

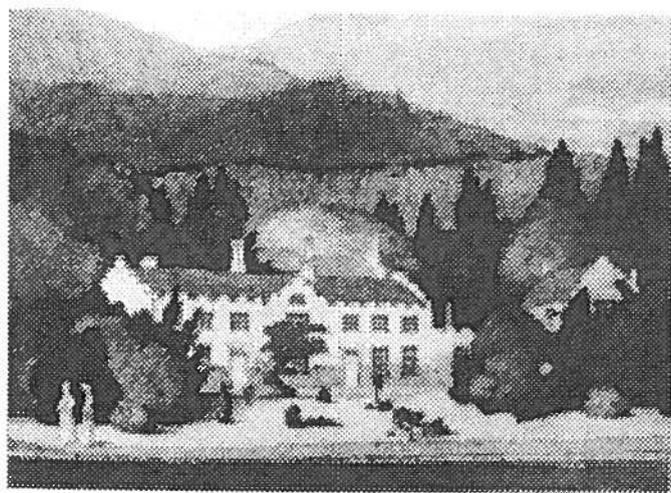
SUMMER ISSUE 1993

THE GARDENS AT ABERPERGWM

Elizabeth F. Belcham

The gardens at Aberpergwm, so carefully tended by gardeners under the close supervision of generations of the Williams family, now lie in a distressing state of dereliction.

Aberpergwm in the Vale of Heath, West Glamorgan, had been in the home of the Williams family since the sixteenth century and although it has remained in one family's occupation for over 400 years, very little is known of the gardens. The grounds were probably never restyled by any other than the family members, being used mainly for food production rather than as ornamental pleasure gardens until the late 1700s.



Aberpergwm by William W. Young

The estate was not large compared to those of many of the Glamorgan gentry, but for its day and location, it could boast some of the garden features that would place it in vogue with contemporary estates. The Welsh cultural heritage of the family is legendary, yet its traditions would not have held back new horticultural fashions and innovations. A glasshouse must be presumed to have then been in existence at Aberpergwm in 1811, as in the month of October one Williams brother wrote of another 'Tom is in the garden working under my Aunt's directions... where shall we put the orange trees' which... 'are much grown'. A vine was also to be found there. Fresh exotic fruits were therefore available for the table.

Shortly after this date a number of estate 'improvements' were instigated on the death of Rees Williams the elder. His son, William Williams, travelling abroad, left the estate under the stewardship of his brother Rees for many years. As with most estate and garden 'improvements', a lot of the old style features were lost. Work carried out during William's absence was later (c. 1870s) recalled by his sister Maria Jane (*Llinos*), the renowned harpist and singer, as including (amongst a catalogue of estate improvements) more specific works near to the house:

Buildings at Aberpergwm removed

Farmyard consisting of Cowhouses; two Barns, one the largest in the County of Glamorgan; Carriage horses stables,

saddle horses stables, farm horses stables; Sheds; Carpenter's shop; Horse pond; High garden wall surrounding the premises, 2 large doors closing the yard; Cart houses, Coach houses, within the wall; Mill, mill stables, Miller's house—high wall surrounding Mill premises and garden on the mill side & separating the mill & premises from the garden, two large doors or gates enclosing all—piggeries and poultry houses inside this large wall. Greenhouse built by Rees Williams on the site of the old mill which was so old that it paid no tythe.

1835 saw the publication of the *Guide to the Scenery etc. of Ulynneath* by William Weston Young, a friend of William Williams. A narrative description of Aberpergwm, and verse, along with a watercolour sketch shows William's improvements to his grounds.

...nature has truly done much here and considerable skill has been displayed, in altering surrounding grounds, taking away buildings, hedges, trees and giving the whole a general finish without much display of art...

But much around this mansion now is changed;
Art has achieved a pleasing victory here
And scenes which fancy then arranged,
In gradual progression now appear.
Much has the power of labour also done;
From deep and treach'rous bogs, and tangled brakes,
New lands arise, and fertile fields are won,
And nature every form of beauty takes...

