

Spring 2012

FRIENDSNEWSLETTER



Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Newsletter

Chairman's Message

New Happy New Year to all our Friends

By Stephen Parker

As Friends of Dyffryn I know you are all awaiting details of the transition of the house and gardens to the National Trust. As we go to press with this newsletter the final details and dates are yet to be finalised, so we have had to take action on your behalf to allow continued access to the Gardens and events. We have therefore negotiated an extension of the date of your membership card thereby allowing continued entrance until the end of May 2012. Rather than repeat the details here, I would like to draw your attention to the statement enclosed with this newsletter by our treasurer Joan

Andrews, in which the various options for the future are also explained fully.

Once The National Trust has completed the transfer, the Friends of Dyffryn will continue in association with the Trust, very much along the lines of other gardens and their associated friends societies, with the largest being Hidcote.

The transfer to the National Trust is a very exciting time both for the Friends and the Gardens and one we see as a very positive step in the further development and security of Dyffryn Gardens, which has always been our main aim. Many thanks for all your support through the years and

I hope you will continue to support us. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact us, we will be happy to help as always.

We look forward to seeing you at the first of this year's new events, which will be held on the 28th

February at 10.30 am in the Cory Education Centre, Dyffryn Gardens at which Cynthia Merrett will talk about 'Spinning and Weaving', with demonstrations and examples of Cynthia's work. .

Friends Membership Subscriptions

By Joan Andrews, Treasurer

We have had to make some unusual arrangement for the Friends Membership subscription for next year – starting from 1st April 2012. This is because there has been delay in the signing of the lease with the National Trust which seems likely to be after the end of March.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council with the National Trust have agreed that this years membership card will be valid up to the end of May and will allow free entry to the gardens for this period.

The Friends will reimburse the Gardens in the usual way (pro rata for two months).

As a member you will receive the application form for membership of the Friends once we know the date of transfer to the National Trust.

This will be cover two periods:

1. April and May 2012 – we will be asking you to pay one/sixth of your current annual membership whether it be individual, concession, family or joint adult. This will be on a trust basis as the Society will have to pay the Vale of Glamorgan even if members do

not pay the Society – see how we trust our members

2. For the remaining 10 months there will be three options:

Either - if you already are a National Trust member we will be asking for a subscription of about 1/3 of our current rate to cover membership of the Friends and invitation to all Friends organised events

OR - if you are not a the National Trust member you may choose to join and take our Friends membership as above. If you do so then please do so via Dyffryn when part of your fee goes direct to Dyffryn.

OR - for this year only the Trust will honour our current arrangement with the Vale of Glamorgan whereby your membership of the Friends covers both free entry to the gardens and entry to all Friends organised events - and at a similar cost. This offer is only available to existing members of the Society who are renewing their membership for 2012/2013

Sorry if this sounds somewhat complex – but was the only way we could find to maintain continuity of enjoyment of Dyffryn

Chinese Philosopher?

By Stephen Parker

As a garden historian with a particular interest in our beloved Dyffryn Gardens and Reginald Cory, on whom I wrote a dissertation a few years back. It still amazes me the surprising sources of information. In the course of my University research I visit many twentieth-century gardens throughout the country, so imagine my surprise to find, on the terrace at Lotherton Hall near Leeds, a particularly familiar statue.

This statue is accredited by an accompanying nameplate as being of Sho Haku, the sixteenth-century Japanese pilgrim priest who assumed the name Botankwa (peony flower). The statue now at Lotherton was previously in the gardens at Temple Newsam House, which is also owned by the City of Leeds, and had been moved to Lotherton Hall in 1968.

The statue had originally been sold from another Yorkshire country house, Kirby Misperton Hall in 1928 on the death of the owner Mr J.R. Twentyman; the Kirby Misperton sale catalogue has an illustration and description of it. The statue was bought by the Leeds industrialist Lord Brotherton, who took it to his house Kirkham Abbey, where it remained until his death in 1949. The Kirkham Abbey estate and many other treasures were given to the City of Leeds by a Mrs Charles Brotherton, his daughter in law in 1950, as part of what is referred to as the 'Radcliffe Gift'.

The sculpture is unrecorded until it



The Lotherton Hall Philosopher

clearly appears on display at Temple Newsam House, just downhill from the house, under a weeping ash tree in a set of photographs taken in the summer of 1955 and held by Leeds City Council.

