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The Gardens of Gwydir Castle Dr Meinir Moncrieffe

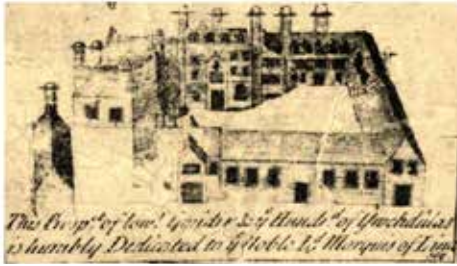
Nestled in the Conwy Valley, Gwydir stands as one of the most evocative remnants of the Welsh Renaissance gentry world. Once the seat of the Wynn family, who flourished there from around 1500 until the late seventeenth century, Gwydir encapsulates the layered history of a family whose fortunes shaped and were shaped by their land.

Today, Gwydir's ten-acre, Grade I listed gardens reflect both their sixteenth-century origins and the later interventions of celebrated designers, including the horticulturist Lewis Kennedy (1789-1877) and the architect Sir Charles Barry (1795-1860) in the 1820s and 30s. These grounds are renowned not only for their design but also for their extraordinary trees: around eighty are now protected by Tree Preservation Orders. Among them are the venerable Giant Yew, estimated at being between six hundred and thousand years old, and three of the original twelve Cedars of Lebanon planted in 1625 to celebrate the marriage of Charles I and Princess Henrietta Maria.

Traces of the Wynn family's own building campaigns re-

main embedded in the fabric of the estate. Surviving sixteenth-century architectural features include the gateway built in 1559 by John Wynn ap Maredudd (d.1559) and the series of elegant stone arches erected c.1600 by his grandson Sir John Wynn, 1st Baronet (d.1626/7). Wynn heraldry is still visible in the carved stonework, a material assertion of lineage and prestige. The earliest known illustration of Gwydir, dated 1710 and appearing on a regional map, signals its former prominence - though by then the Wynn dynasty had ended. On the death of Sir Richard Wynn, 4th Baronet, in 1674, his daughter and heiress Mary (d. 1689) married into the Bertie family of Grimsthorpe, Lincolnshire, and Gwydir passed into an English estate, closing the chapter on over a hundred and fifty years of Wynn dynastic dominance in North Wales.

Contemporary and later depictions help us to visualise the splendour of Gwydir's historic gardens. One particularly evocative example is a painting by Peter Welford, the current owner, titled *Gwydir c.1620*. Its composition offers a carefully considered rendering of the rich Eliza-



Above: Gwydir, Llanrwst as depicted on A New Map of Denbighshire and Flintshire, NLW: MA002/Attic by William Williams and John Felton, engraved by J. Senex, c. 1710.



Right: Gwydir c. 1620, Peter Welford, (2022), tempura and oil on panel.

bethan garden culture that once framed the house. The work is the result of over thirty years of research, drawing together a wide range of architectural, archaeological, archival, and topographical evidence. It forms part of Peter's broader study into the architectural evolution of Gwydir, which he hopes to disseminate formally in due course. Like other gentry homes of the period, Gwydir's grounds combined utility, ornament, and display. They featured a structured kitchen garden of vegetables and herbs; orchards for fruit; and formal ornamental spaces planted with box-edged beds, flowers, and topiary. Walkways lined with trees, shrub 'rooms' for reflection, and maze-like features reflected Renaissance fashions while serving as stages for social life. Weddings were held here, including the celebrated marriage of Mary Wynn (d. 1653), Sir John's daughter, to Roger Mostyn (d. 1647) in 1597, which was attended by ten bards, and also that of her younger sister Elizabeth (d. 1661) to John Bodfel (d. 1631) in 1606, attended by the Bishop of Bangor.

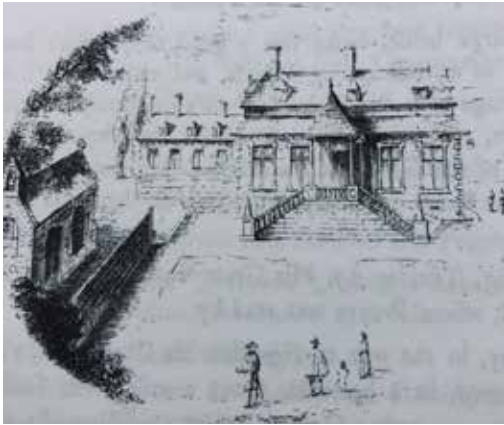
These pleasure grounds were paired with productive spaces. The finest gentry gardens were expected to provide not just staples but also rarities: grapes, apricots, olives, and pomegranates were cultivated with ingenious techniques to capture warmth, including pieces of metal placed along walls and vines to draw and reflect the sun's heat. John Wynn Jr. (d. 1614), writing from France during his Grand Tour in 1613, described citrus groves protected in winter by specially built glasshouses. This passion was multi-generational: Morus Wynn's (d. 1580) memorandum book records figs, bay, tamarisk and plum trees, and evidence suggests that estates sometimes exchanged exotic plants to enrich their collections.

The Wynns' gardens supplied not only the kitchen but also the brewhouse and cellar. Mead, beer, and ale were

brewed from homegrown crops, and tenants sometimes paid rent in hops. Bardic praise celebrated Gwydir's *plentiful mead and Gascony wine*, and Sir John Wynn even received compliments on his home-produced wine, described in 1602 by Justice Richard Baker (d. 1636) as *more excellent than the grape of France or the wine of Greece or Spain*. Sir John also sourced luxury produce from London, including claret, pickled quinces, citrus fruit, chestnuts, walnuts, and spices. Such items were high-status commodities, and their exchange reinforced the Wynns' standing: Owen Wynn (d. 1660) once sent home wine from the king's own cellar and rare French pears *which the king eats*.

Baskets of homegrown fruit which included plums, apricots and apples circulated as gifts between neighbouring gentry families and their English in-laws, symbolising refinement as much as generosity. Servants such as John Pigott coordinated the flow of provisions from Gwydir to allied households; in 1623 he reported sending venison to Bodfel and Gloddaeth and wheat to the Bishop of Bangor, while noting that the precious lemons remained locked in Lady Sydney Wynn's (d. 1632) closet, and at a shilling each roughly £7 today, it is little wonder that she was not willing to share her provisions. The family's cosmopolitan tastes endured: in 1669 Sir Richard Wynn, 4th Baronet, was asked to procure both a gardening manual and *The Little French Cook*, reflecting a continuing appetite for fashionable horticulture and cuisine.

Feasting at Gwydir was never merely domestic: it was a performance of power, virtue, and cultural polish. Weddings, funerals, saints' days, and Christmas brought together family, tenants, and neighbours for lavish hospitality all praised by bards in a language of abundance. These events showcased the house's interiors, silver-



Left Gwydir Uchaf sketch by T Dineley, *The Account of the Official Progress of His Grace, Henry the first Duke of Beaufort through Wales in 1684* (London, 1888), p.72.

Right: Peter Drummond-Burrell 22nd Baron Willoughby de Eresby (1782-1865), *Welsh Portrait Collection*, NLW Lithograph.

ware, textiles, heraldry, and cultivated taste, reinforcing loyalty networks and the family's political prominence.

