



Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Newsletter

A Reflection on Dyffryn and the Years Ahead

**Gerry Donovan , General Manager,
Dyffryn Garden**

It was with great pleasure I had the opportunity to welcome members of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust and Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Society for a joint event to talk about Dyffryn's achievements so far and where our ambitions are going to take us.

Since transferring to the National Trust in January 2013, Dyffryn has welcomed over 600,000 visitors and over the next six years we expect to attract a further million. We have a stretching ambition to regain Dyffryn's position on the international stage as a leader in horticultural excellence and to grow our annual numbers to over 275,000 by 2026. We know that we must improve our facilities to meet the expectations of these visitors and we are progressing a multimillion

pound investment programme for the property during this time.

As part of the investment planning we are gathering information about how our visitors explore the property. We have been asking some visitors to carry GPS trackers to inform us how they walk the gardens and in the house we are starting a similar approach called Conservation for Access, where we analyse the flow through the rooms and where people like to stop and pause. We will be using the information to help us understand where we need, for example, more seating, paths, more interpretation and where our big opportunities are such as the arboretum. This data gathering is going on for the rest of 2019 and participation by all members would be a great help.

To realise the vision to be an exceptional garden we are building on the restoration works of the past

two decades, and entering in to a new era of revival. The emphasis is on the embellishments, finer details, specimen collections and attaining high quality presentation standards throughout the property with the spirit of place at its heart.

The Edith Adie watercolours and the Neame Roff photographs are key sources to understanding how the gardens were maintained and presented when their creator, Reginald, was still partially resident at Dyffryn. Precision hedges, selective placement of pots to accentuate the background or direct the eye, inspiring colour combinations, new introductions to the UK to surprise and delight with professional horticulture on display at every turn.

Garden revival, particularly of plant collections, needs time and our operational activities are running in parallel with the projects focusing on the milestone years. A key example is the lead time for hedge restoration in areas such as the rose garden and cloisters were been dramatically stumped back in 2016 to allow time for regrowth for these areas' focus in 2021 culminating in the 2023 Edith Adie watercolour centenary celebrations.

Just as the revival project processes will be evident to our visitors we want to highlight the range of tasks necessary to improve and maintain the gardens from the propagation of the plants to the design and preparation of pot displays, from how to water, how much and when, to cleaning tools to stop introduction or spread of disease. These professional craft skills are everyday happenings to the property team and easy to dismiss as mundane but the scale and



Neame Roff image of the Rose Gardens in 1920s



Rose Garden revival – stumped back yew hedging and box shaping



Caring for the arboretum and seeing history in tree rings inspired these children to want to become arborists!

professional standards that are needed can be a fascinating eye opener to our visitors of how this charity undertakes its core purpose of conservation.

This coming year will see some dramatic works at the property. The Mansion is receiving major stone repairs to the exterior and the south front yew specimens are being removed and replaced with new yews which will be maintained more in keeping with the Italianate accents originally intended to define the lawns. Period records are essential in informing our decisions as well as the specimen's character

and health. Removing any tree is a long thought out process and our policy at Dyffryn is to reuse as much of the timber as possible in a variety ways. Most notable for the south front yews will be the addition of their upturned root plates into our stumpery. We're not aiming to challenge Highgrove's magnificent feature but our current stumpery will be significantly expanded.

We do want visitors to see our passion for

this very special place expressed in our openness to engage with them and to show the skill and professionalism needed to care for living collections and historic buildings in a changing climate. Throughout the year there will be opportunities to talk with the team and hopefully we will continue to inspire the next generation of gardeners.

Many thanks from the Dyffryn team for your continuing support.

The Digital Magic Lantern Show

By Paul Knoyle

The title "The Digital Magic Lantern Show" evokes memories of yesteryear. A modern day presentation of audiovisual stories recounting a miscellany of topics was given by Edgar Gibbs, a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. Edgar normally presents his talk with his wife Linda who was unfortunately unable to attend.

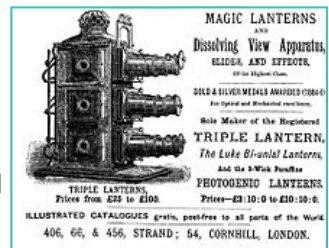
The presentation included places of interest around England and Wales such as

glorious Sidmouth, a town caught still in a timeless charm and Portmeirion with its brilliant Italianate architecture. The life and work of a Scottish fisherman was also portrayed. Another story featured Toc H, an abbreviation for Talbot House at Poperinge, Belgium which was used by the British Army in WWI as a rest and recreation centre away from the field of battle.

Each story lasted for about 15 minutes but could have taken many hours to create. For example a day out taking possibly 100 photos in all weather conditions could

result in just one frame being considered suitable for inclusion. Each story was accompanied by music and commentary which greatly enhanced the overall enjoyment.

Edgar and Linda are preparing a digital story on Dyffryn Gardens. They have kindly agreed to make another presentation in the future and members look forward to that.