William's plans for the kitchen garden, were ambitious, and yet practical:

Hothouse—melon beds—Cucumber beds—gardner's house—tool house—tanpit, manure—gateway for cart to enter, all contiguous in one part of the garden. Small pool of water in the centre of D^o. terrace in upper part the wall surrounding the garden built in imitation of the walls of a

fortified Town—with battlements & square or round towers (low) at each corner with occasional breaks in the intermediate spaces, such as the buttresses, or projecting machicolations, lancet windows—arched doorways walled up & each of the four walls to be seventy yards in length forming a perfect square. Entrance gateway to the gardner's house between two towers as at Chepstow Castle, height of the wall above the level of the ground twelve feet.

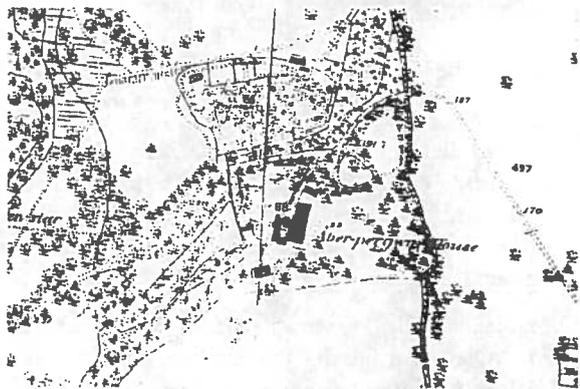
Alas for Aberpergwm as well as Glynneath, most of William's fanciful ideas remained just that. However a certain number of achievements can be laid at his and his brother Rees' door, for the grounds ultimately contained such features:

...attached to the House are a walled Garden of between two and three Acres a Hothouse a very large Greenhouse and Conservatory a Pinery Lawns Shrubberies and a park of about One hundred and sixty Acres (of which about Sixty Acres are covered with Wood) in a ring fence...

Grounds of this extent demanded a considerable amount of staff to undertake the upkeep...

out of the House...a Head Gardener two constant Under Gardeners a Gardener's Boy with occasional helpers

The walled garden which can be identified on the 1st edition OS map of 1876 shows some of the features he described, but this garden now lies derelict, its wall breached by a watercourse installed following adjacent opencast mining. The steps, walling and terracing features remain, but are overgrown.



1st edition OS map

In the kitchen garden; an acorn that had been planted by his mother in April 1833, at three feet from the ground measured ten inches around; periodically, William noted the measurements—by 1843 it had grown to a girth of nearly three feet. A descendant in 1900 had written in William's book that the tree then measured eight feet ten inches around.

Three trees were presented to him by J. Jones Esq., of Derry Ormond, Cardiganshire in 1833, and that February he planted a *Pinus nobilis*, 'near where the old stables stood'; a *Pinus deodara* 'near the haha on the green', and a *Pinus ponderosa* 'near to the old portugese laurels'. A significant number of pines and parkland trees remain on the site, although vandalism to these as well as to the fabric of the house, has taken its toll.

Many features that William created within his estate have alas been lost to the onslaught of opencast mining. Rides and

paths described in the *Handbook of the Vale of Heath* (1852) include one noted as having had a stone seat placed by the roadside with the inscription

*Gorphwysfa i Gymro glan,
Rho ddiolch i Dduw,
A cher yn y blaen.*

A resting place for Welshman true;
Let him thank God, enjoy the view,
And then his onward way pursue.

Further along a monumental stone to a favourite pony remarked in Latin

Poor Corrin lies in this sequester'd spot:
May his repose be as easy as his trot.

William, a supporter of the Celtic cultural revival of the 1830s also instigated a competition to provide a prize-winning englyn, to be inscribed on a rock at Ffynon Pergwm. The winning stanza by the Revd John Jones (*Tegid*) reads

*O ddaioni Duw i ddynion—llawn wyf
Lloned sychedigion;
Hoff y rhed, o hyd, ffrwd hon,
Gwiw liviant! ma] gloew afon*

Of God's goodness to men—I am full
Rejoice those who are thirsty;
Dearly and constantly it flows,
A worthy flow like a bright river.