Further research has revealed there is, or was, a third version at Langley Park near Slough in Buckinghamshire, and this is documented and photographed in John Harris's *No Voice from the Hall. Memories of a Country House Snooper* (p.33 and plate facing p.34)

This sculpture also bears a remarkable resemblance to our own much-loved 'Chinese Philosopher'. The mystery deepens...I will keep the Friends updated as to further research!

Highgrove

By Barbara Hodges & Joan Andrews

On Thursday 17th August over 40 members left Dyffryn Gardens for a visit to The Prince of Wales' Garden - Highgrove. The previous week we had watched the dark scenes in London when the police had such a hard time in the riots. Here was a scene of utter peace. A policeman boarded our coach in his old fashioned helmet and a pleasant smile to check our driver's credentials. All our I.D.'s were checked and we were split into two groups - each led by a different guide.

We were shown a short film about the estate which was introduced by Prince Charles. The house was built in 1796 and in 1980 was bought by the Prince from a former Prime Minister, sadly the cedar of Lebanon by the house which was the only survivor from earlier times had to be felled because of safety concerns.

Our volunteer Highgrove garden guide



Image from the Highgrove website

was very knowledgeable and explained the various aspects of it to us. His Royal Highness has devoted a lot of energy to transforming his garden and with the help and advice of several notable people and the dedicated assistance of the garden staff has achieved a very interesting garden. Like most gardens it is an ever changing scene and is managed to the organic and sustainable principles that he has so long championed. There is a specially-built reed bed sewage system which is used for all the waste water from the house and Orchard room.

The gardens have been developed to be as self-sufficient as possible. All green

waste is composted and used in the gardens. Natural predators are encouraged and only natural fertilizers are used. On the advice of Miriam Rothschild, the Prince has re-created a lost habitat by re-establishing a wild flower meadow. The meadow has over 30 different varieties of native plants including ox-eye daisies, yellow rattle, common spotted orchid, meadow cranesbill and ragged robin. The wild flower seeds are harvested, dried and used throughout the estate.

On the approach to the walled vegetable garden you walk the Azalea Walk which is home to busts of people including Miriam Rothschild and Robert Chartis, Bishop of

London. There is also a small memorial to Tigga - the Prince's favourite Jack Russell dog.

In the walled kitchen garden there are many old English varieties of espaliered fruit trees as well as many rare and endangered varieties of vegetables. We met a gardener there who told us that he has worked for The Prince for 26 years. He was tidying the ground under a damson tree, the branches were bending under the weight of fruit.

The beds were bordered with an unusual herb called Teuchrium, it was a mass of colour and apparently does not grow so straggly as Thyme.

As the family was not in residence, we were able to enjoy the Sundial and Terrace gardens which lie to the right of the house. Our guide recommended the cream tea in the café and the nearby shop was full of things to buy. All profit goes to The

Princes Trust.

We were not allowed to take photographs but you can visit www.highgrovegardens.com where you will find plenty.

If you have not visited High grove - do go. Private visits can now be booked but the waiting time is approximately 18 months. It is an unpretentious house but set in imaginative gardens with much to enjoy.

Christmas Lunch By Barbara Hodges

40 members enjoyed a Christmas buffet lunch served at the CEC on 14th Dec.

The tables were brightly decorated by several members of the

Committee with floral centre pieces that were made by Dr. Val. Caple and afterwards raffled, together with other prizes.

Mrs Mary Ponting supplied the usual, challenging quiz which was fiercely contested.

Cath Little entertained us with seasonal stories and songs. Cath. draws her inspiration from her Irish and English heritage as well as her Welsh homeland. She regularly tells stories at the National Museum of Wales.



Barbara introducing Cath Little to the members.



Enjoying the quiz and buffet afterwards

The Pumpkin Tea By Val Caple

Most of us only see pumpkins as decorative jack-o'-lanterns for Guy Fawkes Night, or for the Halloween celebrations which have been introduced from the USA since I was a child. The content of the fruit is usually just thrown away so that the skin can be carved. Polly Davies demonstrated that many delicious cakes and even truffles can be made from the pulp.

About 40 Friends enjoyed a talk by Polly Davies, an American who has lived in Wales for about 20 years, entitled 'Pumpkins from seed to pie.' Polly started by giving us some tips for growing pumpkins. However, although I am a keen vegetable gardener, I think my plot is too small to do justice to the plant.