Like their peers, the Wynns embraced the Renaissance taste for garden artistry. The Mostyn manuscripts record a topiary figure of the house bard Huw Machno (d.1637) on horseback, a round temple woven from holly trees, and a labyrinth at Gwydir Uchaf, the 'upper house' built as a summer retreat in 1604 by Sir John Wynn. Bards praised the labyrinth, likely formed from low box or lavender hedges, as a beautiful labyrinth, of vivid green', 'second only to the walls of Troy', and the garden's clipped trees were likened to bell towers of birds. However, most notably the grounds were described as the perfect place to drink wine and compose poetry.

Such artistry required skill and the gardener Owain Sieffre, credited with creating the ornamental topiary, was mentioned in several family letters and rewarded in Sir John Wynn's will (1627) with an annuity and lifelong keep at Gwydir. John Wynn Jr even asked that Owain be allowed to tend the gardens at his own house, Y Wern in Llanfrothen, whilst he was away on grand tour.

The so-called 'golden age' of the Wynns ended in 1678 under the laws of coverture, when Mary Wynn married the English nobleman Robert Bertie, later 1st Duke of Ancaster and Kesteven, 17th Baron Willoughby de Eresby, 4th Earl of Lindsey (d. 1723). The 30,000-acre Gwydir estate was immediately transferred to her husband. Mary herself died relatively young in 1689, but not before giving birth to five children, two sons and three daughters. One of her sons died aged ten, and one of her daughters in infancy, but crucially, she left a surviving male heir.

For much of the next century Gwydir slipped into quiet obscurity within the Bertie family's wider portfolio of estates. Eventually the estate re-emerged into view through Mary's great-granddaughter, Priscilla, Baroness Willoughby de Eresby (d.1829), and her husband Sir Peter Burrell (d.1820), who revived the historic Welsh title by becoming 1st Baron Gwydir. Their son, Peter Robert Burrell, 2nd Baron Gwydir (d.1865), and his wife Clementina Drummond, heiress of James Drummond, 1st Lord Perth of Drummond Castle in Perthshire (d.1865), went on to play a pivotal role in reviving Gwydir during the Victorian era.

By the early 19th century, Britain was in the grip of a wave of enthusiasm for restoring and reimagining historic places. Sir Peter and Clementina embraced this spirit wholeheartedly, undertaking extensive works at their houses and gardens, notably Drummond Castle and Gwydir.

Visitors in the late 1700s and early 1800s often described Gwydir as neglected, they wrote of their disappointment of encountering the *ruinous remains* of its once-famous bowling green, mentioned by Sir John Wynn in the early sixteen hundreds to his chaplain. By the 1820s and 30s, however, tourists recorded signs of vigorous repair under Lord Gwydir, praising the *exceedingly pretty* flower garden as being in far better order than the house, and by 1852 the bowling green was reportedly reinstated and *trimly kept*. In 1861 a Mr John Murray wrote that *the botanist will glean many specimens from the woods*. He also listed some of the plants, then considered rare imports, by their Latin names which included bog or alpine bilberry, alpine penny-grass, and chaffweed all of which were ideally suited to the mountainous woodland environment of north Wales. To achieve this, Sir Peter and Lady Clementina employed two of the most prestigious designers of their day: the architect Sir Charles Barry, and the horticulturist Lewis Kennedy.

Sir Charles Barry was among the most celebrated architects of his generation, his fame sealed after 1834, when he won the commission to design the new Houses of Parliament in London. Long before that triumph, however, he had shown a keen interest in how architecture and gardens could complement one another. Travelling through France and Italy in 1817, Barry immersed himself in Renaissance and Baroque design, developing a particular admiration for the use of water and fountains in Italianate gardens. Returning to England in 1820, he brought back a conviction that gardens should be laid out with the same architectural discipline as the buildings they framed.

Between 1820 and 1857 Barry completed at least fifty-nine domestic projects, including thirty gardens, nineteen of which were realised, at places such as Attree Villa in Brighton, Drummond Castle in Perthshire, Soughton Hall in Flintshire, and parts of Highclere Castle, now famed as Downton Abbey. Between 1826 and 1838,



Lewis Kennedy, (1782-1865), Welsh Portrait Collection, NLW Lithograph, (detail).



above: Quartz rock around the pool



left: Terraces at Gwydir.

Barry was engaged alongside the horticulturist Lewis Kennedy to reshape both the house and gardens at Gwydir. His contributions included alterations to the west wing service block, carried out at the same time as repairs to the garden walls and the addition, or perhaps reinstatement, of formal parterres.

Barry's reputation was not without controversy, which would explain his somewhat ambiguous reputation as a landscape gardener. He was not especially well regarded among some of his contemporaries, partly because of his tendency to encroach upon, or even take over, other designers' gardening schemes. A notable conflict arose between him and William Andrews Nesfield (d.1881), a rival designer and contributor of *The Gardens of England*, one of the era's most prestigious garden design publications. Despite Barry's prominence, this influential work mentioned him only in passing. One of the main driving forces and financial supporters of the magazine was Harriet, 2nd Duchess of Sutherland (d.1868), the political hostess and friend of Queen Victoria (d 1901). The Duchess' gardens and those of some of her relatives were featured within the publication. Barry had undertaken some work for the Duchess but had submitted an invoice for his work that far exceeded her expectations, causing embarrassment and ill feeling. Despite these tensions, Barry's work flourished. His collaborations at Gwydir and Drummond Castle for Lord Gwydir show how his architectural discipline could frame and enhance a historic landscape, a vision that would shape his later designs across Britain.

Lewis Kennedy was regarded in his lifetime as one of the foremost landscape gardeners of his day, a reputation earned through talent, training, and extraordinary breadth of experience. Born into a renowned family of horticulturists who owned the Vineyard Nurseries in Hammersmith, Kennedy began his professional training at Riga, Russia, in 1804 at the age of just fifteen, possibly under the patronage of Sir Thomas (d.1834) and Lady Hare of Stow Hall in Norfolk, with whom the Kennedys had been associated since 1802. By 1812, still barely

in his twenties, he was working for the Empress Josephine (d.1814) at her celebrated gardens at Malmaison and Nevers in France. He had also travelled extensively through Italy, absorbing Continental fashions and techniques that would shape his future work.

Early in his career Kennedy considered publishing a book on garden design; although never completed, notes from this period record at least twenty gardens he had already laid out by then. Among these were the celebrated parterres and flower gardens at Drummond Castle in Perthshire, where in 1821 he was appointed estate agent, a position that allowed him to combine his horticultural artistry with practical oversight on a grand scale. Kennedy's artistry is also evident in the 1830 portrait he sketched of his employer Sir Peter; the inscription reads: *A sketch from memory by his Lordship's faithful friend and agent for fifty years.* He also included a small portrait of himself at the bottom of the composition with the initials L K that can be found at the National Library of Wales.

