

FRIENDS NEWSLETTER



Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Newsletter

40th year for the Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Society

A welcome from our chair, Gerry Donovan

Welcome to a momentous year for our society. It was on March 30th, 1983, that a group of eminent people, including Sir Cennydd and Lady Traherne, gathered for the inaugural meeting at Dyffryn. I wondered if they had in mind that it would be a society of such strength to continue for 40 years including facing the challenges of a global pandemic.

At its core, the society's objectives have remained constant:

- *To advance education in and promote understanding and appreciation of horticulture and botany among the public.*
- *In furtherance of the above object the Society shall have the following powers:*
- *To further the development of the*

public amenities and the education and information services at Dyffryn Garden, including the extension of plant collections and the improvement of planting design;

- *To support such other work conducive to the above objectives.*

In terms of membership, we currently have 77 single members and 37 joint members. Understandably, there has been some reduction in membership over the pandemic period, but we are hopeful that support will continue and grow. Our current membership subscription is £7 for single and £12 for joint and the annual subscriptions are due currently. Renewal forms and information on paying by BACS, which is very helpful for our administration, or by cheque is on our website. We do hope you will continue with us and introduce family and friends to expand the society. Our grateful thanks, Gerry.

Farewell to the Majestic Poplar

By Gerry Donovan



Section Felling of the Poplar Tree
February 2023 (man at work)

It is always sad to see the decline of a mature tree but leaving a diseased, weakened specimen in a busy garden is just not an option. Honey fungus was identified at the base of the Poplar tree in the West Garden and its fate was sealed.

Over the past few months, members visiting this part of Dyffryn will have seen the arborists' technical skills tackling this magnificent tree and the dramatic change to this area of the gardens. The Poplar had been the largest tree in the gardens and though majestic, it had been the source of a number of problems. Over my years at Dyffryn there were several



The Poplar tree, top left, adjacent to the Reflecting Pool, in 2011

interventions to remove failing branches, some very large, high up in the canopy and its dominance of the area both in terms of shade and water take up meant challenging conditions for anything growing beneath it.

Adjacent to the Poplar, a deciduous tree, is an important garden room which originally served as the Cory family's swimming pool, beautifully depicted in one of Edith Adie's 1923 watercolours. It had been filled in and grassed over in 1974 and in 1998, the pool was reinstated with a shallower draw acting as a reflecting pool for the surrounding acer pots and standard wisterias. A new challenge appeared, though perhaps one the Cory family had encountered with a younger Poplar, with the prevailing wind direction depositing bountiful amounts of leaves into the pool. Apart from littering the reflection, the decaying leaves impacted the water quality and

contributed to the flushes of green algae occasionally dominating the feature. A fine, thriving colony of Great Crested Newts which moved into the pool as soon as it was recreated, meant water management could only take place at certain times of year and then under licence always with the Newts' habitat in mind. This careful approach continues, perhaps less complicated now by the tree's removal.

The Head Gardener, Chris Flynn,

and his team, are seizing the opportunity to redesign this part of the West Garden area.

There has already been quite a dramatic change to the space, and it will be very interesting to follow how it is developed. One species that will not be reappearing here will be a poplar tree. Other parts of the Dyffryn estate have better opportunities for a tree that likes to dominate.

Yuletide Stars

By Cynthia M. Merrett

On a very wet day in November, with floodwater on the approach road to Dyffryn, the Friends gathered to create, by weaving, some festive stars to celebrate the approach of Christmas.

Under the guidance of Mary Ponting our very patient Events Organiser, we were shown how to deal with the strips of willow which had been previously treated to render them pliable. Willow has to be kept damp or it will stiffen and dry, so the beginners amongst us soon became quite damp ourselves and with stiffening fingers made slow progress. However it was



still very satisfying to watch the stars gradually taking shape, and once in place the strips remained in situ as they dried. As an

alternative the weaving can be achieved with raffia, which needs no damping and is very easy to weave, but, of course, is not so durable as willow if wanted for decoration outside. A third method is to weave the strips less closely together, which is useful for decorating the gaps with ivy; holly; etc.

Below is a larger star illustrating all three methods and materials, each achieving a pleasing result.