Pumpkins grown in the Dyffryn Walled garden

Smaller varieties are available – they do not have to be giants grown to win a prize at the local agricultural or gardening show – but they still require a lot of ground to crawl over. Another problem are obvious in the statements 'select a site that receive as much sunshine as possible' and 'it helps to keep the plant leaves drier earlier in the day and late at night'. With the weather being 'enjoyed' in the Vale recently this is impossible in my garden without a sunlamp and an umbrella! Obviously the walled garden at Dyffryn is more sheltered than mine.

Cleaning the fruit and cooking the pulp and pureeing it appears less stressful and the pulp will freeze. However Polly admitted that she buys most of her pumpkin in tins from Howells Food Hall in Cardiff in bulk.

Many examples of the cookery skills of herself and her helpers were on show, not just pumpkin pie, and there was a rush to buy the products on display after the talk. We all enjoyed



Polly Davies demonstrated that many delicious cakes and even truffles can be made from the pulp.



the delicacies laid on for afternoon tea and the event became a real celebration of the much maligned pumpkin.

The food and recipe books were for sale with proceeds going to the St Nicholas' Childrens Aid Hospice which supports day centres and home support in Cape Town South Africa. We later received a letter from Fr. Colion Amos in the Parish of St Theodore, Port Talbot, thanking us for our contribution of £160 to the fund.

The St Lythans Dig

By Ceridwen Davies

During December Archaeology Wales and Cadw carried out a dig at both the Tinkinswood and St Lythans Burial Chambers. The two sites are on land formerly belonging to the Cory family as part of the Dyffryn estate. The Mill field or *Maesyfelin*, where the St Lythans chamber is situated is now farmed by the Readers. Both chambers are thought to date back 5,000 to 6,000 years ago to the Neolithic period. At this time Humans were moving away from being hunter gatherers to farmers. The tomb at Tinkinswood is all that remains of a Neolithic larger settlement there.

The last dig on the site had been in 1914 and had uncovered skeletons of Neolithic men, women and children. Local people were invited to participate in the 2011 project as part of Cadw's outreach aims. Cadw will also be organising 'Make and Break' activities at Tinkinswood later this year when local school children follow the Neolithic peoples' practice of making then breaking objects. Staff from Dyffryn Gardens and Arboretum joined other volunteers and staff from Archaeology Wales and Cadw for a day's digging and discovery at the St Lythans tomb. Here all that remains for the eye to see are three upright stones forming three sides and a large cap stone lying flat on top. The site has been plundered over the years with the front and the contents removed in the late nineteenth century, local folk law



'all that remains for the eye to see are three upright stones forming three sides and a large cap stone'

saying it was cleaned out by the then tenant in 1878 and used as a kennel for his dog! Ploughing the ground over many years had also damaged the area immediately around the chamber. The site has never been excavated before and the team's aims were to see if ideas about the function and construction of the chamber were accurate.

The dig gradually exposed the forecourt area around the chamber. Using small trowels and brushes the diggers cleared away the soil to show the rocks below. Some were natural, others placed by the Neolithic builders showing the base of a front wall to the chamber. These, hard to see at ground level became much clearer from the aerial photographs taken from the top of a very long pole. Small finds such as flint chips show that there may have been activities such as shaping tools on the forecourt. Pieces of pottery, fragments of bone needles and bits of teeth thought to have been from the chamber itself, strewn around the site during the nineteenth century

clearance.

Joining in the dig was great fun, and for a gardener it's a change to be removing the soil and leaving the stones! It's also good to know there are people out there who are as geeky about Neolithic tombs as I am about kitchen gardening. The archaeologists dig diary is at <http://tinkinswoodarchaeology.wordpress.com/2011/12/04/final-dig-diary-for-st-lythans/> with some photos showing various stages of the dig.



'The dig gradually exposed the fore-court area around the chamber.'

Tinkinswood's White Witch

By Val Caple

One of the stories by Cath Little was located at the Tinkinswood Burial Cairn. I was one of the volunteer diggers on the Cadw sponsored excavation of two of the smaller, neighbouring cairns, one of which turned out to be a later Bronze Age barrow and the other a pile of stones which was the result of later field clearance.

Among the many visitors was the Tinkinswood White Witch and her family. She was interested in what we were doing; her main concern being that we should not destroy any trees. She said that the local coven would re-purify the site when we had finished.

Later she wrote a blog for the website, www.tinkinswoodarchaeology.wordpress.com. She writes with understanding of the archaeology of the site where there was evidence of activity from the Stone Age to Roman period, but has her own viewpoint.



