

Spring 2018

# FRIENDS NEWSLETTER



## Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Newsletter

### **Wern Manor, Porthmadog: A remnant Mawson design**

**By Geraldine Donovan, CMLI  
FRSA, General Manager, Dyffryn  
House and Gardens**

It was with great interest I took up the invitation to talk about Thomas Mawson, 1861- 1933, with specific reference to his work in Wales. The venue was the original drawing room of Wern Manor and there was a very warm welcome, from the current owners Mane-Ann and Paul Davies who are restoring the property.

To give some context, the earliest record of the manor dates back to the 16th century. Substantially remodelled under the ownership of Richard Greaves

in the 19th century, it was later owned by the William Ellis family. (Richard Greaves nephew was Clough - Williams Ellis, of Portmeirion). More recently it was used as a nursing home and then left abandoned and rapidly decaying before the current owners stepped in with courage and ambition and a dear love for the Grade II\* house and its overgrown setting.

It was in the era of Greaves, with his wealth from nearby slate quarrying, that he commissioned John Douglas to transform the property into a Jacobean Arts and Craft country house of the late Victorian style and who better than Thomas Mawson to design a complementary setting. Mawson

had already undertaken a substantial commission in north Wales and his first edition of 'The Art and Craft of Garden Making' had been published in 1900.

Mawson in Wales

### Garden Commissions

1899 The Flagstaff, Colwyn Bay  
(now the Welsh Mountain Zoo)

1900 St Mary's Lodge, Newport,  
Gwent

1901-04 Wern, Porthmadog

1904-14 Dyffryn Gardens

1907 Maesrudd, Newport, Gwent

1908 Raithwaite, Penarth, Cardiff

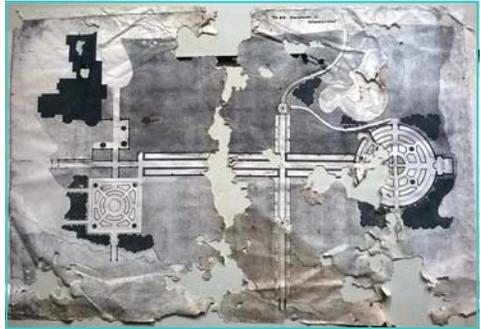
### Park Commissions

1892 Bellevue Park, Newport,  
Gwent

1900 Beechwood Park, Newport,  
Gwent

No town planning commissions listed but he did do the masterplanning for the garden village, Glyn Cory, part of the Dyffryn Estate, launched in 1909. (Details available in Janet Waymark's *Thomas Mawson: Life, Gardens and Landscapes*, 2009).

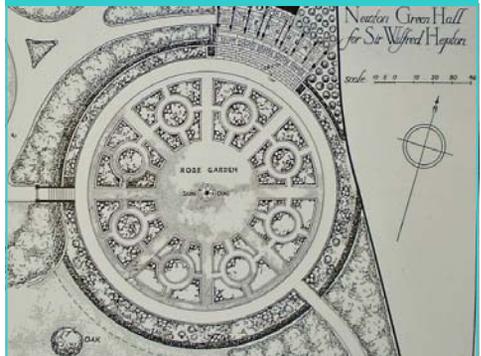
I have had the privilege of being involved with Dyffryn for over 20 years but I have not encountered an original Mawson drawing (Reginald Cory had instructed the executors of his estate to burn all his papers at his death in 1934). I could not convey my huge excitement at seeing the Wern garden drawings laid out at the back of the drawing room in various beleaguered states. The preciousness of them heightened by the story of their discovery in a



Mawson's design for the east section of the garden at Wern



Extract from Wern's Mawson drawing



Rose Garden design from *The Art & Craft of Garden Making* Fifth edition

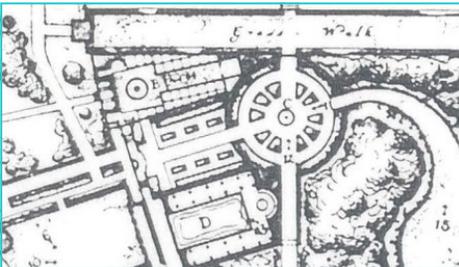
severely dilapidated room which not a day or two later suffered a ceiling collapse which would have obliterated these now treasured documents.

