

FRIENDSNEWSLETTER



Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Newsletter

Christmas Celebrations.

By Barbara Hodges

On Tuesday 10th December forty members boarded the coach for Llancaiach Fawr Manor, Nelson.

On arrival and after we had all sat down to a welcome hot drink in the café, we were welcomed by Edward "Colonel" Prichard's representative and stepped back in time to the year 1645, the year King Charles visited the house. We were told how Colonel Prichard ran his household and managed his staff. Everyone knew their place and their tasks for the day. Life was physically and perhaps mentally more difficult then than is now, especially for the women folk, for a start they had to obey their husbands! We were shown how Lady Mary would have put a lead based powder on her face and scraped it off

at night with a 'scraper' Her 'lipstick' was made from crushed beetles and appeared to be very sticky. She also plucked her eyebrows and replaced them with small strips of mouse skin. It was to make her more attractive and enable her to have what ever shaped eyebrows she chose. Her bedroom was used as a private sitting room to chat with her female friends.

The two children Jane and Mary had few toys and were encouraged to amuse themselves but they were taught to play musical instruments - the one demonstrated to us was a bowed psaltery - a triangular shaped instrument with wires of different lengths which are played in a similar way to a violin with a sheep's gut bow.

The children were also taught to write their letters. Their two brothers were dead and this was shown in the portrait on the wall by the presence of

two skulls. The girls had to stand at the meal table until they were twelve years old - the age of responsibility, then they were allowed to sit on a chair. When they were very young and not tall enough to see over the table, they were allowed to stand on a box or stool and their nurse helped them to eat their food.

Servants slept in the attic rooms, rising at dawn and retiring at dusk. They worked very hard keeping the house clean, cooking the meals, and generally looking after the family. No washing machines or dishwashers in those days, the benches, tables and floors were scrubbed by hand and the open fires fed with coal and wood. Servants were allowed time to go home for a few hours a week if their families lived nearby.

The spit boy would have been about 9 years old and had to sit by a roaring fire turning the joints of meat for six to nine hours until the meat was cooked. I wondered if he was ever allowed any for his supper. Herbs and spices were extensively used and small bags of mixed herbs were sometimes carried to protect the person from diseases such as the Plague..

The house is said to be haunted, I kept looking to see if I could spot Mattie the housekeeper but she wasn't about on Tuesday 10th December 2013. Visitors sometimes feel a slight tug of their hair or a small hand slip into theirs - that is the little boy who fell to his death from an upper room and is looking for someone to take him home.

After our tour of the house, we all returned to 2013 and sat down to a



Members enjoying their Christmas Lunch



delicious three course lunch cooked and served by the present staff. Val. Caple kindly made and gave the table decorations which were raffled with other items after the meal. When lunch and Mary's quiz was completed, there was a limited amount of time for retail therapy in the shop.

I am pleased that a nine year old boy didn't have to sit by a hot fire scorching his face and hands whilst turning the meat on a spit for our lunch.

I would like to thank Mary Ponting for organising another very enjoyable outing.

RHS Garden Wisley

By Dyffryn Garden Staff

*All the flowers of all the
tomorrows are in the
seeds of today and
yesterday*

Taken from an inscription in
the garden

The Garden Staff at Dyffryn were delighted to accept the invitation to join the Friends on a coach trip to Wisley in Surrey, the flagship garden of the RHS.

Arriving soon after 11 o'clock, the coach party was greeted by two volunteer tour guides near the garden entrance, close by a well-placed coffee shop and gift shop. The group was split into two, and so the one and a half hour tour started, one group heading towards the laboratory, and the other in the opposite direction.

Before the tours got underway, the guides stopped by a big display map to show the layout, diversity and vastness of the 240 acres garden, and gave a short introductory talk which was extremely helpful.