Kennedy's signature style lay in richly orchestrated planting schemes, intricate parterres, and the integration of rustic buildings and trellises into the landscape to create a sense of romance and variety. At Gwydir, from the late 1820s to 1838, Sir Charles Barry and Kennedy worked in close partnership, uniting Barry's architectural framework with Kennedy's horticultural flair. Together they revived the historic grounds in a distinctly Victorian



Drummond Castle Gardens, Perthshire.



The Tudor Rose Garden.

spirit, reimagining Gwydir's Tudor heritage with innovative planting and design. Their work introduced a knot garden shaped as a Tudor rose, enclosed courtyards, terrace walks, stone archways, and a pool edged with white quartz in a Druidic style.

The owners were known to be interested in the sixth-century bard Taliesin, and this subtle allusions to the family's Celtic heritage was something of a Kennedy hallmark, also seen at the gardens of Drummond Castle. Lord Gwydir is also said to have erected a monument to commemorate the birthplace of Taliesin at around 1850 on the bank of Lake Geirionydd, Thomas Roscoe (d.1871) remarked on the statue in 1853 that *Lord Willoughby de Eresby erected the column at the west end of the lake to commemorate the sage.*

What Barry absorbed from his work at Gwydir continued to shape his later garden designs. At Attree's Villa, for example, a mound with a winding snail trail may have been inspired by the one beside the chapel at Gwydir Uchaf. He also incorporated a terrace walk, stone archways, a summerhouse, and a pool, features that strongly echo the Gwydir scheme.

The terraces visible today at Gwydir are, however, the result of years of dedicated restoration work by the current owners, who have painstakingly combined archaeology, and documentary research to maintain and restore the gardens bringing the historic landscape back to life.

Both Barry and Kennedy were celebrated for their parterres: the examples at Gwydir and Drummond Castle still survive today, although the scale at Gwydir is much smaller than that found in Perthshire. (*Drummond Castle Gardens, Perthshire. www.drummondcastlegardens.co.uk*)

The collaboration of these two talents under the Drummond patronage at Gwydir not only transformed the gardens there, but also helped reconnect the estate to the wider story of British garden design in the early nineteenth century. Sir Peter and Lady Clementina managed the Drummond estate for more than 60 years, and their gardens became so renowned that Queen Victoria visited Drummond Castle in 1842. Gwydir has also wel-

comed monarchs over the years from Charles I in 1645 to George V and Queen Mary in 1899, and the Prince of Wales in 1998.

Since 1994, Peter Welford and Judy Corbett have led a sympathetic restoration of Gwydir's house and gardens, honouring this rich legacy despite daunting physical and financial challenges. In recent years, the effects of climate change have brought increasingly frequent and severe floods to Gwydir. At times, water has risen to seven feet in the cellars, surging through the historic fabric of the house. The impact has been worsened by recent tree felling and the Llanrwst flood prevention scheme, which have altered local water flow and left ancient yews and sixteenth-century garden walls vulnerable to damage. Thanks to the tireless efforts of volunteers, a sand-bag barrier now stands guard, a small, but vital defence for this fragile heritage. Sir Francis Bacon once wrote: *A garden is the purest of human pleasures ... without which, buildings and palaces are but gross handy-works.* Gwydir remains a testament to that enduring truth, a living place, shaped by centuries of care and renewal.



Recent flooding at Gwydir



Llandough, Charles Byrne 1789; watercolour

An attempt to document the fluctuating fortunes of one historic garden near Cowbridge in the Vale of Glamorgan and to identify some of those elusive figures, the gardeners, who worked in the almost 4 acre gardens surrounding the castle. The earliest known references to Llandough Castle gardens are found in a late C18th document which lists the constituent compartments of the gardens with their dimensions (in feet) and describes a state of dilapidation:

Kitchen Garden (150x129) - wall round it rather low and decayed.

Large Drying Yard (80x80) – formerly a bowling green, [with] thorn hedges and fruit trees, through which you go to the church and Kitchen Garden.

Pleasure Gardens (120x96) – A Terrass Walk to the west and 2 flights of steps to ascend it, and gravel walks etc. Another Kitchen Garden [dimensions not given] – with a few apple trees etc. Wild and out of repair.

Of particular significance is the reference to the former Bowling Green which harks back to an earlier century, and while the Pleasure Gardens with their Terrass Walk suggest fashionable late C18th elegance, the overall impression is one of neglect and poor maintenance, a picture reinforced by descriptions of crumbling walls *rather low and decayed* and of *doors and door frames wanting*.

At the end of the C18th Llandough Castle and its estate had passed into the ownership of the Mansel family of Penrice and Margam. The castle, not required as a residence by the owners, was leased out to a succession of tenants upon whom were placed obligations for the maintenance and repair of the property. The garden details listed above are endorsed on an Inventory of the Goods and Fixtures at Llandough Castle delivered to Edward Mathew when he took on the tenancy in 1757 and are included on the schedule of Necessary Repairs compiled when he relinquished his lease in 1775 and a new tenant was sought.

John Edmondson, who took on the lease in 1776, showed himself eager to improve the grounds around the castle. He was given permission to pull down the court and garden wall adjoining the house and to make Pleasure Walks in Coed y Parc. His tenancy agreement drew attention to the need for repair or replacement of door and window frames in the house, including the sash windows in the parlour and bedchamber which fronted the west and overlooked the Pleasure Gardens. Draught-free rooms from which to enjoy the view of the gardens would have encouraged John Edmondson to attend to *necessary repairs* and to undertake other improvements, but his tenancy was short lived. He died in 1778, and other members of the Edmondson family who took on



Llandough 1839; watercolour by a member of the Edmondes family - looking north west from the road bridge towards the castle above the River Thaw.

the lease appear to have been less than assiduous in maintaining the property. A schedule of necessary repairs drawn up in 1800 indicates an advanced state of dilapidation in the house and it can be assumed that the gardens were similarly neglected, while a rapid succession of short-term tenants at the turn of the century can have done little to maintain the property in good order.

The terms of the leases imposed responsibilities upon the tenants for keeping the property in good repair, usually at their own expense, and handing it back to the owner in good condition. Such obligations if not ignored were often grudgingly and inadequately performed, there being an understandable reluctance to spend one's money on another man's property. But then in 1803 there appeared a tenant who was prepared to spend lavishly on the at Llandough Castle thereby earning himself the title of 'fool'.

That man was John Price; he and his wife Jane occupied the castle from 1803 to 1819 during which years the house was enlarged and comprehensively improved and turned into a fashionable and comfortable residence. Among John Price's improvements were the addition of an impressive first floor drawing room and an entire new wing providing servants quarters, and the installation of a water supply to the house. He must have improved the gardens as a fitting complement to the new house, but little is known of their appearance or content during the Prices' years of residence or of the workforce employed there. A few clues are provided by estate records of the early C19th which reveal the existence of a Gardeners House near the castle (thatched like many of the cottages in the village at this date) and the names of two of the men who worked in the castle gardens - John Ford and Robert Arnott junior. Ford was engaged as gardener in January 1816 at a starting wage of 28 guineas a year, apparently on probation, as if his work did not give satisfaction this would be reduced to £28. His

employment ceased after eighteen months when Robert Arnott was engaged as gardener to the then widowed Jane Price on a starting wage of 25 guineas, rising after a year to 28 guineas if he gave satisfaction and to 30 guineas in the third year. Both Ford and Arnott were employed when John and Jane Price were in poor health and nearing the end of their lives. John Price died in July 1818 his widow followed him to the grave a few months later, and in 1820 a new tenant, Colonel Richard Morgan arrived at the castle.

A man of diverse interests, one of which was in horticulture, Morgan is recorded as winning prizes for fruit and flowers at local shows. In July 1829 at the Glamorgan, Monmouthshire & South Wales Horticultural Society's meeting at Cardiff he was awarded prizes for his black grapes and white currants, and his roses were singled out for special mention. Such success could only have been achieved by the work of a team of gardeners; the sheltered grounds of the castle with their south facing walls and hot houses providing enviable conditions for the cultivation of fruits, flowers and kitchen garden produce. However, in 1835 when the Morgans were abroad a sub-tenant, Edward Copleston, the Bishop of Llandaff, took-up temporary residence at the castle and he was not impressed by the *gloomy* surroundings of his residence. He undertook to improve the grounds, opening up the vistas from the house, revealing the *bright green sloping lawn running irregularly into the wood* and introducing colour into the castle's immediate surroundings. *Nothing that I ever did [has] given me more satisfaction than what has been done here* he wrote, claiming that Llandough Castle had become *a pleasant and even beautiful residence*, and recommending the planting of more shrubs *in abundance*. It is not known whether Robert Arnott was retained as gardener by the Morgans but in 1841 William Millward is named as the Llandough Castle gardener. In the latter half of the C19th three families succeeded



Llandough Castle wild gardens c. 1900

the Morgans as tenants of Llandough Castle - the Botelers (1844-69), the Staceys (1869-93) and the Ebsworths (1895-1914), each of whom made a considerable impact upon the gardens. One of their gardeners in particular effected a transformation by establishing, in the words of one visitor: *lovely gardens of flowers, fruits, vegetables, hot houses, pineries, vineries etc, laying-out woodland walks, waterfalls in babbling brooks – miles and miles of them in Castle woods. Swans homes were arranged too.* So, who was this gardener, and who were his employers?

His name was William Harkness (alias Harkness), he worked at Llandough Castle for almost fifty years, and he died in Llandough in 1900 at the age of 88. William was from Tyrone, in Ireland, Matilda his wife was from Manchester and one wonders what brought them to Llandough where they were living by 1851. Nothing has yet been discovered of his previous employment, but it can be assumed that that he had worked his way up the gardening hierarchy on one or more estates in Ireland and/or England, The skills he demonstrated at Llandough showed a talent beyond mere competence and it is likely that a recommendation from his previous place of work secured his employment at the castle. Did he work initially under William Millward or did he succeed Millward and arrive in Llandough when, or soon after, Robert Boteler took on the tenancy of the castle in 1844? What is certain is that it was the partnership of Boteler and Harkness that transformed the Llandough Castle gardens.

Boteler's lease obliged him to keep the house in good repair, to keep the gardens well stocked and tidy and to improve shrubs, vines and fruit trees. Boteler's engineering and practical skills are reflected in the walls he built surrounding the castle gardens and their compartments, walls which had been allowed to fall into disrepair. And he is credited with installing flues to heat the greenhouses. Harkness embarked upon

an ambitious programme of planting and landscape management which reached its culmination towards the end of his life. In 1871, when the Stacey family had succeeded the Botelers, William Harkness is described as Head Gardener a role he must have occupied earlier, for the transformation of the Castle gardens would have demanded a considerable workforce under his (and his employer's) direction. His weekly wage in 1868 was 19s.3d., but this was supplemented by extra payment for planting trees, notable among which were hundreds of Austrian Pines, many planted in Castle Woods (for the eight weeks to 30 March 1868 he was paid £7 14s.0d plus £2 17s.2d. for planting trees).

Over the centuries the maintenance of the gardens would have provided employment

for a team of gardeners and labourers, the size of the workforce determined by the enthusiasm of occupiers of the castle to keep the gardens in good order, the vagaries of the seasons and the demands of particular projects. Most of the gardeners remain singularly elusive figures, and it is only in the C19th that a few of these men emerge from obscurity, no one more emphatically than William Harkness.

The memorial to William Harkness in Llandough churchyard is distinctive, its pink granite stone standing out among the grey limestone memorials around it. Its inscriptions records William's wife Matilda who died in 1885, their infant son Frederick William, and William himself who died in 1900. William's legacy to Llandough and the wider community was the garden landscape of Llandough Castle, a landscape which endured until the mid C20th and vestiges of which survive to the present day.

The heyday of the gardens was in the last decades of the C19th and in the years leading up to the First World War. When the Ebsworths were in residence a team of eight gardeners was employed, with Richard German as Head Gardener, and when the Byass family purchased the castle in 1914 German was retained by them. The gardens with their rose garden, sundial garden, wild garden and woodland walks were kept in immaculate order, attracting widespread admiration and providing the venue for garden parties and other 'social occasions', and while few of these features now survive, their former glory is captured in black & white and sepia photographs.

The south facing garden walls in addition to providing a sheltered environment provided sites for glasshouses where vines and other more delicate fruits and flowers were grown. The 1877 edition of the Ordnance Survey map shows two small hot house structures immediately west of the churchyard, but by 1899 a long range of glasshouses has been added against the south-facing boundary wall of



Llandough orangery was built in 1844, now restored.

the churchyard. An aerial photograph taken c1950 shows those greenhouses in an advanced state of dilapidation, but villagers' reminiscences of the inter-war years recalled peaches, nectarines, vines and delicate ornamental shrubs grown in the gardens and hothouses, and the magnificent prize chrysanthemums grown by Jack Evans the last fulltime gardener at the castle.

In 1914 Llandough Castle was purchased by the Port Talbot businessman Sir Sidney Hutchinson Byass and for the first time in centuries the castle and its lands passed into new ownership. After Sir Sidney's death in 1929 his widow, Evelyn Lady Byass, continued to live in Llandough for a few years before moving to Llanblethian when the castle was leased to the Ministry of Labour as a Juvenile Instruction Centre for boys from the South Wales valleys whose health had suffered from working conditions in the mining communities. In 1939 the castle briefly accommodated a small number of Jewish children brought to this country by the Kindertransport before it was requisitioned by the government in 1940 as a headquarters of the Canadian Air Force.

Photographs taken during the 1930s show the boys on the Juvenile Employment scheme constructing a swimming pool on the west side of the house, against a background of well-tended flower borders, the boys performing exercises on the well-tended lawns and helping to repair the glasshouses. A former superintendent of the Juvenile Instruction Centre recalled ample quantities of vegetables, fruit and flowers, including peaches, nectarines and figs, grown in the castle gardens in those years. Of the state of the

gardens during the Second World War little is known, but in the immediate post war years nature began to reclaim large areas including the kitchen garden, and soon parts of the wild and woodland gardens created by William Harkness were separated from the castle to be incorporated into the grounds of two newly built houses. Soon after the end of WW2 Llandough Castle was sold by the Byass family, and through the following decades a succession of new owners occupied the house. (1946-52: Russell Shephard; 1952-57 Arthur George Davies; 1957-63 Peter Warren Harvey; Arthur Capps, 1963- 70; Simon and Rhian Rees 2003 to date).

In recent decades Llandough Castle gardens have been lovingly and appropriately transformed by Rhian Rees. The 8.5 acres now include a blend of the traditional, the wild and the Mediterranean where features of the past meld with the new. On the south side of the house a small courtyard garden leads into a potager where the owner's love of the Mediterranean is reflected in the rosemary hedges, pollarded figs, and an olive tree, and in vibrant displays of tulips, dahlias and other flowers through the seasons. Formal lawns and herbaceous borders on the west side of the house lead to a wildlife pond (the former swimming pool!) with a waterfall and an abundance of water lilies. The woodland garden (formerly the wild garden) has been reclaimed, with paths meandering through the trees, coppiced hazels, a hornbeam tunnel and a stumpery. In spring the ground is carpeted with snowdrops, bluebells and other native wildflowers (thousands of bulbs planted by the owner) including the fragrant Pheasants Eye narcissi, Snakes



Left Restored garden
Below: Llandough dragon



Head Fritillaries and Wild Garlic. This tranquil woodland area now recalls and perpetuates the heyday of the castle gardens in the C19th and early C20th. There is a modern introduction in the forms of sculptures which include two fabulous dragons, the work of a Pembrokeshire blacksmith.

Over the centuries the gardens of Llandough Castle have incorporated the aesthetic and the utilitarian, pleasure garden and kitchen garden. They have suffered periods of neglect and enjoyed years of careful maintenance. Their C21st reclamation marks another, positive chapter in their long history. Opened to the public under the National Gardens Scheme and to interested groups by appointment, they make their own contemporary contribution to the long history of Llandough Castle and its gardens.

National Library of Wales: Penrice & Margam collection: Inventory 1757, with Endorsement c1775 (mss.8171), Lease to John Edmondson, 1775 (mss.8173)

Glamorgan Archives:

Margam estate accounts: 1820s (refs Ma 61, 71), 1860s (refs LL/E 97-99, 105). Merthyr Mawr estate accounts 1816, 1818 (ref MM116).

Merthyr Mawr estate correspondence, letter from Griffith Llewelyn, the Margam estate agent to John Price, 18 December 1816 re trees supplied from Margam for the Plantation at Llandough (ref MM 57).

The Letters of Edward Copleston, Bishop of Llandaff, 1828-1849, ed. Roger Lee; Brown (South Wales Record Society publication no.17, 2003). NB letters 1835-36.

Census Returns, 1841-1911.

Personal letter from Olive Bowen, Whitchurch to HMT re William Harkness, 1983. [Olive Bowen does not reveal the name of the person who supplied her with the information on Harkness.]

Cardiff Times and South Wales Daily News, 16 December 1911 (contains account of the Llandough Castle gardens temp Ebsworth.)

Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan, ed. Hilary M Thomas (Welsh Historic Gardens Trust, 2007). pp128-136

Urgent Appeal

New Chair

As most members will now know we face a crisis within WHGT due to the lack of members willing to take on the major roles necessary for the efficient functioning of the Trust.

We cannot operate without these key people and all the work done to create a responsible, campaigning and respected organization will be for nothing.

As Chair I have served longer than is healthy for the vibrancy of the organisation and we need to find someone who will take on the role and revitalise the Trust. There has been no response within the Trust and we have not managed to find a suitable external candidate so we will be advertising the post on LinkedIn. If anyone wishes to apply then please read the specifications which will be available shortly on LinkedIn and on our website.

We also need a planning officer, a secretary and an editor for the Bulletin. These jobs are currently being done by Trustees who have served us above and beyond the requirements of these roles but need to retire urgently. If you enjoy the events, the Bulletin and the sense of belonging to something important then please think seriously about volunteering for one of these roles.



Kelly Scott Head Gardener and Stephen Lacey

Nant Clwyd y Dre (formerly known as Nantclwyd House) in Ruthin is the site of one of the oldest gardens in Wales

A successful National Garden Scheme open day was held in 2025 with a strong turnout. Amongst this year's visitors was Stephen Lacey, President of WHGT, shown above with Head Gardener Scott Kelly. WHGT have recently supported a Conservation Management Plan and a heritage orchard for the site. Special thanks to the volunteers who have helped to restore and maintain this garden.

New Editor

Could you be the next bulletin editor?

I became the bulletin editor by accident, when a previous WHGT chair liked a newsletter I had produced for the Clwyd branch.

Since then, I have learnt much and been very thankful to all contributors who have supported the Bulletin over the years. I owe a great debt of thanks to colleagues who have been kind enough to proofread, provide horticultural expertise and much more to encourage my efforts - particularly in the early days.

The benefits of being the Bulletin editor is encountering many lovely, interesting people researching and restoring Welsh parks and gardens. There has also been the privilege of meeting experts; the gardeners, owners, designers and volunteers who make all this possible. At times I have been overwhelmed by the generosity of those who have given their time and attention to making the Bulletin happen particularly as this is a volunteer publication as the only fees paid are those for image rights when necessary.

After more than a decade it is time for new blood and new ideas. I am happy to help and support anyone who would like to step into this role -or steer clear, if a clean sweep is preferred.

In addition to editing the bulletin there is the Annual Report which involves a comprehensive overview of WHGT's financial performance, governance, and future outlook for the past year, fulfilling legal compliance while building trust through transparency and accountability. The Annual Report combines detailed financial statements (balance sheet, income statement, cash flow) with branch reports of achievements, challenges, and future goals, showing how WHGT functions.

I have no special skills or training in desktop publishing and have managed to use the Adobe InDesign to provide a print ready pdf. Anyone interested can use their preferred system. There are many different ways of being an editor and now is time for change!

Glynis Shaw

The Protection of Hedgerows Lynda Warren

Hedgerows are fundamental to the landscape of Wales. Some of them are extremely old and make a significant contribution to the culture of an area. Hedgerow planting was originally done for agricultural purposes to provide borders between different landholdings or to create closed-off areas to keep stock. The same principles of dividing the land up into separate plots is equally important for the garden designer, of course, and hedges are often important features in gardens, including those of historic interest.

A recent report by the Independent Environmental Protection Assessor For Wales (IEPAW) on hedgerows in Wales showed that hedgerows do not receive the legal protection that they need. Individual trees of cultural importance can be safeguarded through the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) procedure which makes it an offence to remove a tree covered by an Order without obtaining permission. The law on TPOs in Wales is about to be revised by the Senedd. Most importantly, it will no longer be an excuse to remove a tree just because it looks as if it might be dangerous. The new procedures should also make it easier for local authorities to administer and for the public to understand TPOs.

Unfortunately, these changes do not apply to hedgerows as such as these are not included in the TPO Regulations. Where there are individual trees within a hedgerow these might be eligible for a TPO. The fact that such trees exist, however, points to the lack of management of the hedgerow!

Hedgerows are included in a list of priority habitats under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. This means that the Welsh Government must take reasonable steps to maintain and enhance them and encourage others to do so as well. The main way of doing this is through agricultural grants and conditions attached to such grants. The new Sustainable Farming Scheme includes specific measures for hedgerow management. There is no clear mechanism, however, for ensuring that non-agricultural hedgerows are also maintained and enhanced.

At present, the only law supposedly providing specific protection for hedgerows in Wales is The Hedgerows Regulations 1997. Unfortunately these Regulations are woefully out of date and unnecessarily complicated. Only those hedgerows identified as 'important' are protected. There are objective tests for determining importance on the criteria of archaeological and historical value, wildlife value and landscape value. These criteria only apply if the hedgerow is more than 30 years old.

To meet the archaeological and historical value criterion the hedgerow must:

- mark a pre-1850 parish or township boundary; or
 - incorporate an archaeological feature; or
 - be situated in an archaeological site and be associated with a monument or feature of that site;
- or

- mark the boundary of a pre-1600 estate or manor; or
- form an integral part of a field system pre-dating the Inclosure Acts.

The wildlife criterion require the hedgerow either to contain specific protected species included in schedules to the Wildlife and Countryside Act or species categorised as endangered, extinct, rare or vulnerable in Britain within a 5 year period before 1997 in the case of birds and other animals or 10 years in the case of plants. It is not possible to take account of any changes in status of these species after that date!

The wildlife criterion may also be met if the hedgerow contains the following prescribed numbers of specified woody plants and accompanying features on average, in a 30 metre length of hedgerow:

- at least seven woody species; or
- at least six woody species and three associated features; or
- at least six woody species including a black poplar tree, large-leaved lime, small-leaved lime, or a wild service tree; or
- at least five woody species and at least four associated features.

Schedule 3 lists 56 species of trees and shrubs defined as 'woody species'.

In summary, the associated features are:

- a bank or wall which supports the hedgerow;
- gaps which in aggregate do not exceed 10% of the hedgerow;
- at least one standard tree every 50 metres;
- at least three species from a list of 57 woodland plants included in Schedule 2;
- a ditch along at least half the length of the hedgerow;
- a number of connections with other hedgerows, ponds or woodlands
- a parallel hedge within 15 metres.

To meet the landscape criterion the hedgerow must:

- be adjacent to a bridleway, footpath, road used as a public path, or a byway open to all traffic; and
- include at least four woody species; and
- include at least two associated species.

Not surprisingly, the IEPAW received a lot of evidence criticising the unnecessary complexity of the definition of important hedgerow!

If a hedgerow is identified as important, the Regulations provide protection against unlawful removal. They do not, however, require a landowner to do anything to look after it – neglect is not an offence. At the time when the Regulations were being made there were real concerns about the number of hedgerows that were being grubbed out mainly to meet requirements under Europe-

an funded agricultural grants. The purpose of the Regulations was to prevent any further unjustified removals. In this respect, it could be said that the Regulations have been successful. Local authorities told IEPAW that they now receive very few applications for hedgerow removal in Wales and that numbers had dropped significantly since the first few years following the introduction of the Regulations. However, the majority of hedgerows in Wales are not protected from removal at all so there will be no need to contact the local authority. Furthermore, the Regulations do not protect any hedgerow, 'important' or otherwise, from poor management.

There is a further limitation of the Regulations when it comes to safeguarding hedgerows for cultural and landscaping reasons. The following categories of hedgerow are excluded from the Regulations either expressly or by default:

- hedgerows within the curtilage of, or marking a boundary of the curtilage, of a dwelling house;
- most other hedgerows on non-agricultural or forestry land;
- hedgerows of length less than 20 metres unless connected to another hedgerow;
- hedgerows that have grown into a line of trees; and
- other types of field boundary such as hedge banks and cloddiau.

So where does this leave hedgerows of historic interest in Wales? The law has already been changed in England so that any hedgerow of at least 20 metres in length, apart from hedgerows associated with dwelling houses, is to be considered to be 'important'. But this does not go far enough.

The IEPAW report makes a number of recommendations for action by Welsh Ministers including the following of particular relevance to WHGT:

- legislation to provide legal protection against removal for all hedgerows;
- consultation on the best way of managing hedgerows on non-agricultural land;
- raise awareness of the importance of protecting hedgerows by the provision of clear guidance for the public and local authorities;
- issue planning guidance to local authorities on the need to consider historical, archaeological, ecological and cultural factors when considering an application for planning permission to remove a hedgerow.

The Welsh Government's response was to accept the first three of these in principle, in other words there was a recognition that something needs to be done although nothing scheduled as yet! The recommendation on planning permission was rejected on the basis that the latest version of Planning Policy Wales (PPW) issued in February 2024 already addresses this. The response cites the

following paragraphs from PPW:

hedgerows are important connecting habitats for resilient ecological networks and make an essential wider contribution to landscape character, culture, heritage and sense of place, air quality, recreation and local climate moderation.

native tree and hedge species help to define our cultural heritage and landscape, creating a strong sense of place and connection to the past.

It will be interesting to see whether there is any change in the level of appreciation of the value of hedgerows by local authorities.

The IEPAW has recently published its report on The Protection of Trees and Woodlands in Wales which includes detailed consideration of TPOs and the possibility of legal protection for a new category of 'important' trees. Unfortunately the Welsh Government has rejected this recommendation.

Lynda Warren is the Interim Environmental Protection Assessor Wales. EPAW is responsible for advising Welsh Ministers of issues with the functioning of environmental law in Wales. The two reports mentioned in this paper were prepared in response to submissions from members of the public highlighting concerns.

Further information about the role of IEPAW is available at <https://www.gov.wales/interim-environmental-protection-assessor-wales> or on our LinkedIn page at AIDAC/IEPAW.

Plas Tan y Bwylch

We are pleased to learn that Eryri National Park Authority are planning on submitting a funding application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for £10m to transform Plas Tan y Bwlch near Blaenau Ffestiniog from a study centre into their headquarters, as well as a mixed-use site with educational and community functions. This proposal would also ensure continued open access to the 59-acre ancient woodland surrounding the house, which is designated as a Grade II* garden of special historic interest and a site of scientific interest.

This welcome news comes after Eryri National Park Authority put the house up for sale in August last year because of prohibitive running costs. This prompted outcry from the local community, who faced losing access to the woodland. The present house at Plas Tan y Bwlch was built in the nineteenth century by the Oakeley family with proceeds from slate quarrying.



Above: Nelson Garden pavilion before 2002
Left: Nelson Garden Pavilion today

Twenty-five years ago, the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust published a Guide to the Historic Parks & Gardens of Wales which included the grade II Nelson Garden headed by Bronwyn Williams Ellis's black and white line illustration of the 1840 Nelson Pavilion. It is described as *a small, enclosed garden with a restored 19th century pavilion on the site where Nelson, with Sir William and Lady Hamilton, was entertained in 1802. They visited the Kymin on the same occasion.*

During the 1990's much work was done with the removal of many island beds, conifer trees, overgrown shrubs, prostrate juniper and hedges on the raised bank nearest the hot-wall path. Further improvements were made during the 2000's with more appropriate planting and easier access to the garden for visitors by appointments with members of the trust.

In 2016 the Nelson Garden Preservation Trust was formed, to submit a Heritage Lottery Fund grant application, headed by Helena Gerrish the chairman and many others, some of whom are still involved with the garden.

After a long and difficult process in 2018 the HLF bid was successful. This resulted in new planting for the hot wall, new paths and gravel, a fully restored Pavilion surmounted with replica oak urns and an eco-loo building with metal gutters and a rainwater barrel. A lavender

hedge was planted shortly after, the ironwork on the pavilion was restored and a new door, gate and extra information boards were all installed.

The planting scheme was based on the suggestions made by Elisabeth Whittle and Helena Gerrish which blended the idea of a Regency town garden with a nod to the later 1840-1900 Cottage Garden. We have fruit trees in what we call the hot wall bed (although the wall is no longer heated) with lavender softening the edges of gravel paths (instead of a grass strip front of border) and deep borders of bearded iris, cranesbill, phlox, alliums, sedum and hostas repeated through the bed. We have a mixture of shrubs, evergreens, globe thistle, spring bulbs, red hot pokers, hellebores, cranesbill, helianthus with a few small fruit trees on the deep sloping bed opposite the hot wall. We made a rose bed in front of the Pavilion behind the pond for the Rose Horatio Nelson bred by Peter Beales in Norfolk in 1997 and Rosa Lady Emma Hamilton bred by David Austin in 2005 which is no longer available. The Emma rose is large and shrubby, scented and repeat flowering. The top path was planted with Rose Generous Gardener, an Austin rose, named to mark the 75th anniversary of the National Gardens Scheme, which made it possible for us to see so many beautiful private gardens, thanks to the generosity of their owners. It is a climbing rose (they can reach a modest 5') encouraged to cover the railings and screen the view to the buildings beyond.

The site also has an ancient lawn made up of meadow grass with areas left uncut during the summer supporting thirty-six species of wild flora. This area has never been cultivated or treated with fertilizer and is of interest to botanists and visitors. When Nelson and his party visited Monmouth in

July and August 1802, they also visit Piercefield at Chepstow, the Iron Works at Merthyr, The porcelain factory at Worcester and the Soho Mint at Birmingham. At Soho they visited the factory, house and gardens of Matthew Boulton, one of the greatest early industrialists of the age who minted coins for Britain and the rest of the world.

Boulton's 100 acres garden was newly designed and planted and his Soho House remodelled. By 1802 Boulton was seventy-four and quite ill. He kept copious notes on the nurseries from where he had bought plants and seeds between the years 1796 to 1809 when he died. At this time Nelson was in the process of making his own new garden at Paradise Merton in Wimbledon. Although Nelson was away at sea for much of his life, he had gardened at his family home in Norfolk and liked to write to Emma and Sir William Hamilton with his ideas and to sanction their ideas for the Merton garden. The plants at Soho House are relevant in date and useful to us at the Nelson Garden. Although the Soho House garden is now tiny in comparison to what it was in the early 1800's, its description by Phillada Ballard for Birmingham City Council and the records in the Birmingham City Archive are helping us to keep to our purpose of maintaining an historic garden with regard to the listed structures and the plants themselves. This means we have the potential to educate, inform and entertain our visitors and thereby raise funds through fees and donations to keep the garden going.

It usually amuses visitors to be taken to see the Emma Hamilton roses growing in the same bed as Horatio Nelson roses. Lady Emma is all heavy fruity scent and wild apricot colour who cannot wait to show off whilst Horatio Nelson is a rather quiet slender rose who takes a long time to bloom but gets better and better over the season, a mere boy until his maturity; or, for visitors to be shown the rather maligned spotted laurel bush and told that the *Aucuba japonica* was introduced to Britain by Johann Andreas Graeffer, a plantsman and landscape gardener who trained at Chelsea Physic Garden and became Nelson's estate manager in Sicily. Nelson sweet peas are usually grown each year, but as yet no vegetables or fruit bushes so we do not grow the Hero of the Nile gooseberry or the Nelson carrot.

All this may sound very positive and yet there are problems. We had lots of publicity and interest both locally and more widely at the time of our HLF grant. We had a wonderful launch event organised by Helena Gerrish at which Sir Roy Strong was our guest. Members of the public and not all local donated money for further work. The oak urns on top of the pavilion were the result. The Worshipful Company of Ironmongers with apprentice blacksmiths from Hereford also restored the ironwork around the Pavilion. The Tesco supermarket community disc scheme provided the new pond surround and other grants from Monmouth Town Council and WHGT helped with yet more of the smaller projects. We even had a donation from a Friend of the Nelson Garden who left money in her will for some authentic oil lanterns to light

the tunnel entrance on party nights.

During the Covid pandemic years of 2020 – 2022 we closed, then opened then closed again and then re-opened with a steward present to maintain social distancing and a one-way route around the site. Despite the restrictions the safe outdoors quiet space was appreciated by the community, and we managed to maintain our member numbers without social events and fundraising.

What happened next has had a big impact on our success. Firstly, the decision by the National Trust to make the accommodation used by on-site wardens at The Kymin Roundhouse into a holiday let, and secondly, the closing of the Nelson Museum Collection pending a move into the Monmouth Shire Hall. The Museum is not expected to open until 2027. Our publicity material linking all three sites, launched as the Nelson Triangle, became obsolete.

We have since lost half of our Friends and their £10 per annum subscription over the past three years and suffered the sad loss of two very enthusiastic committee members who were both brilliant gardeners. In 2015 we had eight committee members and eight volunteer gardeners. By spring 2025 we were reduced to a committee of four and three volunteer gardeners. Thankfully we have just recently gained three new volunteers. They knew next to nothing about the history of the garden, our constitution, our responsibilities as a registered charity, who owned the site (we have a lease) or what the planting scheme of 2018 was based on. Why would they know any of these things? – and we had no structures in place to introduce new volunteers to the garden.

We have learned that it is not possible to run an historic garden without having a management plan which makes best use of the time given by our very willing volunteers. With a small committee it is difficult, and yes, we had taken our eye off the ball. Now we have had our first induction of new volunteer gardeners' morning, complete with a takeaway leaflet giving a potted history of where we were and where we are going and of course, coffee and cakes. We now plan for the committee to meet with gardeners every six weeks. We introduced them to the long list of plants which were in Matthew Boulton's Soho garden. It really is the case that there are actually very few plants and trees which were not available in the years 1802 – 1840. We try to avoid some of the African and Mexican plants which might be historically inaccurate but there are plenty to choose from. Perhaps we will encourage a resurgence of interest in white willow herb, goldenrod, Dutch honeysuckle, Jerusalem sage, Michaelmas daisies, butcher's-broom, Persian lilac, cistus, rusty foxglove, and mourning widow geranium, all of which were in the Soho House garden.

Summer 2025 has been difficult. The extreme heat and lack of rain have meant less flowers beyond June and barely any grass. Fruit trees did well and there was plenty of lavender edging the hot wall bed and plenty of Lady's bedstraw in the meadow (another talking point for



Unveiling of restored Britannia Plinth 2024.

pear from the wall or gazing at that perfect little Pavilion with the evening light catching the mirrored roundels and all is hope for Good Fortune and a Fair Wind.

The Nelson Garden is a regular participant in the Monmouth Open Gardens each May.

Anyone wishing to volunteer can contact Susan Amos www.nelsongarden.org.uk / ngpt1802@yahoo.co.uk.

visitors). We have a very limited supply of water at the garden being mostly reliant on one very large wooden water barrel. We have been allowed a hose from a neighbouring property to keep the pond filled but this may not always be available. We have some major decisions to make going forward about plants which will be able to cope with hot dry summers and mild wet winters.

As is the case with many gardens ours looks its best during May and June. It looks ragged during August and revives in late September and October just when we close to the public. We are lucky if snowdrops or daffodils and narcissi are there to be seen as we only open to the public in April. To address this, we are planting many more tulips and bearded iris for 2026. One thing we can do is make more of our historic structures. The Pavilion with its three plant platforms, the eco-loo and brick bothy with trellis attached, the tunnel entrance and the area above it and the recently renovated Britannia plinth. All these areas might have more changing displays of bulbs or annuals to take us through the summer months. The use of tall grasses might have a place. They have been used successfully at Lytes Cary Manor garden in Somerset. There they appear in the walled garden at the back of shrub roses. They do not form a continuous wall of grasses but give the effect of formal fountains regularly spaced as a backdrop to the roses.

So, on we go into the future with our plans and schemes. At times we despair and imagine the Nelson Garden struggling and perhaps being given up on. Then just a look through a bulb catalogue while tucking into a fresh

Bailey Hill daffodil

Last year, the landscape designers Harrisons Design and Development said they wanted help from the Friends to source a daffodil – Brunswick - to plant near the new Children's Play area. Brunswick is a beautiful large-cupped daffodil with white and yellow flowers (1931). Friends approached commercial suppliers online, but there were none available then.

Based in Wester Ross, in Scotland, Kate and Duncan Donald have become much respected collectors and propagators of old daffodil varieties [cf. Kingsbury, N. (2013) 'Daffodil: the remarkable story of the world's most popular spring flower'.] They manage a National Collection of pre-1930s daffodils.

Only a very few (surplus after research) are sold annually by their company Croft. Luckily, they had a few Brunswick, and others, to offer by Summer 2025. The bulbs were received during July 2025, and they were planted, at Bailey Hill Park. They will be close to the 'April Queen' (1938), and 'Queen of the North' (1908). They should make a nice show of flowers in 2026.



Left: 21.05.2025

Below: Clay from Newcastle Emlyn

Since making the application to the WHGT for a grant to help us repair the dam wall of our historic lake at Noyadd Trefawr, we were battered by Storm Darragh which inflicted increased damage and consequent work to the lake area.

Mike Horton, tree surgeon, worked through the spring to clear the bank of fallen ash and pine tree trunks and attempted to get a huge root bole of a 200 year old black poplar back into the bank. The bank was now clear enough for walking along and getting machines onto it. The root bole hasn't yet been tugged back into the bank, this is: an ongoing project now.

It was difficult to find contractors prepared to undertake work of this sort. I tried to get advice or contacts from the Welsh Botanic Gardens, from The Welsh Wildlife Trust, from a local company called Sylvan Management and a ground radar penetrating surveyor as well as a local earthworks contractor.

After listening to a lot of advice and the opinion of how impossible the project was on our budget and in our location, we found Gary Watkins who is a contractor used by the National Trust for Llanerchaeron and also at Hafod. He and his team were keen to do the work, interested in the heritage and understood the practical difficulties. They had local contacts and very quickly phoned to say that they had secured a source of high-grade clay which could be delivered straight away if we were ready for it. The clay came from Newcastle Emlyn area and thought to be from an old brick works. It is very dense, good quality clay. This would eliminate the previous decision to try and mix Bentonite with soil or buy a small quantity of puddle clay.





left finding the original draining sluices and then building the new clay wall on top of them

Lower left: By the afternoon of May 22nd there was a good smooth, strong clay wall and water was beginning to stay in the lake.



water has collected in the lake and gradually risen until it met the level of the two strong exit pipes at the sides. It is now exiting from both. There is still a very tiny trickle coming through at the base of the old sluice exit; we are monitoring this and hoping that it will silt up or remain a slight trickle compared to the main exit points.

The lake in June now looks terrific. Ducklings have hatched, moorhens returned, dragon flies abound and with time and further work to strengthen the bank we hope to raise the level a bit more to stop Himalayan Balsam, willow and bulrushes invading further.

June 1st 2025 (10 days later)

The total cost of the repairs was £3,142.80 and the work was supported by grant of £1000 from the WHGT Small Grants Scheme.

Gary thought we would need 5 trailer loads but we took 8 to be on the safe side and make the dam wall thicker and stronger at the point of the old sluice – the leak area. A large dumper truck and digger were hired to do the work.

By May 20th the weather had been dry for several weeks and the stream that fills the lake had dwindled, the majority of the water had exited through the central leak and the whole lake was a mud flat with a tiny stream. Huw thought he could work with these conditions without need for pumping water.

Huw, the digger operator, was clear that we had to get right down into the original architecture of the sluice drainage channels (slate drains) to stop the source of the water's leaking without our control through the centre of the lake.

He found these channels and collapsed them, building a solid clay wall on top of them. He created a wider, smoother bank wall to help keep pressure off this point.

Over the next couple of weeks the

Restored Lake in June



Restoration of Lady Cawdor's Garden Susan Davies



Garden in 1910



Garden Now

Golden Grove (Gelli Aur in Welsh) was until the 20th Century one of the most important country house estates in West Wales. Originally owned by the Vaughans and then inherited by the Cawdor family, becoming the seat of the Earls of Cawdor in Carmarthenshire in 1821. The Mansion (including the Service Wing and Stable Block) was built between 1827 to 1832 in the Scottish Baronial style. The photo above shows a postcard image of how the garden, known then as Lady Cawdor's Garden looked in 1910. It was named after Lady Cawdor because, as can be seen from the picture, she had a set of steps added after the house was built, that took her straight into the garden from her own personal room.

Sadly, as can be seen above, the garden is now overgrown, mainly with grasses. It was in reasonable order till the beginning of this century. However, the structural features, with some damage, are still present and in situ. Volunteers from the Golden Grove Trust and the Carmarthenshire Branch of the WHGT are embarking on an exciting project to restore the garden. During this winter they will be fundraising and researching the restoration, and the project will begin in earnest in spring 2026.



Our AGM 2026 will be in South Pembrokeshire, on Saturday Sept 19 held at the National Trust’s home farm complex at Stackpole Court giving us a day to explore this stunning Grade I landscape with its many listed buildings, structures, and exceptional views.

Other interesting and important parks and gardens in the area include Picton Castle (Grade II*), the intriguing plantsman’s garden at Upton Castle, Lamphey Bishop’s

Palace and Lamphey Court – Grade II*, Colby Woodland gardens, Slebech Park.

Further details to follow

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