Margaret Lindsay Williams

By Marion Davies

In October we were treated to a talk by Christine Hanley, a House Steward for the NT at Dyffryn, on the discovery of paintings which had been hidden out of sight at Dyffryn for a number of years. The paintings are by the Welsh artist Margaret Lindsay Williams (1888-1960), and was well known in her lifetime, but, like her lost paintings the artist herself has also disappeared over the years, hopefully the discovery of the paintings will bring this Welsh artist to the fore again.

Margaret Lindsay Williams was born in Cardiff in 1888, her father Samuel A. Williams was a successful shipbroker at Barry Docks, and when she was 9 she moved to Barry. Margaret studied first at Cardiff School of Art and then Pelham School of Art in preparation for entering the Royal Academy where she studied from 1906 to 1911. She won the prestigious gold medal for her painting 'The City of Refuge'. She then won a travel scholarship and spent 18 months studying in Italy and Holland. In 1914 she had her first solo exhibition at the New Galleries in Cardiff.

At the outbreak of World War I she lobbied Lloyd George for an appointment as an official war artist with the Welsh Division in France. This was refused but she did work with Margaret Lloyd George providing illustrations for a 1915 prose anthology to support the National Fund for Welsh troops. During this period she received commissions for very large works including 'Care of Wounded Soldiers at Cardiff Royal Infirmary. during the Great War'. Her largest



The Devil's daughter.

single painting was of the Welsh National Service held in Westminster Abbey in June 1918 in support of the Welsh Prisoners of War effort. Margaret spent 2 years working on the 20 by 16 foot painting in the Abbey itself. The work was commissioned by the shipping magnate Lord Glanely who presented it to the City of Cardiff.

By the end of the war she was a successful and well established artist and had painted a number of pictures with political and religious overtones. 'The Devil's Daughter' painted in 1917 is a work in the "wages of sin" allegorical genre popular in the early 20th Century. This shows a woman holding a fan and a human skull, a death's head with bat's wings adorns her headdress and she turns away from a crucifix being held up to her.

It is rumoured that this painting hung for a number of years in Black Sabbath's recording studio in London!. A sequel 'The Triumph' was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1918 and another in the series 'The Imprisoned Soul' was painted in 1920 and this is one of her paintings discovered recently at Dyffryn. This painting depicts a woman tempted by material things with her skeleton hand holding

a golden tray of jewels, her soul locked away in a prison cell, and a dagger held to her throat. In her expression she has reached a terrible moment of indecision. The painting is in a very poor condition with a large tear and deteriorating paint. The NT has estimated the cost of restoring this and the other recently discovered paintings at approx. £50,000. Fund raising is in progress and the sale of second hand books will contribute to the costs. It is hoped that the work will be completed by Autumn 2019 and that 'The Imprisoned Soul' will be hung in the Main Hall opposite the stained glass window.

But in the mid 1920's Margaret moved away from this style of art and decided to concentrate on portraits. She received a steady stream of commissions and, although based in London, painted the portraits of several generations of prominent Welsh families including members of the Morgan family the owners of the Cardiff department store. She also painted Ivor Novello and his mother. Margaret visited the United States several times where portrait commissions included President Warren Harding and Henry Ford.

Margaret became best known for her portraits of the British Royal Family including Queen Alexandria, Queen Mary, Princess Margaret, Prince Charles and Princess Anne, and at least 5 portraits of Queen Elizabeth II. In her unpublished biography she described how Prince Charles and Princess Anne, aged 4 and 2, came to her studio a number of times in 1952 for one of their first ever portraits to be painted. Margaret provided toys for the children to play with it soon emerged that Prince

Charles was more interested in her activities with the brushes and paints. For one sitting he arrived dressed as a mini artist with overalls, his own box of paints and a special book to paint in. In her biography Margaret wrote "When his first picture was finished – and I must say that it was produced with great deliberation – I asked what it represented. Without hesitating for a moment the young Prince replied "oh, it's a forest". The bold lines and strokes and lively use of colour were certainly imaginative and suggested the very modern school'. When her own portrait of Charles and Anne was completed the Prince said "I just wanted to tell you that I think the picture is very good indeed."

Margaret worked for most of her life in London, but she was deeply committed to Wales and Welsh art. She was a member of the South Wales Art Society, the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and the Gorsedd of Bards. Margaret died in 1960, the funeral taking place in Barry, where she is buried. There is a Blue Plaque on her childhood home of 9 Windsor Road, Barry.

Margaret gained considerable recognition and was famous in her lifetime, but her work has been neglected since. It is to be hoped that will change with the restoration and display of 'The Imprisoned Soul' at Dyffryn.

After the talk we accompanied Helen into Dyffryn House to see the newly discovered paintings, and to see at first hand just how badly damaged they are. It will require a great deal of skilful restoration to repair the paintings, and we look forward to receiving updates on the restoration work.