A few steps from the

garden entrance was the large brick built laboratory. It looks like a beautiful old house, but the guide explained that it had never been lived in, and was used as offices and research facilities. In front, stretching away, is the often photographed canal, much like the one at Dyffryn, but the guide also pointed out that it was not a canal, as it did not go anywhere. The well-manicured lawn and paths on either side of the canal gave a view of the evenly spaced water lilies, each labelled to good effect. The Loggia at the end of the canal was the perfect platform to view the central fountain with the brick built building in the background. From here we entered the Walled Garden.

The high walls surrounding the Walled Garden produced a sub-tropical microclimate and the Garden Staff took interest in the trumpet shaped flowers of the pomegranate tree against a wall. By this time it was noticed that the Surrey Sculpture Society Trail had placed 65 sculptures around the gardens from the clever



The Laboratory



Sarracenia



New Alpine House



Spanner and Caliper
Dancers to impressive
Leaping Tigers.

The guide explained that only a percentage of Wisley was cultivated. Much was woodland and grassland which was maintained on an annual basis.

Away from the walled

garden and moving up a series of steps was a poolside bed of *Sarracenia*, the carnivorous pitcher plant. This bright display of yellow and red brought the cameras out in force, then onward through the Rock Garden, complete with tumbling stream and up towards the Alpine House on top of the hill.

The new aluminium walk through alpine house was bright and airy with well labelled skilfully displayed thriving alpine plants in pristine condition sunk into sandy benches.

Outside, more alpenes were on display in the well planted raised rock gardens and scree beds. One raised bed was fitted with a canopy in the winter months to protect the plants from the rain, as those particular alpenes hated the wet more than most. The path was lined with an array of troughs with slate tiles and stone inserted vertically in them, creating the crevices the alpenes clearly enjoyed. Plenty of ideas to take home.

Just around the corner, a wide path backed by a high hedge

on either side revealed a striking display of bonsai on plinths set on grey gravel, making the perfect companions for the alpine area. The Garden Staff liked the way they were presented, and thought how good they would look in the Theatre Garden at Dyffryn.

There was so much to see, far too much for a day. The circle of white roses was very eye catching, as was the semi-circular wild flower bed nearby.

The orchards and fruit growing areas were inspirational, especially the skilled faultless display of the espaliers. The Y-shaped cordons of apples were text book perfect, forming an attractive screen that takes up minimum space, and the fruit garden staff were particularly helpful in giving information.

As we now have a vinery at Dyffryn, it was interesting to note that the vinery staff at Wisley laid straw on the floor of the glasshouse to reflect the light to help ripen the fruit. The good display of grapes was well labelled, so the better ones were noted.



Bonsai



Prairie Borders



The small model gardens, about the size of small townhouse gardens are worth a mention. They are full of hard landscaping ideas for shady courtyard style gardens, perfectly contrasting with the open long borders. The wide prairie border is a modern take on the traditional English border. It was originally designed by Piet Oudolf, the international Dutch garden designer, who specialises in using bold

drifts of grasses and herbaceous perennials, known as prairie planting. Late summer was the ideal time to see it looking good.

After bidding the guides farewell, and enjoying a well-earned lunch break, it was time to visit another world and head for the glasshouse that was opened in 2007. Approaching it, the modern look of the curved glass structure was very impressive, and nobody was disappointed with the interior. It is massive, and the size helps control the temperature. It is divided into three climate zones.

The waterfall in the moist temperate zone is both attractive and functional, and the large tropical area has the feel of a humid jungle. The tall *Ravenala madagascariensis* dominates the canopy of plants in the tropical zone, with its fantastic fan-like structure reaching up to the top of the roof, and it was good to see it at eye level up on the raised viewing platform. The information plaque revealed that it is known

as the Traveller's tree as water runs down from the paddle-like leaves and collects at the base, providing a welcome drink for thirsty travellers.

It was hard to think of a tender plant that was not on show. The garden Staff did like the epiphyte collection, the display of bromeliads including the *Tillandsia* sp. (air plants) and the different orchids. The cacti and succulents are on display in the dry temperate zone, and the similarity to Dyffryn in the planting layout was noted.