Immediately, I was drawn to the more detailed drawing which included the circular design of what I presumed would have been the rose garden, now an overgrown area but still with the path network apparent. It is a familiar element of Mawson's designs and one which he uses with such ease to resolve circulation routes converging from formal and informal areas, often at asymmetric angles which can be beautifully absorbed by the segmented beds, as evident at Dyffryn and in his illustration of Newton Great Hall.

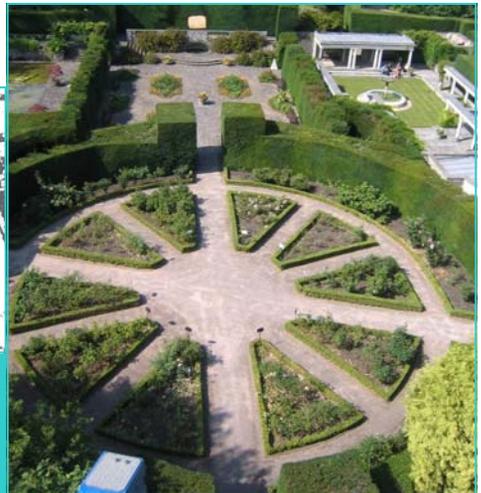
Of roses Mawson comments, 'Of all the flowers which repay the provision of a separate garden and individual treatment, the rose by popular consent has first and unquestioned claims to special consideration and choice of position. No other flower provides such a number of varieties with such wide range of effects nor such an extensive flowering season.' I think Mawson would be

delighted that so many of the roses from his time, now referred to as heritage varieties, are still sought after and are accompanied by new breeds with even longer flowering seasons.

The quotation is from 'The Arts & Craft of Garden Making' cited earlier. As a source of fine design principles it is as relevant today as when published but I do warn against the soft back facsimile version which is such a disappointment compared with the sizeable original publication. I would suggest the later editions — 4<sup>th</sup>, 1912 and 5<sup>th</sup>, 1926. As Mawson states 'In the first edition, I was obliged to rely almost entirely on perspective drawings to help me visualize the plans illustrated, for, though most of the schemes described were completed so far as the actual work of formation was concerned, the hand of time was necessary to clothe the ground work thus



Dyffryn Garden masterplan extract showing Rose Garden and to the right an elevated view from the early 2000s.



created with a softening and beautifying veil of greenery. In the present (4<sup>th</sup>) edition, however, after 25 years' practice, I am in a position to illustrate by photographs from my own work nearly all the points dealt with. While this almost exclusive use of examples culled from my own practice may be considered open to the objection that it narrows the outlook, it has the more than counterbalancing advantage that each point shows some problem met in actual practice and successfully solved, a practical gain of the highest importance.'

Lastly, I must congratulate

Marie-Ann and Paul for recognising the remnants of Mawson's Wern design and not taking the easy path of clearing the overgrowth and simply starting again. It will be a long process of recovery. not least as major funding is more challenging to secure for private owners. Their current income streams are holiday lets in restored sections of the outer manor buildings. I for one will take pleasure in supporting these when I next plan a visit to north Wales knowing my holiday revenue will contribute to reinstating a very worthy property.

See [www.wernmanor.co.uk](http://www.wernmanor.co.uk)

## 12 Days of Christmas 2017

By Val Caple



The display was again great fun. I will let you guess the days!