The morning passed very quickly and the rain had ceased by the time we packed up, so allowing us an easier drive home. A most enjoyable and successful occasion. Thank you Mary



Adventures in Quizland

By Barbara Hodges

On 11th October 2022 20 members gathered in the Cory Education Centre to listen to Gwerfyl Gardner talking about her adventures in Quizland.

When Gwerfyl was a child she was always interested in quizzes and loved to take part. She used to listen to them on the radio and watch them on the television sometimes getting the correct answer herself.

When she became older she decided that she would like to take part in one of those quizzes so sent her details to the appropriate places. To her delight she was accepted and even better, started to win some of them. The prizes were always in cash which was very pleasing.

Not only a prize was given but all expenses were paid and she often spent a night in a good hotel in places that she had only heard about and never visited.

She told us about some of the



people who she had to work with, some were easy, others were not.

Following the talk some of our members took part in the gardening quiz that Gwerfyl had ready. At least one of them found that it is not easy having a question thrown at you in front of an audience and being expected to give the correct answer immediately. Gwerfyl gave a small prize to the winner.

Adventures in Quizland

By Marion Davies

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to take part in a quiz on TV? And what is Ann Robinson really like? Would you be the weakest link? All these questions and more were answered by Gwerfyl in her fascinating talk 'Adventures in Quizland'.

Gwerfyl got the quiz bug at a young age, from the age of 12 to 18 she took part in 'Top of the Form' on the radio – and was an early winner when she won with fellow school mates from the School for Girls, Bangor, beating a school from Leytonstone in the final. They went to London with their

headmistress to receive their prize – an encyclopaedia and book token, and an appearance on children's television.

During her career as a teacher Gwerfyl put her TV quiz career on hold – but as soon as she retired she had ample opportunity to demonstrate her knowledge and her ability to stay calm in front of the television cameras. As Gwerfyl explained it's one thing to be able to shout out the answers from the comfort of your own lounge – but it does take steady nerves to do so in the glare of cameras and lights in a TV studio. When asked – why do you want to take part in TV quizzes? Her reply brought a laugh from the Friends of Dyffryn audience – "If you're not

embarrassing your children you're obviously not enjoying yourself'.

Gwerfyl told us about her experience of taking part in different TV quizzes – 15 to 1, the Weakest Link, Going for Gold, The Chase and Egg Heads with a Glamorgan WI team. She enjoyed meeting all the TV quiz masters who were pleasant and encouraging – bar one – and no prizes for guessing which one lived up to her reputation.

Gwerfyl said 'there is no such thing

as a difficult question – there are just questions where you know the answer'. And then it was the turn for members of the Friends of Dyffryn to take part in a Gardening Quiz. Four brave contestants took part – John Oliver, Paul Knoyle, Barbara Hodges and Judy Keenor – with Judy emerging as the winner.

It was a fascinating talk and we were all very grateful to Gwerfyl for sharing her experience in quizland with us.

Christmas Lunch

By Val Caple

For the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic the Friends met for Christmas Lunch at the Blue Anchor, Aberthaw

As always, the food was great, the atmosphere friendly and it was a great way to start of my celebrations for Christmas 2022.

Many thanks for all those who joined us and made it such a memorable occasion. And also thanks to all those who made donations for the Stars and Preserves. The money will go towards our next fun-raising project for Dyffryn



The National Arboretum of Wales

Talk summary by Gerry Donovan

On March 21st we welcomed Alex Summer, Curator for National Botanic Garden of Wales (NBGW) for a joint talk with the local branch of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust. Places were limited to 40 and were booked out quickly showing a significant interest in the topic.

It had been held on March 21st to coincide with the International Day of Forests. This annual commemoration day was established by the UN in 2013. This year's theme is *Forests and Health* and we have seen how valuable access to these spaces during the pandemic became and continues. To set the scene on how important forests (and arboretum) are, our chair highlighted that the world is currently losing 10 million hectares of forest each year due to deforestation – about the size of Iceland. A very sobering fact. She noted such statistics usually refer to the Size of Wales and to put it in context, Iceland is 4.95 times as big as Wales.



Image of the established Monkey Puzzle (*Araucaria araucana*) tree collection at NBGW, representative of the Temperate Rainforest of Chile, with the Glasshouse dome in the distance. Source: NBGW website.
Arboretum - National Botanic Garden of Wales



Alex opened the talk by giving a potted history of his horticultural career. He joined NBGW in 2021 as the Senior Horticulturist (Glasshouses) coming from Cambridge University Botanic

Garden and became Curator in 2022. He's formal training had been at Kew Gardens.