The Root Zone deserves a special mention. It is situated in the main glass house forming a dimly lit underground world. The central focus point is a model of a tree root system, loaded with information plaques hanging from the roots, and it asks that people explore a world hidden from view, an underground cavern where the secrets of healthy plants and the world beneath our feet is revealed. Buttons to push, and observations to be made. Educational – and fun.



Glasshouse



**Ravenala
madagascariensis**



Tillandsia

As we headed back to the coach, we just had time to admire the row of tigers on the sculpture trail near the exit and make a very

quick visit to the huge plant centre. The weather had been kind, it was overcast but the rain held off until the

coach departed about 5.15p.m. Thank you all for most enjoyable day.

Hidden gardens - Calm and tranquillity amidst hectic city life

By Barbara Hodges

I recently spent a few days in Central London taking in sights that I hadn't seen since childhood and some not at all. One of the places on my list was Westminster Abbey and after a very interesting self guided tour with the aid of the electronic equipment supplied it was suggested that I should visit the garden. This took me by surprise as I had no idea that there was a one acre garden completely hidden from public view in the grounds of Westminster Abbey.

The garden I found was the Westminster College Garden which is reputed to be the oldest one in England and was originally an isolated piece of land inside the Thames called 'Thorney Island.' It eventually grew from a wilderness to a productive farm capable of feeding the monks who lived there. Following the dissolution of the monasteries in 1540 it became a recreational area for the clergy. In recent years an attempt was made to acknowledge its original use by planting vegetables, herbs and fruit trees.

Today it is a calm relaxing place to sit or wander. The afternoon that we visited was calm and sunny and there were few people around.

There are three original gardens within Westminster Abbey, The Garth, Little Cloister and College Garden. St Catherine's garden lies in the area of the ruined monastery and was more recently created. Each garden had a separate function.

The Great Cloister Garth - a large green square where the monks used to take a rest from their studies. Green was symbolic of rebirth and therefore appropriate for spiritual refreshment. Washing took place on the south side but the monks used the north side to read as it was sheltered by the Abbey.

Little Cloister - a small enclosed garden with a fountain which was set aside for recuperation after illness. Ferns create a green backdrop and echo the unfurling curves in the ironwork of the gate. There would probably have been turf topped seats in this garden which were common in medieval times.

College Garden - the Infirmary's garden used for the purpose of growing medicinal herbs and foods for the well being of the occupants of the Abbey. It is unusual for an Abbey or Monastery to still have its Infirmary's garden attached and kept as a garden.

St. Catherine's garden - created in the ruins of the Chapel of St. Catherine. The columns and window shapes can still be seen. The south facing raised bed grows sun-loving plants including broom, - *Planta*

genista, the favoured flower of the Plantagenets.

There are various trees and plants growing in the gardens including step over apple trees, quince, herbs, roses, a double pink cherry - *Prunus Kanzan* and morning glory - There are white and black mulberry, fig, walnut and pyracantha - Orange Glow, holly as well as a Golden Rain Tree - *Koeleutaria Paniculata*, this looked spectacular in the afternoon sunshine with its profusion of lime green bladder like fruits.

The gardens were tended by the Monks who were expected to attend Matins and Compline, they had to

leave their muddy boots and capes outside. On St. James' day - the 25th July - the gardener gave away fruit from the orchard to the local people. Until the 1300's England had a Mediterranean climate ideal for fruit growing and especially vines for wine making.

The Gardens are open Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays during the year from 10-00 - 16.00 hours in the Winter and 10.00 to 18.00 hrs in the summer.

Lunchtime band concerts and children's' events are held in College Garden during the summer months.

Tredegar House and The Morgan Family

By Mary Evans

Those of our members who came to my talk in October heard and saw the story unfold of Tredegar House, the home for 500 years of the Morgan Family, later Lords Tredegar, from which the town takes its name. It is a fascinating story which I have learned about in my role as a room guide since the National Trust took over the management of the Estate.