Neolithic Tinkinswood in the background, with later field clearance cairn and modern pylon—and archaeologists

Here are 2 excerpts:

'My name is Ginny, and I come to Tinkinswood on a very regular basis. In fact I call Tinkinswood my spiritual home. I feel at ease here, and I suspect that this feeling comes from the thousands of years of occupation and the coming together of people and ideas at this one very special site. I believe, that to understand the significance of ancient sites as sacred

areas like Tinkinswood for neo-pagans like myself, we all need to go back and look at the practices and beliefs of the people who lived in the Stone Age.'

'Living human activity has continued within sight of the ancients at Tinkinswood: we continue to visit and practice our own commemorative acts and rituals, culminating with our own Handfasting (a Pagan marriage).

A similarity between ancient and modern Pagan belief is ancestral worship and the fact that

ancient forebears were always present. Indeed it has been suggested that ancestral remains were removed from chambers at times and brought together with the living to be present at rituals and celebrations. We believe that Neolithic burial chambers such as Tinkinswood represent the female womb where the departed would be returned to the womb of Mother Earth.

We also perform our rituals throughout the seasons. A communal group of people share food, drinks and gifts

and do so at every seasonal ritual or Full Moon celebration. These are done in a respectful way in which we believe our ancestors would approve."

'Blessed Be and Love and Light, Ginny'.

It is true that Tinkinswood has it's own special atmosphere, despite the regular visits by dog walkers and rambles—but as a keen amateur archaeologist and a scientist I am sceptical of the presence of pagan gods.

What do you think?

Notes from the Friends Committee Meetings

Progress report of the Dyffryn Estate.

The toilet refurbishment in the Exhibition Hall is ongoing - there has been a delay due to problems with the water pressure and new fittings. The project should be finished in February and will allow the Exhibition Hall to be hired for functions.

It has been

suggested that a second hand book corner, with an honesty box, should be placed in the Exhibition Hall. The Friends of Dyffryn Committee agreed to ask members for donations of spare books and ask them to buy any that interest them.. There could be a variety of books, not just ones connected with gardening.

The Contractor has been appointed and work on the house will begin soon. Tours for the 'Friends' are to be

arranged during the summer.

Mrs Alex. Andrews, the head gardener, has agreed to select shrubs and plants from the list suggested by Roy Lancaster. The committee agreed that the Friends will donate these to the gardens. It was suggested that at least one plant should be planted in memory of the late Mrs Andree Pinkard, who was an active Friend and committee member for many years.

Garden Cuttings From the Committee

All Members.

Please continue to send me contributions, especially your impressions of the Friends events and visits, other gardens or any garden related topics. This is your Newsletter and we welcome all articles, photographs etc., from you - The Members.

If you have visited an interesting garden or venue with horticultural links or have something which you would like to share with fellow members, please send articles and photographs to the Acting Editor, Dr. Val Caple, Milestone, Penllyn, Cowbridge. CF71 7RQ, val.t.caple@care4free.net or Chairman, Mr Stephen Parker fodyffryngardens.chairman@virginmedia.com

E-Newsletter

If you would like to receive the monthly E-Newsletter, please send your e-mail address to Chairman, Mr Stephen Parker

For the latest information about the Friends events, membership etc. please visit our website at; www.dyffryngardens.org.uk

Website

We have been working on the updated Friends website for some time, but we hope to have it launched with new features when the National Trust takes over management.

Meanwhile we would be very interested in hearing what changes we should make, which sections we should keep. Also if anyone is willing to help design and maintain the site, please let me know. You do not need to have internet access, as, if you can use MS Word or can produce maintain digital photographs you would be able to help. Dr. Val Caple, Milestone, Penllyn, Cowbridge. CF71 7RQ, val.t.caple@care4free.net

Committee Members.

We are always looking for people with new ideas. If you would like to contribute to committee work, please contact the secretary - Mrs Barbara Hodges before the AGM. You will be made very welcome.

If you are interested in helping edit the Newsletter, please let Val Caple know.

Membership Secretary.

Kathy Seddon has resigned as Membership Secretary. The Committee would like to thank her for her contribution. Please send any membership correspondence to Dr Joan Andrews until otherwise notified.

AGM Thursday 10th May 2012 at 2 pm The Cory Education Centre

The business meeting will be followed by refreshments.

Please make every effort to attend this event at the new time as we hope we to be able to update you with the transfer of Dyffryn to the National Trust.

The papers will be sent to you before the meeting.

THANK YOU

Barbara Hodges
Hon. Secretary