## Visit to Whitcombe House and Coughton Court

By Rev. Margaret Stark

On a cloudy, not to say, showery morning we set off first for the Cotswolds and then Warwickshire. Whitcombe House and its beautiful acre of garden is owned by Faith and Anthony Hallett. They welcomed us warmly and we were served coffee and scrumptious cake by their friendly helpers – almost on the terrace, but the rain put paid to that idea! Pottering about the garden with its immaculate lawns and fine herbaceous borders we passed under arches draped with wisteria and noted the delightful garden furniture. A lovely dark pink hydrangea, roses of various hues, dahlias, trees with autumnal tints, a meandering stream and a wooden falcon – all a pleasure for the eye and occasionally the nose! A further delight was a greenhouse with clusters of grapes hanging from its vines and peppers at the sides. And there was a good old-fashioned potting shed. Some of the views across the garden included the square tower of the nearby Church of St Faith (not named after our hostess, sadly) which has a magnificent old font.

On to Coughton Court, a fine Tudor house, home of the Throckmorton family since 1409. The half-timbered building extends around three sides of a courtyard which contains a formal garden laid



### Whitcombe House

out in Elizabethan times as a knot garden. Two short talks were available about the Gunpowder Plot and the history of the house and family. While it rained we visited the house where we learned about the Throckmortons' involvement in the afore-mentioned Plot and saw the priest's hole in which the devout Catholic family took the risk of hiding their priest. Amongst the exhibits was a cope with intricate needlework that Catherine of Aragon is said to have worked on. There were also many portraits and other memorabilia collected by the family. One could climb a spiral staircase up onto the roof of the C16th gate tower and have a



fine view over the gardens.

Coughton Court grounds consist of some 25 acres of gardens. Near the house we could walk under arches dripping with greenery and come upon urns placed centrally for optimum effect. Peeking through one such arch we saw the monument to the fair Rosamund, lover of King Henry ii and kinswoman to the Throckmortons. And then to the Walled Garden with its magnificent herbaceous borders and pool and tsunami memorial carved by Rosie Musgrave. Within this garden is the Rose Labyrinth with its many varieties of roses. Some of the bushes now boast luscious crimson rose-hips. Some of us made for the tree-lined Riverside Walk which, after a pleasant stroll, brought us out at the Bog Garden with its swathes of bulrushes, and thence to the Vegetable Garden and the Orchard. Within the 25 acres there are also two churches; the younger Roman Catholic Church and the older St Peter's of Anglican persuasion with its old font and nave arches.

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit in spite of the rain and are grateful

as ever to Mary for organising us so well and to Dave for his excellent driving; this included about 100 yards in reverse so that we could park inconspicuously near Whitcombe House!



Coughton Court



## National Trust Wales Supporters' Groups and Associations Meeting

By Val Caple

Joan Andrews and I attended the meeting in Dyffryn as representatives of the Friends. NT properties from around South Wales had sent representatives, for example Aberdulais Falls.

We were welcomed by Justin Albert and presentations followed on the challenges which the groups face, for example, the new General Data Protection Regulations which come into force on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

After lunch we were given the chance to break into small discussion groups, when we shared our concerns with the NT



representatives. One result is that the details of the groups are now published in the NT Newsletter for Wales

After the talk we had a conducted tour of the garden. We saw the work on the new children's playground, and the beautiful carved seats which have been made from some of the trees which have had to be chopped down in the Arboretum.

## Winter Talk Series

By Val Caple

We have enjoyed a series of talks in the Cory Education Centre over the winter. For the first time some have been in the afternoon and have been equally successful

The talk In October was by Jacqueline Walters on 'The Button Family - the beginning of the Dyffryn Story. This was very interesting and informative and was enjoyed by everyone

In November Marion Davies gave a presentation entitled 'Landscape and Character in Jane Austen's Novels'. She was ably

supported by Judith Hart who read excerpts from Jane's novels and letters as well as those who admired her work. As a fan of Jane I learnt a lot about her and her times.