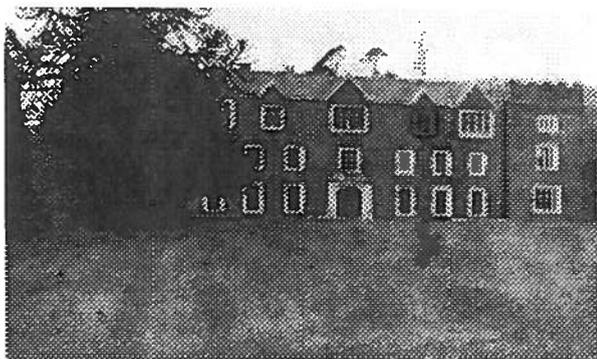
This rock still stands but the englyn now is impossible to discern, and it must be said that the stanza is hardly an accurate description of the flow!

By 1873 Morgan S. Williams, William's son, was the fifth largest landowner in Glamorgan. His land ownership amounted to over 3,000 acres with an annual gross estimated rental of £2,700; in Breconshire he owned a further 860 acres with over £800 rental. John Llewellyn of Penllergaer and Ynisgerwn headed the list with over 8,700 acres; the Earl of Jersey over 7,000; Major Vaughan Lee of Llanelay and Rheola over 6,000; and Howell Gwyn over 4,500.

A programme of massive refurbishment of the mansion and grounds was begun in 1875. Morgan employed the architect Ben Lawrence of Lawrence and Goodman, Newport; John Linton, Builders and Contractors of Newport signed a contract in July 1876 to carry out the works that same year. Work to the grounds included excavations and drainage, the construction of the terrace wall, and the infilling of the pond to the north of the house.

In its prime, the gardens were lyrically described in the *South Wales Daily News* (c. 1913):

The gardens and grounds which surround Aberpergwm are singularly beautiful, a beauty that results in part from the luxuriance and wonderful variety of the vegetation and partly from the fact that the ground on every side but the east is on a slope. The grounds immediately around the house are separated from the park by the stream which rattles down Cwmpergwm, and which runs along a deep paved channel. The drive crosses this stream by a bridge which has picturesque stone parapets pierced in quatrefoils. By this bridge is a



Morgan's remodelled house and grounds

pair of charmingly designed hammered iron gates which were the work of local craftsmen in Neath and bear the date 1825. South of the house the ground falls away rapidly and the garden descends in terraces to the level of the broad bosomed mead which extends as far as the thick grove of trees which skirts the canal bank.

The main gardens, which are very extensive are all behind the house, from which they are separated by a lordly avenue of Scotch fir trees. The gardens slope up the hill and have a southerly aspect. The ornamental gardens, which are those at the bottom of the slope are traversed by thick yew hedges which form an effective backing to the wide herbaceous borders which traverse each section..

Picturesqueness is added by the fact that the upper end of the flower garden is terraced and a flight of broad stone steps flanked by stone parapets confer a delightfully old-world appearance. From the terrace above, classical stone figures look down upon...below.

Above this are the extensive glass-houses, and beyond these the kitchen garden extends until it meets the lower fringe of the great oak wood that covers the hillside. At the present time, massive alterations are in progress with a view to further extending the gardens. But after all its magnificent trees are the chief glory of the environment of Aberpergwm. Above the broad green sward on the right hand side of the drive as you reach the mansion are some of the finest trees in South Wales. Among these is a silver fir which rises to a height of 120 feet and which is probably the loftiest in the county if not the whole principality. There, stately tulip tree adds variety, and the beech and other conifers of unusual proportions and sycamore are also characterised by great luxuriance of growth and beauty of form. Yew trees evidently of great age, and cut into pyramid shape are to be seen in several directions and there are a number of very large mulberry trees.

When the scandal of the elopement of Godfrey Williams with his estate manager's wife in the 1930's made a return to his ancestral home unacceptable, the estate deteriorated. Godfrey spent his inheritance and returned only to be buried in the family graveyard. From 1948 the house was occupied by the NCB who maintained the grounds. The staff, many of whom lived locally in Glynneath, took pleasure of using the gardens and tennis lawn for recreation. This was a privilege that had not been afforded to them by by the local squires, when they had occupied the house. The grounds of Aberpergwm then were

only opened on special occasions such as the village fête and sports day, although surplus garden vegetables could be purchased. In the 1920s (and the scene is probably reminiscent of a hundred years earlier) a child being sent with a basket and a shilling to fetch vegetables from the big house, was stopped at every gate and asked, as he walked along the carriage road, 'Who are you? Has your mam given you a list? Let me have a look at it! Have you the money? Dont walk on the grass in the middle—only in the wheel ruts!' On the return trip the child would again be stopped, and the basket checked to see there weren't any extras in there!

The gardens of Aberpergwm now lie derelict. The walled garden, the shrubbery, the terrace, the lawns, the pinery and the parkland all share the same fate as the ruins of the late Victorian house—vandalism. Yet many of the parkland trees still dominate the Aberpergwm landscape, and glimpses of steps and walls can still be seen amidst the undergrowth. The hills which form the backdrop to the ruins of the house and grounds, although re-contoured in part by the NCB, still appear to protectively enfold Aberpergwm as they have for the last eight hundred years.

The future of the site is unknown. Aberpergwm is still owned by the Williams family, and the new owner of the estate has graciously given permission for the West Glamorgan branch of the WHGT to survey the site, and record its findings. A date in the early autumn has yet to be arranged.

A book, *ABOUT ABERPERGWM* by Elizabeth F. Belcham, is available locally in bookshops, (220 pages HB) priced £15.00 or from the author, Pant y Gwarthog, Aberpergwm, Glynneath, West Glamorgan SA11 5RG. Cheques payable to Heritage Ventures (+ £2.50 p&tp).

GAZETTEER STUDY DAY

at
OLD GWERNYFED

Friday, 24 September

The Principal Speaker will be

ELISABETH WHITTLE

Coordinator of the VCADW/ICOMOS Register of
Landscapes, Parks and Gardens.

Details to Follow

HISTORIC GARDEN

Managing our great garden heritage

WHAT IS HISTORIC GARDEN?

Historic Garden is a quarterly magazine for all who own, manage and love our great garden heritage. A source of practical information and an open forum that is becoming increasingly important for those who are conserving, restoring and sustaining our great gardens and landscapes.

Subscribers come from a wide range of interests, but are all united by a love of our great horticultural traditions. From private owners and their head gardeners to estate managers and botanical directors. It is to these custodians of our gardens that **Historic Garden** is directed. However, we recognise that there is a whole sector of the public who belong to garden trusts, conservation bodies and horticultural societies who also have a passionate interest in historic gardens and landscapes.

Historic Garden enables the interested garden visitor, as well as the historian, researcher and lecturer, to gain a better understanding of the complexity of restoring, conserving and developing our rich horticultural heritage.

Regular Features Include:

- Conservation and restoration
- Management and design
- Garden profile
- The plant centre and garden shop
- New products
- Education and interpretation
- Mechanisation
- Plant profile
- Book reviews
- Directory



Historic Garden is published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter – Subscribe today. Annual subscription £7.20 (US\$25), 4 issues. I enclose a cheque/P.O. for payable to **Historic Garden**.