It tells of the recovery of confiscated lands, royal patronage, advantageous marriages, madness, vast wealth, philanthropy, scandal and eventual decline. The Morgan family dominated life in South Wales for almost 300 years. It was described by the Duke of Bedford as "the oddest family I have ever met". Among its more colourful characters were a notorious buccaneer, a survivor of the



Charge of the Light Brigade who became a significant public benefactor to Newport and Cardiff, a Russian princess and an eccentric Viscount who was an occultist and a Papal Chamberlain. It can also claim its own War Horse which is buried in the grounds.

From the death in 1913 of Godfrey Morgan, the 2nd Lord Tredegar, it took less than 40 years to deplete the family's wealth and power. In 1951 the last Lord Tredegar sold the Estate to the Sisters of St Joseph who used it

as a school for 23 years. Yet the Estate survived. In 1974 it was rescued by Newport Council to become 'the grandest council house in Britain'. In 2012, like Dyffryn Gardens, its management passed to the NT. I have also discovered there are two other links between the two Estates.

Rooms currently open include the servants' quarters of 'life below stairs' and the lavish state and family rooms of 'life upstairs'. The Gilt Room is described by Simon Jenkins, the

Chairman of the National Trust 'as one of the great rooms of Wales'.

When I gave my talk I did not know that HRH Prince Charles would be visiting Tredegar House in December and that I would be talking to him about my role as a representative of the Tredegar House Community Talks Group. If you haven't seen this architectural gem which is on our doorstep then do visit to see why Simon Jenkins describes it as 'a house equal only to Powys among the great houses of Wales'.

The Family Tree of Flowering Plants

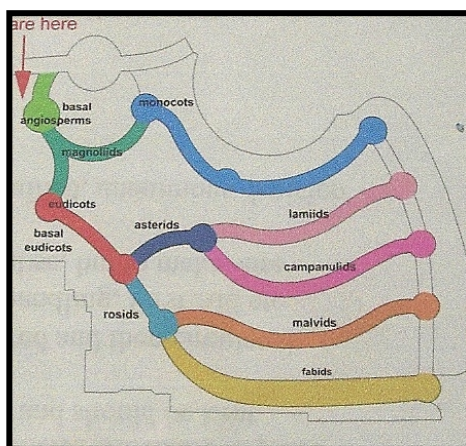
By Joan Andrews

As part of a visit to the new Bristol Botanic garden and by chance a visit to Gotland in the same year, my interest in the nomenclature of plants was rekindled. Much of the original classification we learned years ago was based on the work of Linnaeus – who reported on the flora of Gotland to the then King of Sweden. It was Linnaeus who largely developed the binomial classification based on physical characteristics and throughout most of our schooldays – flowering plants were classified by their visible characteristics – in to domain, kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus and species - the last two giving the binomial nomenclature.

In recent years the work of the Angiosperm Phylogeny Group has revolutionized this classification. With developments in plant genetics, the differing sequences of DNA, has allowed them to work out the

relationships between flowering plants who all share a common ancestor. These evolutionary relationships between plant groups can be illustrated as if by a tree and branching structure. The phylogenetic tree of flowering plants is shown below and in the Botanic Garden in Bristol the bedding scheme mirrors this pattern shown on the sign board.

In the gardens the plants have been laid out with reference to this classification and you can walk up



and down the evolutionary groups. The longer the path and branch represents greater evolutionary change.

The groups or 'Clades' of flowering plants

Angiosperms = flowering plants

Basal angiosperms – include waterlilies

Magnolids – include –magnolias, nutmeg, avocado and black pepper

Monocots – including orchids

Eudicots – **Basal eudicots** - meaning 'true dicots' – contain most of the angiosperms previously known as dicotyledons

Asterids – sub group of eudicots – 80.000 species from potato to daisy to cowslip and coffee

Lamiids – sub group of Asterids – include gentian, garrya, nightshade and borage

Campanulids – another subgroup – including holly and all the umbels

Rosids – very large group – 70,000 species

Malvids – includes brassicas, geraniums and myrtles

Fabids – roses, strawberry, apples and many edible fruit

All these new studies are exciting and continually being updated. Any errors in reporting are mine.