In January there was a changed to the advertised talk due to illness. Joan Andrews took over at short notice and talked about the Workhouse movement in Glamorgan based on her research while working in St David's Hospital, Cardiff, a former workhouse.

1More talks are in the pipeline, see page 12.

## Dyffryn Dahlias

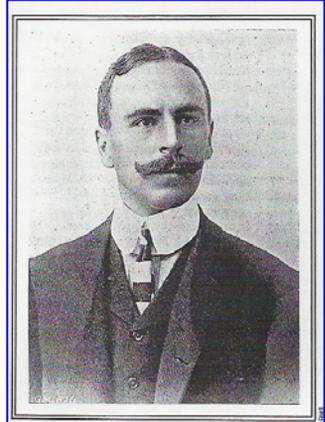
By Hilary M Thomas

Reginald Cory of Dyffryn House, St Nicholas, in the Vale of Glamorgan, was among the foremost amateur botanists and horticulturalists of the early C20th. Cory had a passion for plants, studying them, collecting them, sponsoring plant hunting expeditions and himself travelling abroad in search of plants. His personal fortune enabled him to indulge these interests as it did to ensure that the gardens at Dyffryn were transformed by the landscape architect Thomas Mawson and by Cory himself.

In his book *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* Thomas Mawson highlights one of Cory's pioneering endeavours the trialling of dahlias. First introduced into this country from South America, via Spain, at the beginning of the

C19th, dahlias became an instantly fashionable garden plant, but by the beginning of the C20th their popularity had waned and they were grown mainly not as garden flowers but as blooms for exhibition. Reginald Cory seems to have had a particular liking for dahlias and in 1913 he and his head gardener Arthur Cobb organised the Cardiff Dahlia Trials at Dyffryn.

This comprehensive trial of garden varieties of dahlias was set up under the auspices of the Royal Horticultural Society and the National Dahlia Society, two organisations with which Cory was intimately involved. Dahlia growers throughout Britain were invited to contribute to the trials, and the response was overwhelming. Over 8000 plants were sent to Dyffryn, representing nearly 1000 varieties. All were potted up and



Reginald Cory

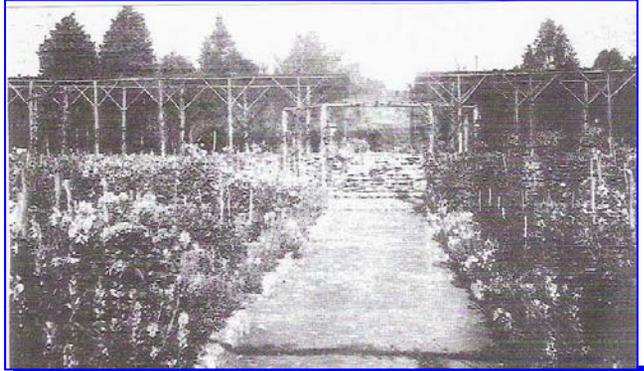
grown on by Arthur Cobb and his team of gardeners to be planted out in the newly created Dahlia Garden.

Particular care was taken to arrange the plantings in the most attractive way, grouping the dahlias in beds as in a flower garden (and not in straight lines, variety by variety, as was the norm in trials), something which particularly impressed a contributor to *The Gardeners Chronicle* of 12 December 1914 who wrote of 'the gorgeous yet artistic effects' and of 'Mr Cobb's grouping in the variously shaped beds [which] left nothing to be desired'.

Filled with a great variety of dahlias - pompoms, single and cactus, collerettes, paeony and others - the garden must have presented a vibrant tapestry of colour and form.

The Dahlia Garden was created at the extreme south-west corner of the Dyffryn gardens. It is not clear how long it survived as a showplace for dahlias, but by the 1990s it had long been neglected and was filled in leaving no visible footprint. Photographs taken in the 1920s reveal the garden and its content, but only in the imagination can the spectacular mass of colours provided by so many different dahlias in full bloom be conjured up.