Name _____

Address _____

Post/Zip Code _____

New Subscription Renewal

Send your subscription to: **Historic Garden**, Philip Swindells Associates, 28 Albert Street, Harrogate. HG1 1JT. UK. Tel: (0423) 568081 Fax: (0423) 568080
Editor: Philip Swindells MIHort. MISTC. AMITD. NSch. FLS.

identified older trees and hedges from the sketches. Some of the smaller shrubs and most of the flowers have disappeared, but the purple crocuses still swathe the slope below the Wendy hut—what was the origin of the name? Fortunately the new lawns and flower beds have been regularly maintained, and fit in well with the old planting. Meanwhile other volunteers took photographs, dowsed for buried features or wrote up the notes for their group.

After three hours we were all well pleased with our work and eager to tackle other gardens on the list. However we first have to finish collating the data, filling in the forms and drawing plans so that Christopher can assess the results. We also have to discuss what we learnt on that memorable day in April so that we can make recommendations. It would be a great pity if the remaining 'secret garden' were lost after mellowing for nearly 70 years.

If anyone else in the South and Mid Glamorgan area would like to volunteer to help record gardens, or knows of a garden which we should add to the list of those worth considering for the Gazetteer, please contact any of the branch committee members or:

Val Caple, 111, Heol Isaf, Radyr, Cardiff, CF4 8DW

Gazetteer

Since the last report you received, a number of changes have been made to the overall aims and objectives of the Gazetteer Project. The first of these has been to abandon the idea of a reference document for use by local Planning Authorities, as the general response from planners has been very disappointing. However, the archaeological trust of Wales have agreed to place any garden site we request on their Sites and Monuments Register, whereby we shall receive immediate notification of any planning applications that occur on garden sites, both of local importance and on the Cadw Register.

In respect of Branch training in Gazetteer site survey techniques, so far South & Mid Glamorgan, Clwyd, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire have completed training sessions. As a result of these training events a number of clear short-comings have become increasingly evident, caused mainly by attempting to achieve too much within a very limited space of time. The most obvious difficulty is that associated with trying to provide a structural uniformity to information collected during site survey work. For this reason it was thought that a more

long term approach to the Gazetteer project may be desirable, the first phase being simply for Branches to make up an inventory of garden sites that are of local importance and list their essential features. These inventories can when the time arises be included in the Gazetteer Database, along with basic details of sites on the Cadw Register. Implementing this particular change does mean that the new Gazetteer Survey Form will have to be altered yet again, to include only the most important aspects of each site. However, the benefits will be two-fold: branches will be able, in a relatively short space of time, to list primary details of all sites within their area, and then at any time after the initial inventory has been compiled undertake more detailed surveys.

As well as details of Historic Garden and Landscape features, there have been a number of suggestions for enhancing the Gazetteer. It might include such things as a Register of Gardens at Risk, a listing of sources of advice and information on Historic Garden management and maintenance. It has also been proposed that the database should include provision for a networking facility, to assist co-ordination of training and volunteer resources and provide information on sources of funding for local Branch projects.

If before the next issue of this update you require any further information on the Gazetteer project, or have any suggestions as to how you feel it could be improved, then please contact Christ Colins, the Project Manager, at the Trust Office, by either dropping him a line, or calling him on 0239 810432 (or 0597 89361 evenings and weekends).

The Beauties of Creation

"The Beauties of the Creation, or a New Moral System of Natural History; displayed in the most singular, curious, and beautiful, Quadrupeds, Birds, Insects, Trees and Flowers, designed to inspire Youth with Humanity towards the Brute Creation, and bring them early acquainted with the wonderful works of the Divine Creator" was published in 1790 with woodcuts by Thomas Bewick. Without presuming readers of *The Bulletin* to have need of similar inspiration, we feel they might appreciate a taste of its quality and have therefore selected a flower for the season.

'Although all the species of Jessamines grow in a very irregular form, and are never submitted to the pruning-knife, they are a beautiful ornament to any garden. Of the Jessamine, there are too many sorts to be



JESSAMINE.

described; we shall therefore confine ourselves to the Common Jessamine, which is so great a decoration to the cottages of our peasants, as well as the gardens of our nobility. It is a shrub that shoots forth several small branches; which are adorned with leaves oblong, pointed, placed in pairs along each branch, which terminates with a single leaf: at the end of the branches grow the blossoms, in form of umbrellas, consisting of five delicate white leaves, which possess a most agreeable smell. When the Jessamine is in bloom, nothing can be more pleasing than the contrast of the green ground with the starry flowers with which it is so numerously studded.'

Curiosities

Historic Tools

With reference to the Dock Spudder described in the Spring Issue, and other bygone implements, members are referred to Dr Christopher Thacker's catalogue of *Historic Garden Tools*, related to the 1991 Exhibition at the Museum of Garden History, or, in extreme cases, by his great kindness, to Dr Thacker himself.

BRANCH ACCOUNTS

One of the effects of the Charities Act 1990 has been to clarify the relationship of Branches with the Trust itself and the responsibilities of the Trustees, i.e. the members of the Trust Committee.

It is now clear that Branch accounts form part of the Trust's accounts as a whole and Treasurers are asked to note that their accounts must be closed on 31 December 1993 (regardless of when their financial year started) and that their accounts—together with all supporting documentation—must be submitted to the Trust Office for auditing with the Trust's central accounts.

The Standing Financial Instructions will be amended accordingly and copies sent to Branch Treasurers. For further information please contact the Trust Office.

INSURANCE FOR TRUST MEMBERS

Members of the Trust are insured in cases of personal accident and for public liability under the terms of a policy issued through the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers

Copies of the detailed 'Statement of Cover' are available from the Trust Office but—in essence—all members (including school children) are covered for Public Liability, and all members up to the age of 85 years for Personal Accident, "whilst engaged on conservation or conservation-related activities".

Because both forms of cover are restricted to members Branches are strongly advised to put in hand a 'day membership' system when arranging site visits which are open to non-members. A satisfactory system would consist of the payment of a 'day subscription' and a signing-in book.

News from the Branches

Unfortunately, the editor of the Bulletin is not psychic. With the honourable exceptions of the South and Mid Glamorgan Branch's outing to The Court, St Fagans on p. 5 and Gwent's continuing activities in the Nelson Garden, a veil of mystery lies over the doings of our branches since the Spring Issue. We understand that Carmarthen and Pembroke held their launch parties at Picton, Ceredigion organised a tour of Hafod and West Glamorgan heard two lectures from Ivor Stokes, but descriptions of these interesting events are wholly lacking. Come on, Branch Secretaries. What are you about? The purpose of this Bulletin is communication. You don't have to write a lengthy article, although a brief account of a particular event or undertaking will always be welcome. But a tiny note for this page lets everyone know you're still alive. Please.

In the meantime, here are some dates for your diaries.

CEREDIGION BRANCH

Tuesday 26 October 7.30pm
Rhydlewis Gardening Club

GWENT BRANCH

The Nelson Summer House Garden, Monmouth

Work on the garden continues and the owners, Lloyds Bank, have kindly agreed to open it on 25th July, when the Monmouth Civic Society will be in charge, and again on 15th August and 26th September, when manning will be by Gwent members.

GWYNEDD BRANCH

Saturday 24 July 2.30pm
Visit to Nerquis Hall

Thursday 2 September 3.30pm
Visit to Bryn Bras Castle, garden and house.

Wednesday 29 September 12.30pm
Michaelmas Dinner, Menai'r Uchaf Hall, Dolgellau.

Thursday 4 November 5.00pm
AGM Llanymstumwy Village Hall.

S & M GLAMORGAN

Sunday 3 September
Lecture on Thomas Mawson by David Mawson. Duffryn. (With RHS).

Ask the Library

County Library Garden History Coverage

The South and Mid Glamorgan Branch contacted its two county library services to ask whether they had a bibliography of their garden history coverage. Both replied that they had not but Mid Glamorgan offered to compile one.

The book let has now appeared and is available in branch libraries in Mid Glamorgan. The coverage is modest but Trust members will know what can be borrowed. The booklet may also encourage other library users to dip into the subject, perhaps to become potential Trust members.

