

# FRIENDS NEWSLETTER



## Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Newsletter

### Chairman's Message

Happy New Year to all Friends

By Stephen Parker

An important year, both for The Friends of Dyffryn Society and for Dyffryn Gardens.....a new era begins.

With the handover to the National Trust, the gardens are entering into an exciting period both for the further restoration of the house and the gardens, and in positioning Dyffryn Gardens at the forefront of visitor attractions in the area. How far the gardens have come since those sadly neglected and poorly visited days of years gone by, that so many of us remember well. I, and I know many of you are as well, are proud of The Friends of Dyffryn's support and involvement in that improvement and look forward to the new role we at the

Friends will now take in partnership with The National Trust. This is the beginning of a whole new era in which the many additional benefits of being a member of the Friends brings an even greater opportunity to our members to enjoy and be involved with Dyffryn Gardens.

It was lovely to see so many old and new faces at The Christmas Lunch on the 10<sup>th</sup> December. I particularly enjoyed the musical accompaniment from Henysgol and to their new soloist, our very own Barbara Hodges. What a great time we all had, and I know from all the emails I have received, how many of you enjoyed yourselves as well.

It is business as usual for the Friends, and we continue with our exciting series of spring events. The first of our well-attended coffee mornings will be held at The Cory Education Centre, at Dyffryn Gardens on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> January, when John Prior-Morris, Secretary of The Friends of Insole Court, will give a presentation entitled THE COAL-OWNING INSOLES OF LLANDAFF A FAMILY STORY - 1827 - 1938. We look forward to seeing you all there.

## Friends Membership Subscriptions

**By Joan Andrews, Treasurer**

**Existing members** should all have had requests for payment for the remainder of this financial year – some by email and others by post. If you slipped through the net – I apologise but email saved us about £100. If you need a new form please email or telephone – [joan.a2@btinternet.com](mailto:joan.a2@btinternet.com) or 029 2051 2402.

## The Heritage Horticultural Skills Scheme (HHSS)

**By Val Caple**

This Heritage Lottery Fund project was started in 2011 to develop high quality practical skills for trainees. The HHSS is run by a group of associated garden sites in Wales: Aberglasney, Bodnant, Cardiff City Council, Dyffryn Gardens, Newport

It is always exciting to get the events year running, and this year, once again, there will be a superb series of trips, talks, lunches and coffee mornings available exclusively to Friends members. A strong Events schedule I am sure you will all enjoy. One of the main reasons I hope you will continue to support us as we run the Society in partnership with the National Trust and their own series of exciting events.

**New members** – we will be delighted to welcome NEW members – entry to the gardens from 4<sup>th</sup> January will be free to NT members or on a visitors payment for one off entry. Our society plans to continue its support for Dyffryn and the wider world of horticulture and its support for the National Trust.

The subscription for The Friends for the period 4<sup>th</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 is just £2. - please contact as above.

Looking forward to seeing you- Joan Andrews, Honorary Treasurer.

City Council, Picton Gardens, Portmeirion and St Fagans.

The original 7 students are now close to finishing their training and have started being assessed in the RHS level 2 practical Skills module.

Recently 7 more students have accepted places on the scheme, including 2 who are being trained in Dyffryn. We look forward to seeing them at some of our events.

## Memories from the 1940s

### Leah Manley

I received this letter recently from an old acquaintance who, after a series of strokes, has limited mobility. However her memories are very much alive. I asked for her permission to publish her letter and she found some old photographs taken in 1947

Val Caple

Dear Val,

I have been interested in your connection to the Friends of Dyffryn Gardens as I have loved the place since I first encountered it as a schoolgirl when we wandered the fields from Barry to St Nicholas. We were discovered peeping over the wall by the Head Gardener in the early 1940s who took us on a tour of the gardens. I remember he showed us the walled garden where he had an Espalier peach tree and also told us about the rare trees in the Arboretum. At that time the gardens were tended by German prisoners of war and not as pristine as they are now.