He then illustrated where the current 30-acre arboretum is at the botanic garden. Initially created from the Colvin

and Moggridge 1996 masterplan for the whole site, it had grown into the *Woods of the World* and more recently was referred to as *Coedfa* – the Place of Trees. The ambition now was to further design the area both to introduce more species relevant to the collection of temperate rainforest species both native to the UK and representing other collections around the globe sharing this unique combination of

environmental conditions.

A critical design element will be introducing a hierarchy of paths which will greatly improve access for all the Botanic Garden visitor and will be accompanied by sensitively designed play are and shelters. The network of paths in various materials will also significantly support the operational access for the garden and estate

teams to care for the existing tree collection and the new introductions.

Consultation with stakeholders on how to progress a detailed plan is currently underway. Alex emphasised that this is a legacy project which will evolve over decades. We will be watching with great interest and planning Society trips in future years to see the progress.

Winter Images

By Val Caple



Nantgarw China Works and Museum

By John Oliver

At the end of November, last year, a party of Friends of Dyffryn members met at Nantgarw China Works and Museum, situated six miles North of Cardiff.

This conveniently located adjacent to the A470, just north of Taffs Well and south of Treforest Industrial Estate.

The China Works and Museum offer a day visit package with lunch, two tours, an introductory talk and demonstrations of ceramic products.

On arrival we were greeted by Charles Fountain, Chair of the Nantgarw China Works Trust Ltd. Once seated at the Museum we were offered tea/coffee and cakes, then Charles took us through an illustrated talk about the history of the China Works and what is currently happening in the present day.

Between 1913 and 1820 William Billingsley created the finest porcelain ever made. This incredibly fine, white and translucent porcelain



was decorated by the finest experts of the age for royalty and aristocracy. However, a commercially critical loss-rate in the bottle kiln resulted in production only lasting 5 years.

In 2018, after a major research project, led by Nantgarw China Works, Bilingsley's lost recipe was rediscovered and the factory is once again producing the legendary porcelain.

Following this talk we were served an excellent cold buffet lunch, with sandwiches, meats, quiches, salads and fruit.

Then the party was divided into two groups, each led by a knowledgeable guide.

One tour, outside included viewings of the last two remaining bottle kilns in Wales, the remains of the Glamorganshire Canal and other workshops on the original pottery site,



which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Also in the gardens, we saw a new rose

garden which was being created containing "William Billingsley" roses, a hybrid that the Trust had commissioned to be created. These will also act as an invaluable source of nectar for the Nantgarw bees.

For the other tour, indoors, we were shown a permanent display of superb Nantgarw porcelain, including many items on loan from the National Museum of Wales. Also we visited the workshop of Sally Stubbings a resident ceramicist and decorator. Here she explained how the porcelain is produced and also how moulds are made. In another workshop we also saw a short demonstration of clay pipe-making.

Finally we returned to the Museum, via the gift shop. Here it is possible to buy botanical prints and greetings cards, books and tea towels, Nantgarw porcelain Christmas decorations, and unique items of jewellery. Known as Shard jewellery, beautiful, hand-made jewellery has been made from shards of original Nantgarw Porcelain guaranteed to have been made by William Billingsley at Nantgarw China Works between 1813 and 1820.

Some shards (most of the white undecorated) have been found onsite during archaeological digs; the coloured pieces are from badly damaged plates which have been donated to the museum.

Each unique piece has been mounted in hallmarked sterling silver by local jeweller/ceramic conservator and is available exclusively from Nantgarw China Works.

I think everyone who attended the day visit found it an enlightening and enjoyable experience and our thanks are extended to Charles Fountain and the Nantgarw China Works and



Museum team.

I recommend a visit this year, if you haven't already been there. Please note that due to the nature of the site, visitors will need to be able to climb a few stairs and negotiate uneven ground.

40th Anniversary Celebration Event for the Friends of Dyffryn

By Paul Knoyle

Plans are well advanced for the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the Friends in June 1983. Members will remember the success of the 30th Anniversary celebrations in 2013 and the intention of the Committee is to follow that format.

