

CLWYD BRANCH NEWS

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Study Day
20th March
Plas Newydd

Booking is essential as numbers are limited by room size.

See Booking form

The Picturesque & the Sublime

Two aristocratic Anglo-Irish ladies Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby eloped to Wales. In 1780 the ladies and Mary Carryl, their housekeeper, retreated to Plas Newydd, a miniature romantic landscape developed around a small five roomed stone cottage called Pen y Maes. Here Eleanor and Sarah lived together for over 50 years and became known as the 'Ladies of Llangollen'.

Between 1798-1814 the Ladies began Gothicizing their home with stained glass windows and carved oak panels. Many friends and visitors donated the glass and carved panels. The porch was created from 17th century bedposts, carvings of the four evangelists and a door carved by a local carpenter. The Duke of Wellington presented the two Chinese lions that stand on either side of the porch.

The Gothic embellishment continued under General Yorke's ownership from 1867. Yorke added the parterre and topiary, built the water tower, white-washed the stone facade and enlarged and half-timbered the house. Yorke's extended front and rear wing were eventually demolished in 1967.

However, it was the Ladies vision in creating a pastoral retreat which makes Plas Newydd special. The pleasure grounds included rural walks, grottoes, temples, conservatories and rustic bridges.

The sale document at the Auction in 1832 describes Plas Newydd in some detail:

"the Kitchen Garden is neatness itself, and the Fruit trees are of the rarest and finest sort, and luxuriant in their produce. Many and shaded gravel walks encircle this elysium, Which is adorned with curious and rare Shrubs and Flowers. It is nothing in extent

but EVERYTHING IN GRACE AND BEAUTY, United with a great variety of foliage. Upon the Freehold is a considerable quantity of valuable Timber which overhangs a deep and hollow glen; In its entangled bottom, a frothing brook leaps and clamours o'er the rough stones in its channel towards THE VALE OF LLANGOLLEN".

There were four well stocked gardens, five pasture fields, a cow and calf house, a circular model dairy, a fowl yard and an engine pump.

Starting with just 2 acres of turnip ground the estate was eventually expanded to 5 acres. When Mary Carryl died she left a field to the Ladies bought with her life savings. The Ladies also rented land and the meadows extended right up to the front of the house. Originally all the gardens were behind the house. Many of the trees and shrubs were planted by their friends.

The Ladies were keen plant collectors. In 1789 Sarah listed 43 rose varieties from the 100 then available. The Ladies also grew vines, melons, mushrooms and kept bees. Eleanor's diaries describe their many endeavours to farm and garden a huge range of produce.

The dell is the most interesting element of their garden as this is an early expression of the Picturesque. Eleanor's diaries describe the pools, cascades, rustic bridges, wild planting and the primrose valley. Lady Eleanor's bower, constructed in 1814, was made from peeled back twisted branches, creating a romantic idyll.

The primitive state of nature with rock, grottoes and caverns was first admired by Anthony Ashley



Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury who believed gardens should induce peacefulness and spirituality. He thought this was better achieved by a bare field or a common walk than the Franco-Dutch formal garden. Alexander Pope also rejected the formal garden's 'garden tailor' topiary. A stone grotto built to look like a ruin in his Twickenham garden is thought to be the first attempt at 'Picturesque' landscaping.

The picturesque movement was largely inspired by writers and philosophers. *'Pleasures of the Imagination'* 1712 by Joseph Addison is considered the basis of the picturesque movement and the beginning of modern aesthetics. Addison was the first to speak on the 'making' of a landscape. In 1757 Edmund Burke's treatise *'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful'* rejected the classical forms of regularity, symmetry and proportion for providing the essence of beauty.

The taste for rugged scenery was also promoted by Reverend William Gilpin in his 1782 *'Picturesque Tours'* based on the Wye Valley. In art Hogarth advocated the wavy line as the line of beauty and 'The Picturesque' aesthetic was further developed in a dialogue between neighbours Uvedale Price and his *'Essay on the Picturesque'* and Richard Payne Knight influenced by the *'Essays on the Nature and Principles in Taste'* 1790 by Archibald Alison. It was Alison who developed the *'theory of association'* whereby certain objects become catalysts for contemplation and higher thought.

Plas Newydd adopted the ideas of association: a romantic arbour above the cascade was the setting for reading Southey's *'Roderick'*; a seat shaded by two poplars with melancholy and rustic views of Dinas Bran was considered the appropriate for reading the poems of Ossian. An Aeolian harp was hung outside a bedroom window and The Ladies read poetic quotations on boards nailed to the trees.

Devoting their life to literature (naming one of their dogs Sappho!), languages and to improving their

estate, the Ladies of Llangollen and Plas Newydd became a picturesque travel destination for numerous visitors including Burke, Wordsworth, Southey, Shelley, Scott, Wedgwood and many others. The Ladies also corresponded with the leading politicians of the day as well as Byron and their many literary friends. Anna Seward described Plas Newydd as *"a retreat which breathes all the witchery of genius, taste, and sentiment."*

Most of the original features have long since gone save for the gothic niche containing the font from Valle Crucis Abbey. The beeches in the dell were planted in 1810 in memory of Mary Carryl.

Plas Newydd became a public park in 1932 and gradually much of the original planting was lost. In 2004 a £1 million lottery grant enabled the restoration of the river bank and the realignment of the river bed. Clearing the dell of rampant laurel the woodland walk was reinstated with a rustic summer house above the stream. The summerhouse and bower as well the replanted Georgian shrubbery have been reconstructed from paintings by Lady Leighton.

Plas Newydd gained a BALI National Landscape award in 2005.

The Study Day will begin with a presentation of **The Wodehouse**, Wombourne, by Dr Dianne Barre, a garden historian, lecturer and co-author with Timothy Mowl of *'Gardens of Staffordshire'* 2009. The Wodehouse is an 18 acre garden originally laid out between 1760-70. Dianne will present her discoveries and the long lost secrets of the site.

Branch member Prue Probert will describe the restoration at Plas Newydd and there will be an opportunity to explore this landscape.

In the afternoon landscape architect Simon Walding will describe the restoration and the recent developments at **Hawkstone Park**, Shropshire. This is a hundred acre landscape centred around Red Castle and the awe-inspiring Grotto Hill, with follies, ruins, ravines, cliffs, arches and bridges, created by the Hill family. Hawkstone is a classic Grade I example of the 18th century concept of the 'Sublime' landscape. Dr. Johnson visited with Mrs Thrale and wrote *"The ideas which it forces upon the mind are the sublime, the dreadful and the vast,"...*

"It excels Dovedale, by the extent of its prospects, the awfulness of its shades, the horrors of its precipices, the verdure of its hollows and the loftiness of its rocks ... above is inaccessible altitude, below is horrible profundity." (1774).

Wenlock Abbey was a most successful autumn visit. The former Prior's house is being beautifully restored by artist Louis de Wet and his wife actress Gabrielle Drake.

The ground floor chapel, with an ancient reliquary altar possibly of St Milburga is now in daily use. Contemporary murals and a remarkable new gothic oak colonnade which has capitals carved with episodes from de Wet's life make the chapel a unique and very personal space.

The *Cabinet of Curiosities** was astonishing with a renaissance tiled Flemish floor. This collection of natural specimens and uncommon man-made artefacts included a smoked cat from London once kept to ward off evil spirits, early Meissen porcelain, reliquary objects, a narwhal tusk, a stuffed crocodile suspended from the ceiling and lumps of amber. A recent acquisition was a set of knives given by Napoleon to the King of Naples.

The Great Hall on the first floor has a very fine elaborate timber vaulted roof and four windows on the east side make the room light and airy - no one wished to leave! Happily Wenlock Abbey is in the hands of a true connoisseur, now building a medieval library! De Wet considers the house to be far more interesting than the garden but this too was lovely. Here the ancient yew topiary behemoths dominated.

**Such collections developed from the sixteenth century were precursors to museums. A famous 17th century cabinet of Ole Worm, known as Olaus Wormius (1588-1654) first identified the narwhal's tusk to be from a whale rather than a unicorn. The collection of Elias Ashmole, largely derived from the collections of John Tradescant the elder and his son John the younger, was the basis of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.*

Windy Ridge developed by Fiona and George Chancellor over 25 years provided much interest. Fiona is a knowledgeable plants woman and George a keen landscaper! The water garden and the recycling of spare windows into a summer house showed imagination as well as judicious planting.

Our host Fiona and David Toyne shared their knowledge of an impressive range of species. Few gardens could offer as much interest in the space or for the time of year.



Membership: WHGT is working to increase its membership. If you have friends or relatives whom you think might be interested in the conservation and preservation of parks and gardens please bring them to one of our events.

The Lleweni Blue Hand Field Inquiry on the proposed chalet development is on Feb 9th at Denbigh town Hall at 10.00 am. Lleweni Park has one of longest histories in Wales with records of a hall in 720 for the court of Marchweithian, chieftain of a founding tribe of Wales. Lleweni awarded to the Salusbury family after the Norman Conquest was a centre of culture in 1578 under the first Sir John Salusbury. Whilst staying at Lleweni, Shakespeare wrote 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' included in the poetry collection called 'Love's Martyr' dedicated to Lord Salusbury. Perhaps Lleweni even inspired 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. In 1642 the grounds were said to hold 148 different plant species. In 1782 Capability Brown landscaped the parkland for Thomas Fitzmaurice.

Bulletin News: Clwyd branch member Matthew Dennison is taking over from Caroline Palmer as Editor of the Bulletin. We look forward to the April issue and wish Matthew every success.

Email: matthew.dennison@tiscali.co.uk

Items for Branch News are always welcome. Send to Glynis: glynis@castell-photography.co.uk / Castell, Bodfari, Denbigh, LL16 4HT Tel 01745 710261

Fountains and Giochi Aqua in Clwyd.

At the study day concerning fountains and *Giochi Aqua* at Portmeirion, Lord Alastair Aberdare made an appeal to be notified of other Welsh examples. Llannerch near St Asaph had such features and was one of the most remarkable baroque terraced gardens in Wales. Created by Mutton Davies (1634 -1684), it was influenced by designs he had seen during his Grand Tour. An immaculately detailed painting in a private Welsh collection by an unknown artist documents this garden. A smaller version is in the Yale Collection of British Art (possibly a copy for a town house). In the Yale version St Asaph cathedral has been added to the horizon above the water mill. This is thought to signify an important relationship that Mutton Davies, a staunch royalist, developed with the Church after painting of the original. (*The Yale Llannerch painting is illustrated in Peter Lord's 'Visual Culture of Wales: Imaging the Nation'*)

The primitive perspective of these paintings gives an oblique angle as if from a balloon. This emphasises Llannerch's five terraces leading down from the house through orchards to a large circular pond with a central fountain of Neptune.

A smaller jet fountain is shown on the middle terrace. The painting details elegant staircases connecting the terraces and their banqueting houses, flower filled urns, espaliered trees, orchards and topiary. The artist depicts a well ordered working estate stocked with deer, cattle and sheep, all enclosed within a picket fence or bounded by the river. A huntsman with his spaniel and two washerwomen walk towards the house from the river and horsemen approach from another avenue towards the main entrance.

Foulke Wynne, a poet from Nantglyn c.1684, described Llannerch in the cywydd gofyn (a traditional verse form of praise) as a paradise, reflecting Davies' many travels, apparently even including India.

Philip Yorke in his 'Royal Tribes of Wales' 1799 also describes the wonderful old gardens of Llannerch with its *Giochi Aqua* (water tricks). Yorke particularly describes a sundial which spouted in your face as you approached. It was inscribed:

*Alas! My friend, time will soon overtake you,
And if you do not cry, by G-d, I'll make you.*

Unlike other gods no Greek or Roman model of Neptune was known during the Renaissance so his depictions are often less deified and more closely based on a human model, usually bearded. He carries a trident and rode a dolphin or a horse (He is also god of horses and horse racing). The Llannerch Neptune holds a dolphin and water spouts from beneath the pedestal on which he stands as if above the crest of a wave.

Forthcoming Events Please see booking forms

End of Feb & early March Crocuses at Dolhyfryd, Lawnt, near Denbigh. Virginia Cunningham is happy for branch members to see the result of 1,000 corms scattered in 1840. This is most spectacular in sunshine around mid-day. No need to go to the house, just turn up. You can also wander on to see Dr Johnson's Monument. To check if the crocuses are out contact Virginia: 01745 814805

March 15 10.00-4.00 Garden Recording Seminar at Rhyl Botanical Gardens and survey of Bodrhyddan Hall. Contact Glynis if interested 01745 710261

March 20 10.30 -11.00 AGM 11.00 -3.00 Study Day 'The Picturesque and Sublime', Plas Newydd, Llangollen. £20 (£23 non members)

May 6 2-4.00 Visit Rosehill, Erbistock, a small late 18th /early 19th century landscape park, Edwardian gardens and walled garden overlooking the River Dee £3 (£4 non members)

May 15 7.30 A Fund-raising musical evening at Leeswood Hall kindly hosted by Elizabeth and Pierre Bartlett. Concert by the Cheltenham 'Voices'. Ticket includes a buffet supper and wine. £25

June 5 WHGT National AGM Powis Castle

June 28 - 30 Clwyd and Gwynedd Branch Coach trip to Aberglasney and the National Botanical Garden of Wales. Contact Glynis: 01745 710261 for further details.

July 4 Afternoon Tea in Glenna's garden, 46 Mwrog Street, Ruthin. £3 (£4 non members)

July 24 Teddy Bears Picnic at Dolhyfryd, Lawnt, near Denbigh.

Oct 16 Visit to Birkenhead Park. Tour and talk on the 'History, Restoration and Future plans of Birkenhead Park'. £3 (£4 non members)