Views of the house and garden



The swimming pool

Then, in my teens, I spent a week in the house with the Glamorgan Youth Club – late 1940s. About 30 odd of us from all over the county – places I had never heard of – like Taibach and Cymmer. I have fond memories of the house with the beautiful ceiling and green silk wallpaper. There was a library, a music room (where I first heard

'Danse Macabre') and a beautiful panelled billiards room. I wonder, are they all the same – I doubt it. In the gardens was a small swimming pool (now long gone) where I taught myself to swim and a tower at the end

of the main lawn from which there was a beautiful view back to the house.

I haven't been there for years, but I retain fond memories

## Christmas Lunch

By Val Caple

The 2012 Christmas Lunch was again a great success with 45 members enjoying perhaps their first seasonal celebration.

We were entertained by the group called 'Yr Hen Ysgol' ('The Old School') which included Sue Banks (harp) and Stephanie Kempley and Sheila Hobbs (violins). The group, which then included John Connolly, appeared at the Llandow Eisteddfod in 2012 and were placed third in the folk music competition.

Sue first described the different types of harp and how her harp is tuned and played. The group then entertained us with Christmas music. After the enjoyable buffet they were joined by our Secretary, Barbara, who even though she has only been playing for a short period, is very proficient on the harp.

Sue asked that I thank the Committee for their kind hospitality.

During the lunch we welcomed Geraldine Donovan and 3 of the new National Trust team who were able to answer our questions on the effects of the change in management before joining us at the tables to talk more informally.

I would like to thank all the members who contributed to the feast

and the raffle and to everyone who attended and helped make the occasion so enjoyable.



Yr Hen Ysgol



The new NT team



Members enjoying the magnificent buffet



## Waterperry Gardens

### By Cynthia and Barbara

A visit to Waterperry in Oxford meant an early start so on the 13<sup>th</sup> September only the early birds climbed aboard our very comfortable coach as we set off along the M4. We had the usual delays around the Bristol area, but arrived in good time at the village of Waterperry and the entrance gates to the estate, where we were met by a very genial gentleman who climbed aboard and gave us a brief introduction to the general plan of the gardens and buildings before passing us on to the head gardener. A very enthusiastic member of the Waterperry staff, he gave us information about the history of the house and its 13th century church (part Saxon in origin) before leading us on a guided tour of the gardens.

Up until 1925 the house, which dates back to the Norman Conquest, had just 3 owners and had been altered and extended over the centuries. It was self-contained,

growing its own fruit, vegetables, and also farmed its own livestock. The villagers were employed in the service of the estate, which also had its own brewhouse and dairy. The large orchard produced many pears and no doubt influenced its title of Waterperry, and the River Thames runs along the borders of the estate.

In 1910 a Miss Beatrix Havergal moved into the house and set up a College for Ladies (no men aloud!), and here they lived and studied horticulture to a high standard of professionalism most unusual in that day and age. Her particular interest was in strawberries (I believe Royal Sovereign was her choice) and these were set in individual pots and each fruit was supported on twigs gathered from the woods nearby. The pots were set along the wall of the garden and turned by hand towards the sun throughout the day! She would enter the show at Chelsea each year and apart from one year always achieved a Gold Award. The only time



Garden features



she was awarded a Silver Gilt, she made an official complaint to the judges. In 1925 she sold the house and it was purchased by Magdalene College, Oxford, who demolished the old house,

using its stones to build a road.

Moving forward to the present, we were told how the estate was now managed, and we were then conducted on a tour of the beautiful gardens which were mostly in glorious flower. Of particular interest were the collections of Asters, of all colours and sizes and including amongst them a species originating in the estate and from which plant all further propagation takes place. Vegetables were also on view and apple trees were noticeably bearing much fruit as we walked along the borders.

We were then left to wander at will and investigate the various buildings such the plant sales shop; the gift shop; the Museum full of agricultural implements etc., and last but not least the restaurant where homemade food both hot and cold could be purchased, and where we refreshed



The long border.



ourselves before the journey home. A memorable day. Even the weather was kind.

## Dyffryn transfers to the National Trust

**Joan Andrews**

Three representatives of the Friends were invited to the official handover of Dyffryn estate from The Vale of Glamorgan Council to the National Trust.