It will take place on Thursday 29 June at the Gallery within Dyffryn House which will allow seating for approximately 50 guests and the provision of a table and display boards to illustrate the achievements and events especially of the past ten years. Notable among the achievements is the presentation of the gold

buggy to the National Trust in 2014 and the mobility scooter in 2021. Guests will also learn of the Friends wish this year to purchase a bench designed by Thomas Mawson as part of the long term plan of Chris Flynn Head Gardener at Dyffryn to restore the Gardens to their original glory. Guests will also be reminded of the many successful and enjoyable day trips to Wisley and Oxford Botanical Garden for example organised by Mary Ponting, Events Organiser. Social occasions like the annual Christmas lunches at the Blue Anchor in Aberthaw and the fundraising



Musical Evenings in the Gallery will also feature in the illustrated material.

If you have any such memorabilia that you would like to share on the evening would you please contact Paul Knoyle at p233knoyle@btinternet.com for further information. We would love your involvement.

You will receive full details nearer the date. Please put this date in your diary as it promises to be a special occasion.

AGM on 10th May From the Committee

Please come and support your committee at our AGM.

Give us ideas for events and trips and feedback on other ways we could raise money to support Dyffryn Gardens in the years ahead

We are very lucky in having an injection of

new blood on the Committee recently, but we are always looking for new members.

The AGM will be followed by an illustrated talk by John Devonshire and Ray Crozier on the Edith Adie Watercolour paintings, followed by a walk with Geraldine Donovan to the areas of the garden that Edith Adie painted.



Friends of Dyffryn Committee

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For the latest information about membership, forthcoming events, etc. please visit www.dyffryngardens.org.uk
For information about Dyffryn Gardens events etc. visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens

Garden Cuttings

From the Committee

Membership

Members are asked to renew their subscriptions for April 2023— April 2024. A renewal form is included with the Newsletter.

As you can see we already have several interesting events and trips planned for the year so we do hope you will continue to support us and will renew your membership.

We would love to have new members to the Society. If you would like a membership form for your friends, please contact Marion Davies, or look on the website

Website and Newsletter

Val Caple would be delighted to receive your contributions for the Newsletter at any time. This is YOUR Newsletter.

She is always looking for articles on Dyffryn events which you may have attended or photos of the garden at all times of the year,

Perhaps you have descriptions or photos of your garden—as they do in Gardeners' World - or somewhere you have visited recently and which other members would be interested in.

Please also let her know how the website can be improved.

Programme of Events 2022—2023

Talks as re open to members only, unless otherwise stated.

Where numbers are limited pre-booking is required using the application forms provided.

Right: Friends at Nantgarw 2022.



Tuesday 25 th April 2023	Visit to Tredegar House with guided tour of the gardens Contact gerrytaironen@outlook.com
Wednesday 10 th May 2023	AGM in the Cory Centre at 2pm. Followed by talk by John Devonshire on the Edith Adey watercolours and a guided walk by Gerry Donovan
Tuesday 6 th June 2023	Coach trip to Longhouse Farm and High Glanau Manor Fully Booked
Tuesday 11 th July 2023	Coach Trip to Oakham Treasures and Tyntesfield Contact Mary Ponting
Thursday 29 th June 2023	40th Celebration Event Details to follow