Reginald Cory's contribution to the affairs of the RHS for over three decades was immense, as it was to the Linnean Society. For the most part, he played an unobtrusive, supporting role, serving on committees



The Dahlia Garden in the 1920s

and councils but not taking the chair. He did, however, agree to become President of the National Dahlia Society, an accolade afforded him in recognition of his pioneering work in establishing dahlias as a popular garden plant. In 1914 he presented the Cory Cup for The Best Garden Dahlia. Appropriately, in 1921 a new dahlia (raised by Messrs. Cheal of the Lowfield Nurseries, Crawley) which won the RHS Award of Garden Merit was named 'Reginald Cory'.

In 1914 a second Dahlia Trial was undertaken at Dyffryn, this time for dahlias raised from seed. This was an area of special

interest to Cory who developed his own varieties of seed-raised plants. He favoured the single-flowered ones which, one summer, he massed in the dry bed of the intended lake at Dyffryn.

The Dahlia Trials of 1913 and 1914 which did much to bring the dahlia back into fashion as a garden plant led to increased interest and competition among nurserymen and amateur growers throughout the country. Fred Treseder, a Cardiff nurseryman, spent a lifetime breeding new varieties of dahlias and in 1928 one of his best seedlings, selected by his friend Joshua Pritchard

Hughes, the bishop of Llandaff, won the RHS Award of Garden Merit. Named 'Bishop of Llandaff', this semi-double 'paeony-like' dahlia, with its scarlet flowers, dark stem and purple foliage, is one of the few varieties grown at Dyffryn during Cory's time to have survived.

Following his marriage in 1930, Reginald Cory moved from Dyffryn to Wareham in Dorset, and over succeeding decades the Dahlia Garden and its content became neglected and finally abandoned. The establishment of dahlia beds at Dyffryn at the beginning of the C21st, and the planting of 'Bishop of Llandaff' dahlias to great effect in the herbaceous borders, appropriately commemorates the pioneering work of Reginald Cory and Fred Treseder.



'Bishop of Llandaff' dahlias in the herbaceous borders at Dyffryn, 2016

## Friends Christmas Party

By Val Caple



the Blue Anchor, Aberthaw

Another sumptuous and companionable party took place at

Many thanks to all those who made it possible and to those Friends who joined us.

## Programme of Events 2018.

**Talks are open to members only, unless otherwise stated.**

**Where numbers are limited pre-booking is required using the application forms included with this issue.**

**Right: Friends at Whitcombe House.**



Wednesday 16 <sup>th</sup> May 2018	AGM. 2.00 pm Cory Education Centre. This will be followed by an update from Gerry Donovan. Ceridwen Davies will lead a tour of the walled garden after the refreshments
Friday 25 <sup>th</sup> May 2018	Coach trip to Dyrham Park and Iford Manor. <b>See Application Form for Details</b>
Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup> June 2018	Special musical evening at Dyffryn, fundraising for a new golf buggy. <b>Application Form and Details Available Soon</b>
Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Coach trip to Oxford Botanic Gardens <b>See Application Form for Details</b>
Friday 5th October 2018	Coffee Afternoon 2 pm to 4 pm at the Cory Education Centre. Talk by Christina Hanley: 'The Imprisoned Soul' on the Margaret Lyndsey painting in Dyffryn House.
Wednesday 14th November 2018	Coffee Morning 10.30 am to 12 M.D at Cory Education Centre. Linda & Edgar Gibbs will be giving a Digital Magic Lantern show.

### **For more Information about above events, please contact**

Mrs Mary Ponting or Mrs Barbara Hodges (addresses on page 11) or visit [www.dyffryngardens.org.uk](http://www.dyffryngardens.org.uk)

For National Trust events contact Dyffryn Gardens, St Nicholas, Vale of Glamorgan, CF58SU. Tel. 02920 593328 or visit [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens)