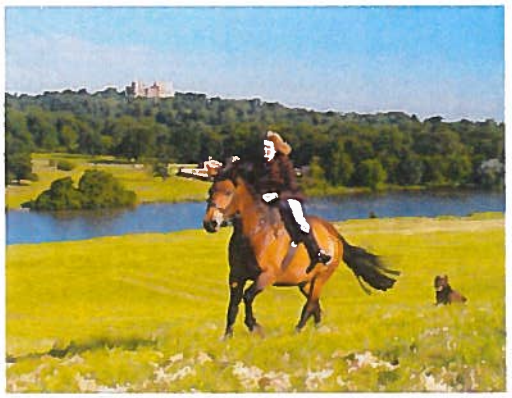
I must have been six years old when I first noticed rhododendrons. They grew in sugared-almond abundance in the woodland gardens of Stanage Castle, close to my parents' farm in Radnorshire. I had my first pony, Betty. Together Betty and I explored every nook and cranny of the surrounding country. We made many discoveries together: the extraordinary rhododendrons and azaleas of Stanage; bluebell woods amid the high hills behind the farm; the tiny, unobtrusive flowers which carpeted coppices across the valley. I fell in love then with a vision of natural loveliness which will remain with me for ever, my own child's-eye-view Welsh idyll. Bluebells are still my favourite flowers and I still love woodland gardens.

Since 2001, when my husband and I took over David's family home, Belvoir Castle, I've been lucky enough to have my own woodland garden. Unlike the gardens at Stanage, which were enriched by a long period of plant collecting, the Spring Garden at Belvoir was created in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and largely untouched for the next 200 years. My mother-in-law began the task of restoration which I have taken up. It will undoubtedly occupy me for the remainder of my time at Belvoir. Over the last decade I have planted thousands of camellias, rhododendrons and azaleas – inspired by the evidence of surviving planting but also by memories of that Welsh woodland garden of my childhood and the soft, welcoming prettiness of the Marches valley my parents still farm.

I discovered a coincidence, too. I have been greatly helped at Belvoir by Charles Williams of Burncoose Nurseries in Cornwall. Charles's family owns Caerhays Castle, with its own wonderful woodland plantings. In the nineteenth century, members of Charles's family brought back exotic and precious rhododendron and azalea specimens from the Far East. In order to protect their gorgeous quarry from potential theft, they hid them away at a more remote estate belonging to cousins – Stanage Castle. By a twist of fate, I am helped today in my garden in Leicestershire by a descendant of the family who planted those azaleas and rhododendrons which first drew me to woodland gardening half a lifetime ago in rural Wales.

My parents' garden was a hands-on affair, in which all of us had a purpose and a role. I was chief weeder. It was a practical garden, which supplied fruit and vegetables, flowers for the house, ingredients for jams and chutneys. The 5th Duchess of Rutland, making her garden at Belvoir in the early nineteenth century, regarded the whole Vale of Belvoir as her garden, the castle's immediate surrounds simply a means of framing the view. For me as a child in Wales, it was the valley surrounding our garden which inspired me with images of beauty that continue to inspire me today. I feel immensely privileged to have grown up in such a beautiful place – and passionately support the work of all those societies dedicated to preserving the unique beauty of Wales, both natural and, like those woodland gardens at Stanage Castle, man-made.

The Duchess of Rutland is currently restoring the gardens at Belvoir Castle (www.belvoircastle.com)



notes from MY WELSH GARDEN

In the first of a column celebrating owners' relationships with their gardens, former WHGT chairman MICHAEL TREE shares his pleasure in his walled garden in the Conwy Valley

On the face of it, walled gardens are among the most enduring beached whales of the countryside. The absurdly low cost of supermarket vegetables, and the relatively high cost of gardening help, have rendered the fruit and produce walled gardens of former days neither practical nor pleasurable. Perhaps it is the very persistence of this rural orthodoxy which has preserved so many Welsh walled gardens – hidden wildernesses, overlooked by the rapacious eye of the developer. But need this be the case?

My own walled garden was overgrown with oak, sycamore, and ash – towering, pre-First World War self-seedings. The walls themselves had collapsed almost completely. Even so it was a romantic place. It took me a day to strip what remained of the walls of their verdant cloak of ivy, then I felled the imposter trees. I realised, with no forward planning, that a new project had begun.

I might have given up at this stage, distracted by more pressing calls on my time, were it not for Cadw. A Cadw inspector came to visit and left in a state of high excitement, having identified the garden as one of the earliest walled gardens in Wales, originally built by the Wynns of Gwydir for nearby Plas Tirion. This discovery resulted in the inclusion of the whole property in the Cadw/Iccomos Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest In Wales. The subsequent decision of the Assembly's Tir Gofal organisation that the repair of the stone walls could be grant-assisted under the terms of the scheme meant that the show really was on the road.

Thus it was that, two years ago, a master stone walling mason, Osian Roberts of Llanrwst, spent an entire summer rebuilding the dry stone walls. By the autumn, for the first time in a century, Hendre House had a fully walled garden. It was still unclear what ultimately I would do with my nicely walled acre. The first edition Ordnance Survey sheets showed the historic layout, although all evidence of paths had long since disappeared, and nothing came to light with a few exploratory trenches.

Serendipity struck again in the shape of local builder Alan Williams, who had no vegetable garden of his own. With two friends, Mike and Rob, he decided that they could make 'our' walled garden productive again. To this end they cleared stumps whose roots went down over eight feet, laid on water from a nearby stream, prepared access to the historic layout and tilled the land for the first time. We drew up a written agreement, based mostly on good faith, and now share a fully functioning walled garden which will shortly be planted with quince, medlar and mulberry, in addition to historic Welsh fruit varieties.

Alan, Mike, Rob and I have now been joined by a beekeeper, bringing the tally of those working in the walled garden to five. The Victorians calculated garden help at a ratio of five men to the acre for poorer employers, seven in the case of richer garden owners. How happy I am to be able to count myself among poor men – infinitely enriched by this small instance of garden restoration which has brought so much pleasure to all involved.

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from THE TREASURER

All charities are going through a difficult time at the moment and this is true of the Trust. In general, charities are suffering from a severe decline in their investment income due to low interest rates. The depression is also affecting members' ability to make donations and, in some cases, even to afford subscriptions, and has resulted in a sharp decline in the grants offered by government organizations – in our case, the Countryside Council for Wales. In 2008, CCW gave us £7,250; for 2009, they have offered £2,000. We must learn to manage without regular support of this nature.

In 2008, the Trust's centre had a loss of £3,000. This is concealed in our accounts as all the branch receipts are included with the central receipts. In 2009, the loss will be larger. This cannot continue. We have tried in recent months to address this situation. I have written to those members who, through administrative dilatoriness on the Trust's part, continued to pay their subscription at the pre-2006 rate – approximately half the membership. Members have responded generously and so our membership receipts for 2009 will be artificially high.

The other measures we have looked at are a reduction in the centre's costs. With hindsight it is clear that it was reckless to open an office and engage an administrator and a part-time assistant to deal with membership. Our existing income did not justify it and continuing government assistance was not forthcoming. I hope we can maintain the office with an assistant for perhaps four hours a week. We are also looking closely at the cost of publications, which in 2009 was about £11,000. Unless sponsorship can be found it will be impossible to fund another Gerddi. The Bulletin is essential, but we are looking at ways to reduce its cost.

The custom has grown up of the centre making a contribution to branch expenses. This is sadly no longer sustainable as the branches acknowledge.

All this reinforces the need for us to increase our membership. If we could double this, it would no longer matter if we received no government support. In 2010, the Committee has decided to have a great membership drive. I hope all members will support this essential aim. We are all part of the organization and, unless we pull together, we shall fail.

JOHN R E BORRON