See www.bristol.ac.uk/botanicgarden for more information

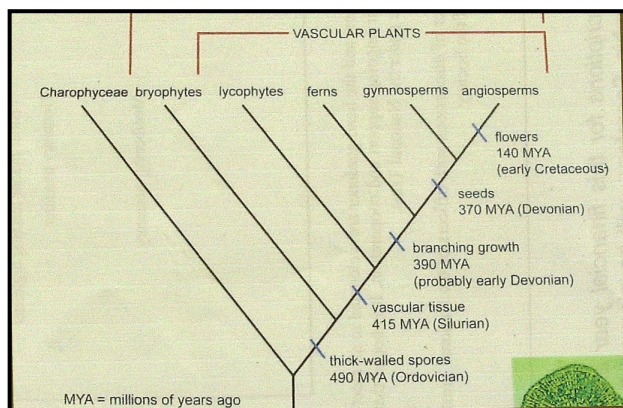
In another area of the Bristol Botanic garden, known as the Dell, the board

A time line of land plants and their evolution

By Joan Andrews

shown below highlights major evolutionary events in the history of land plants and the planting mirrors these changes from mosses and lichens through to flowering plants.

359 to 299 MYA in the Carboniferous period, the first horsetails and ferns appeared.



In the Triassic period 251 to 199 MYA (million years ago) the hot arid climate favoured cycads, ginkgos and the earliest of conifers such as monkey puzzle tree and the Wolloni pine (not a true pine) – a living relic thought to be extinct and rediscovered in 1994.

By the Jurassic period 199 to 145 MYA the climate became

more temperate and in the lush conditions, conifers diversified and pines made their first appearance and ginkgos remained common.

The Cretaceous period lasting from 199 to 145 MYA was relatively warm. Flowering plants spread aided by the appearance of bees. Leafy trees like magnolia (M Sprengii-illustrated) and planes

and figs appeared.

From the Palaeogene – 65MYA to the present day evolution continues. In the surrounding beds are examples of many of these earliest plants to inhabit the earth

Garden Cuttings From the Committee

Chairman's Resignation .

Stephen Parker who has been Chairman of The Friends' for many years has found it necessary to resign from the post.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank Stephen for all the time and hard work he has given to the 'Friends' during his time as Chairman. He has promoted the Society through Twitter, at events and with the email Newsletters as well as organising helpers for the 'Friends' stand at the Vale Show.

It was Stephen's idea that instead of afternoon talks we had coffee

mornings and this has proved popular.

I personally have found him a very amiable and easy person to work with and would like to wish him well in the future. In the meantime John Kirk has agreed to take on the job of Vice Chairman until the AGM

Membership Secretary's resignation

Due to family commitments Mary Evans regrets that she is unable to continue her work for the 'Friends' as Membership Secretary after the AGM.

I would like to thank her for all her hard work and commitment that she has given to the Society over the past

years, it is much appreciated.

Plea for new Committee members

The Committee has reached a difficult time in that we shall need a new Chairperson and a Membership Secretary as from 1st April 2014. If there is anyone who would be willing to put themselves forward for these posts please contact a member of the committee as soon as possible.

Many Thanks

to all members who help with refreshments at the events

Barbara Hodges,
Hon. Secretary

Programme of Events in 2013/2014.

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 Llancaiach Fawr Manor,



Wednesday 12 th February 2014	A member of the Cardiff Astronomy Society will give a talk at a coffee morning in the Cory Education Centre at 10.30am.
Wednesday 19 th February 2014	An evening of Star Gazing in Dyffryn Gardens by the Cardiff Astronomy Society. 7.30 for an 8.00 pm start.
Wednesday 9 th April 2014	Coach trip to the National Botanic garden of Wales See Application Form for Details
Saturday 17 th May 2014	Coach Trip to Barnsley Village Festival See Application Form for Details
Monday 19 th May 2014	Friends of Dyffryn AGM. 2.00 pm Dyffryn Gardens PLEASE SUPPORT US BY ATTENDING THE AGM
Monday 30 th June 2014	Coach Trip to Bowood House and Gardens See Application Form for Details

For more Information, please contact

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