The library also offered to mount a display of books at a meeting of the Branch, if requested. Have other branches approached their Library Service?

Patricia Moore

RADIO WALES

Sheena Crossley, Welsh regional correspondent for *Garden Answers* and gardening consultant for radio Wales, is eager for news from Branches. She will gladly publicise Trust events in her weekly radio spot and also, given the necessary four months notice, in the magazine. Mrs Crossley will also be happy to visit gardens and take photographs, so for any branch that wants to puff off its progress: here's your chance. Ring the Trust office for how to get in touch.

HISTORIC HOUSES, CASTLES AND GARDENS

This annual guide is said to be the most comprehensive guide to properties in Great Britain and Ireland and the 1993 edition contains a section on the 'Garden Landscape Heritage of Wales: Decay and Revival'. A few copies have been donated to the Trust and are available from the Trust Office on a first-come, first-served basis at £7.00 each, plus p & p at cost: the publisher's price is £7.45.

POSTCARDS

Many members will have visited **Hortus Cambrensis**, the exhibition mounted by the National Trust's Foundation for Art in association with Oriol 31 and this Trust.

Remaining stocks of postcards depicting works in the exhibition by John Hubbard, Michael Cullimore, Ivy Smith, Colin Paynton, David Nash and others are now awaiting clearance and are ideal for use in fund-raising, selling for upwards of 15p each. Packs of 100 are available from the Trust Office at £5.00 each (ie 5p per card); p & p at cost.

Notes for Members

TRUST REVIEW 1992/93

The Review describes the work of the Trust and what has been achieved in the first year under the auspices of the Partnership Programme with the Countryside Council for Wales. It has already been issued to members but limited numbers are now available from the Trust Office to Branches for use in publicising the work of the Trust. They are free of charge but a contribution to the costs of postage would be appreciated.

Don't forget the

Extraordinary General Meeting

at Aberystwyth

on Saturday 2 October

11.30 am

THE
SHELL
BETTER
BRITAIN
CAMPAIGN.



Gardens and garden structures are already numbered among the projects in receipt of grants. Any community-based voluntary group can apply, at any time up to the end of November this year and grants of up to £750 are awarded to help with the cost of specific items related to the practical needs of your project. The address to write to is: Shell Better Britain Campaign, Red House, Hill Lane, Great Barr, Birmingham B43 6LZ. Or phone Helpline: 021 358 0744.

IGA Stuttgart -
Expo 93



Members may not have heard of the International Gardens Exposition taking place in Stuttgart this summer. The brochure calls it **Das Natur Schauspiel** and, if the description inside is anything to go by, the whole experience is Ebbw Vale with knobs on. Further information can be had from the Trust Office and Andrea Vals, who wrote to us about it, kindly offers personal help in locating hotels or with any other information.

Apology

The editor tenders her deepest apologies to Mrs Delany for saddling her with an unwanted 'e' in the Spring Issue. Carelessness, ma'am. Pure carelessness.

WHO DO I CONTACT?

Trust Office:	Plas Tyllwyd, Tanygroes, Cardigan SA43 2JD Phone/Fax: 0239 810 432
Brecon & Radnor:	Miss Anne Carter (0982 570 279)
Carmarthen:	Mrs Wendy Foulger (0267 231 880)
Ceredigion:	Mr Donald Moore (0970 828 777)
Clwyd:	Mrs Sara Furse (0352 770 360)
Gwent:	Mrs Sheila Thorneycroft (0600 83334)
Gwynedd	Mr Simon Evans (076 685 324)
Montgomeryshire	Mr John Gleave (0686 640 494)
Pembrokeshire	Col. Richard Gilbertson (083 483 396)
South & Mid Glamorgan	Mrs Muriel Beck (0222 792 798)
West Glamorgan	Mr Chris Adam (0639 850 763)

Advertisement Rates Full page £20 Half page £10
Classified: 50p per line Boxed: 3 lines minimum, from £2.50