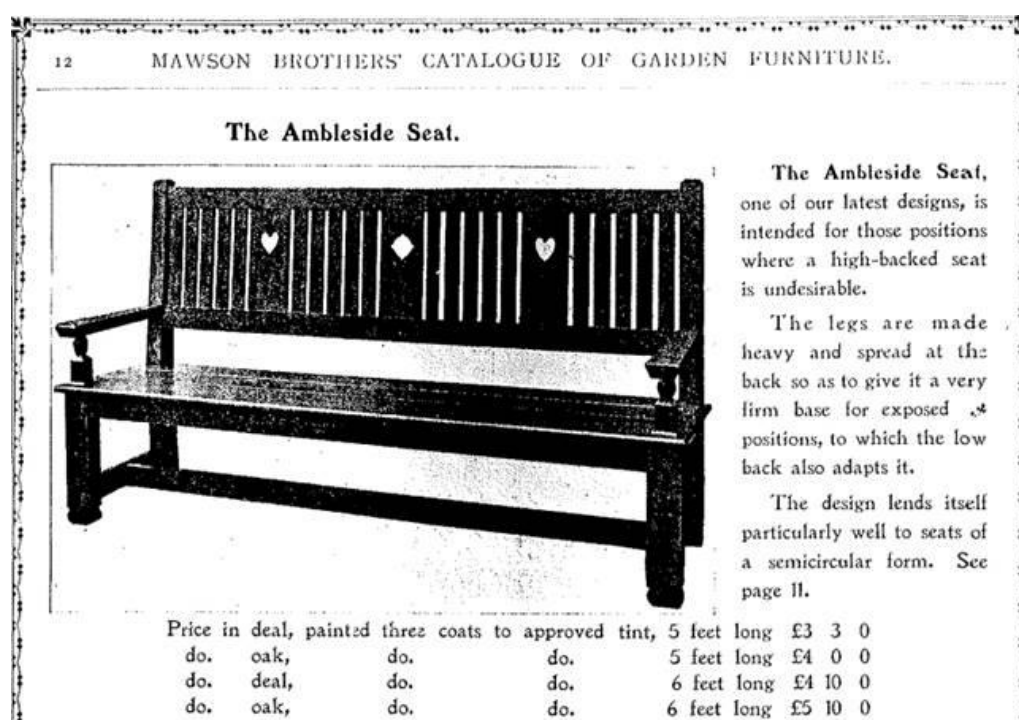
For more information about above events, please contact
Mrs Barbara Hodges or visit www.dyffryngardens.org.uk

Visiting Dyffryn Gardens

- The garden, shop and tearoom are open 7 days a week.
Please follow Welsh government guidelines when visiting.

Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Society Fundraising 2023

We have been asked by Dyffryn to sponsor two benches for placement on either side of the glasshouse terrace. The bench is inspired by Thomas Mawson's early 1900s designs depicted in his catalogue which has inspired many of the seats at Dyffryn over the years and plays an important role in supporting the Grade 1 registered gardens' distinctive character. Mawson was the original designer of the garden with Reginald Cory.



The *Ambleside* seat is the design selected for the glasshouse and will be finished in off white to complement the structure. Unfortunately, the attractive original price of £5 10 shillings has escalated to £2,600 for each bench! The committee has approved the purchase of one from existing society funds and taken the sponsoring of the second as our main fundraiser for 2023. Each bench will have plaques on the side arms in recognition of the Society's support with wording along the lines of:

Funded through the Friends of Dyffryn Gardens

in commemoration of 40 years of the Society

2023

Donations towards the second seat are welcome at any time. Our special evening celebration in June will also be a fundraising event for this.

Should funds be sufficient for the bench and more, the society will be supporting Dyffryn's proposals for further tree planting later in the year.

AGM 10th May 2023

Our annual meeting will be in the Cory Education Centre at 2pm. This will be followed by an illustrated talk by John Devonshire and Ray Crozier on the Edith Adie Watercolour paintings of Dyffryn. These were commissioned in 1923 and are a beautiful depiction of the gardens in their heyday. After the talk, Gerry Donovan will lead a walk to areas of the gardens that Edith painted.

AGM Agenda Item 9: Proposal to increase subscriptions.

Our current subscriptions have remained fixed for several years. They are used to cover the administration costs of the society such as postage, printing the newsletters, insurance and sponsoring items for Dyffryn. Past sponsorship examples include the mobility scooter and buggy, various plants and this year, the benches. There also needs to be sufficient funds to cover deposits for trips both for the venues, when required, and the coaches. We also need some funds to underwrite any events which do not break even, though very thankfully your support has ensured this has not happened recently. With all this in mind, the society's Treasurer has advised to keep an annual operating fund of around £2,000 in our account.

2023 Subscription Comparison	Single Membership	Joint Membership	Student membership
Friends of Dyffryn	£7	£12	N/A
Friends of Tredegar	£14	£20	N/A
Cowbridge Physic Garden	£15	£25	£5

In the context of other similar society's such as Friends of Tredegar House and Cowbridge Physic Garden we are currently a wonderful bargain. However, with burgeoning costs, we are proposing to increase our subscription for 2024 and again in 2025 to bring us to a comparable position. We would also introduce the new student membership rate to encourage a wide range of support for the society.

Friends Of Dyffryn Subscriptions	2024/25	2025/26
Single Membership	£10	£14
Joint membership	£15	£20
Student	£5	£5