The lease is to run for 50 years. This was an opportunity to meet some officials of the Trust in Wales

Councillor Gwyn John - as representative of The Vale of Glamorgan Council gave a brief history of the estate and how it came in to the care of the council. He reminded the audience of the support

received from The Heritage Lottery Fund in terms of two grants to restore the gardens, gardeners complex, greenhouses, shop and restaurant. A third lottery grant is currently being used to restore parts of the house, including most of the ground floor rooms and grand staircase. It is hoped that this work will be open to the public by Easter.

Justin Albert, the Director of the National Trust for Wales, spoke of the delight that such a nationally important garden will be managed by the Trust and will have the potential to attract ever increasing numbers of visitors from across the whole of the United Kingdom. A key to the house

was then passed from Councillor John to Justin Albert to symbolise the handover.

Gerry Donovan, the Property Manager, spoke briefly to direct visitors to just above the heather garden where a young oak tree was to be planted. Alex Andrews, head gardener and her staff, had prepared a site near where a 200 year old tree had stood until recently. The oak has an extra significance as the symbol of the National Trust. The visit ended with an opportunity for a brief tour of



**The tree-planting.**

the house to see all the progress being made - followed by a private side trip to enjoy the aconites.

### **Notes from the Friends Committee Meetings 10th September 2012 and 14th January 2013**

#### **Progress report of the Dyffryn Estate.**

Stephen informed the committee that the contract between The Vale of Glamorgan Council and The National Trust was exchanged Friday 7th September 2012.

The Committee agreed that we need to have a meeting with N.T. to discuss some finer points e.g. the privileges and constitution.

Work on the house is progressing well and it is planned to open it to the public on Good Friday—29th March 2013. In the weeks following the opening there will be an opportunity for visitors to see 'Conservation in Action' as the last touches are made to the internal decorations.

A grant from the Vale Council to the N.T. is pending to cover a backlog of repairs. St. Michaels cottage and key things in the garden

need attention e.g., The Pompeian fountain. These cannot be attended to until after the takeover. Because of the presence of the great crested newts and the bats, permission is required in order to progress work.

Clare, who was the plant propagator, has left and is working towards a Kew diploma. Rhiannon Gamble has started working as the Interpretation and Learning Officer. 100 people are needed to help with the house stewarding. N.T. have produced a volunteer strategy and there are lots of training opportunities see [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens/](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens/) for details.

All permanent staff will transfer to the N.T., but the Agency workers will not. Some of catering staff may transfer and the tea rooms will be introducing a new simple menu.

There will be a study day on 9<sup>th</sup> March in the Great hall entitled 'Women in Horticulture'. The charge will include lunch. This will be open to N.T. members as well as non members with room for 60 - 80 people.

## A glimpse of the past being re-stored for the future

By Joan Andrews

Dyffryn estate has been successful in obtaining a Heritage Lottery Grant to restore the grand ground floor rooms and the staircase to their former glory. On 8th September 2012 some 100 Friends were able to enjoy an excellent guided tour by Gerry Donovan, the curator. The construction site had been made as safe as possible for our visit and was supervised by one of the construction staff.

After a safety advice session and fitting with hard hats all in the astonishingly tidy yard – we entered the grand hall. This was still full of scaffolding but glimpses of its promise could be seen - in the décor and stained glass. The tapestries that once graced this room have been painstakingly traced and it is planned to have these copied and hung again.

The billiard room still looks much as it must have done when used

by the Cory's and their visitors. Although the table is not the original the elaborate scoring board still hangs by the Victorian fireplace

Next to the billiard room lies the first of the three grand reception rooms. The décor in both the Red and Blue drawing rooms, as far as possible duplicating that of the early 1900's, is almost complete and enhanced by the views from the long windows which all look out down the main lawn

The third principal room was used by the BBC and partially restored by them. While the décor is not authentic to the house it is of the period and will be retained

In the corridor it is possible to peer through a peephole in the ceiling where some original wallpaper has been found dating prior to the present hall

The staircase – has been well preserved and though currently under scaffolding and board protection allows glimpses down to the grand hall and access to the landing and the one first floor room being restored



**Safety First**



**Grand Hall**



**Billiard Room**



This first floor room, once a bedroom, has the same splendid view down the long lawn and from its balcony it is possible that Thomas Mawson would have planned his development of the garden. It will be used for a display of garden history, and in particular, the plant hunter connection to Dyffryn

In 1891 the estate was bought by John Cory, an industrialist who made his money in coal and shipping. In 1883 he remodeled the existing house into what we see today.

It was his third son, Reginald Cory, who was to collaborate with Thomas Mawson the landscape architect, to design and plant the garden which has become one of the most important in Wales

Reginald Cory as well as being active in horticulture in the UK

sponsored George Forrest's plant hunting expedition in 1917-1920 and 1921-1923. He plant hunted himself with Lawrence Johnston of Hidcote Gardens' fame to visit South Africa in 1927. he also visited the West Indies in 1931 and the Atlas Mountains in 1932

Reginald Cory died in 1934 and the estate was later sold in 1937 to a neighbouring landowner, Cennydd Traherne, who then offered it to the then Glamorgan County Council on a 999 year lease with the condition that the gardens be used for public education and enjoyment. Later in 1997 the Vale of Glamorgan Council acquired the freehold of the estate

Many volunteers will be needed to help in fitting out and maintaining these rooms – it is hoped with the new

management under the National Trust to make the rooms as accessible as possible without barriers and DO NOT notices

All too soon this glimpse of the past being restored for the future came to an end. We thank Gerry, not only for her time on a Saturday to take all four groups round, but also for all the work she has done over the years in applying for the grants and working with the stream of firms who have brought Dyffryn to what it is today. Also thanks to Chris of Ken Biggs Construction for giving up his Saturday to look after us.

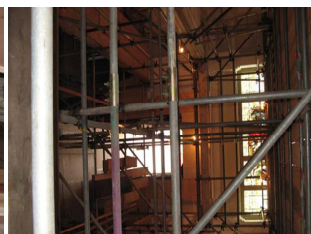
Thanks also to Geraldine Donovan for allowing me to use much of the material in this article. See also Dyffryn, an Edwardian Garden by Stephen Torrode (1983, Cardiff Record Office)



Painted Ceiling



Original Wallpaper



The Staircase

## New Websites

By Val Caple

The new Friends of Dyffryn website was launched to coincide with the transfer of management to the NT.

The original website was launched in April 2001. At that time Dyffryn gardens did not have its own website and Geraldine Donovan asked if the Friends could provide one. Two members of the Committee who had the required experience agreed to design and maintain it.

We have been lucky to receive a grant from

Creative Rural Communities to buy software which has allowed us to include more features and we hope you enjoy it. The website is designed to attract new members and to keep existing members up-to-date on the Friends' activities.

The NT has replaced the Vale of Glamorgan website with its own at [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens/](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens/). This contains information on the gardens themselves.

I would like the new website to include contributions from members:

Have you any historic photos of the house and gardens?

Have you new photos of recent events?

Can you write about a particular aspect of the garden's planting or design.

What are your impressions of the changes in the gardens? Please send comments to [val.t.caple@care4free.net](mailto:val.t.caple@care4free.net)



## Dutch daffodils

By Mary Evans

Dyffryn Gardens is to receive a donation of Dutch daffodils for planting next season.

This is a special strain named Thomas Mawson which has been



Peace Palace Gardens

cultivated by an old Dutch Nursery to celebrate in 2013 the centenary of the Peace Palace in The Hague. Its garden, designed by Thomas Mawson, is where the bulbs have been planted.

Donations are to be made to the ten most important of Mawson's Gardens outside the Netherlands. Our membership secretary, Mary Evans, was contacted by a Dutch national garden conservationist society and our Committee

accepted the donation on behalf of the Friends. The Peace Palace houses the International Court of Justice which is the principal judicial body of the United Nations.

We hope you agree that the donation is an appropriate way to celebrate this special centenary by sharing the Mawson heritage with Dyffryn Gardens. We look forward to seeing this special daffodil in bloom. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace\\_Palace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Palace)