Insole Court

By Barbara Hodges

On 13th September 2018 a group of 'Friends' gathered in the sunshine outside Insole Court for what turned out to be an exceptionally interesting morning followed by an enjoyable soup and sandwich lunch. In the leafy suburb of Llandaff, Cardiff, stands a property known as Insole Court, the historic house built for the Insole family is surrounded by a large garden with many trees and bushes.

George Insole was a moderately wealthy craftsman when he arrived in Cardiff in the 1820's and quickly saw the potential of making a fortune from coal. He opened his shipping company on the banks of the canal just as the market for coal was taking off. Climbing the social ladder from 'craftsman' to 'gentry' in those days was not easy and his wife Mary was doubtful if she would be able to cope but George was very persuasive and gave her a lot of encouragement

The house was built in 1856 surrounded by acres of parkland, the Western Avenue now runs through the middle



of that parkland. As the family's wealth increased the house was extensively expanded and remodelled with gothic windows, towers and decorations in the style set by the Bute family at Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch. The family became more sophisticated and made many influential friends, lavish parties and balls were held at their home entertaining many of the local 'gentry'. Jessy, an unmarried daughter, was the grande dame of Llandaff—she looked so regal in her car that she was mistaken for the Queen by a local girl

After the family left Insole Court it was neglected and fell into

disrepair but this 160 year old property is now benefiting from the community and ongoing restoration. It is a stage telling its story by drama and imagination. There are 7 scenes spread over a century with the ghost of the house relating the successes and disasters of the family as they climb from ambitious tradesmen to wealthy business tycoons. The glory days of the family ended abruptly with the onset of World War I.

Visit to Llanover Park and Birtsmorton Court

By R.D. White

On 16th October, 25 Friends of Dyffryn Gardens set off for what was to be an extremely interesting and enjoyable day's outing.

The first port of call was Llanover Park, Garden and Arboretum, not far from Abergavenny, (worth looking it up) where an impressive avenue of Sweet Chestnut trees lined the long entrance from the gate to the house. This was strewn with a thick carpet of crisp fallen leaves and shiny chestnuts. At the House we were warmly greeted by Elizabeth Murray who gave us a brief history of her family and the development of the gardens. She then introduced her head gardener Peter Hall (who incidentally had been head gardener at Stourhead and Powys Castle) and together they took us on a guided tour of the grounds. This was a very personal experience, for Elizabeth was able to associate many of the trees with her grandmother whose



love of trees she has inherited. In fact, the arboretum is at the heart of this property, there can be few arboretums with such a wide range of species of all sizes, shapes and colour, from so many different countries and then distributed so imaginatively. And we were there to see them at their most colourful!

The more formal herbaceous border which curves around one side of a circular lawn, was Elizabeth's own personal project, the only round garden

that Elizabeth knows of, whilst the other side of the lawn traces the curve of a diverted stream which meanders through the grounds offering different vistas in every direction.

After this we were all treated to a superb lunch with wine or elder flower cordial, prepared and served in the house by Elizabeth herself. I for one, was sorry to leave this haven of tranquillity but there was more to come.

Our next stop was Birtsmorton Court, a Grade 1 listed, fortified, medieval moated manor house, near Malvern.

Needless to say, its history is long, but it has been owned by Nigel and Rosalie Dawes for 40 years and is now run by Rosalie as an events venue, specialising in weddings. The grounds and garden have been cultivated with this in mind and can boast to have added to the attractions of this already photogenic property.

Sitting in the ancient courtyard, sipping tea and eating homemade cake, watching the sun begin to lower in the sky, I felt as though time had slipped away and I was in another era altogether.

On my journey home I found myself reflecting on the beauty of our countryside and the thought and effort put in by two remarkable women whose aim is to preserve and share their good fortune with others.



There is another woman to whom we owe our thanks and that is our own Mary Ponting who continues to find these fascinating places to take us and organises every little detail so

meticulously.

p.s. Birtsmorton Court appeared in an episode of Shakespeare and Hathaway, Private Investigators, on BBC 1 recently!

Friends of Dyffryn Annual General Meeting

By Barbara Hodges

The AGM will take place on Wednesday 22nd May 2019 at 2 pm in the Cory

Education Centre.

It is hoped that a tour of the garden will follow.

Please come along and support your Committee.

If you would like to join the Committee please let me know in advance.

News from the Dyffryn Apiary in September (contd.)



By Harold Williams.

Will there still be honey for tea?

Yes there will!. The supers containing frames of capped honey have now been spun out, filtered and bottled. Spun out means that the individual frames that have been sealed over with wax require unsealing and this is achieved with the removal of the wax using a warmed knife. This wax cover is allowed to fall into a stainless steel tray where any honey adhering to it will drain off and will be eventually added to the honey that is ready to be extracted from the frame. A motorised circular centrifuge holding 9 frames is loaded up, switched on and the start up speed can be varied to accommodate the weight of the loaded frames.

The resulting empty but very sticky frames are replaced in the super boxes and put back onto the hives for the bees to clean-up. There is the likelihood of more supers to come off and this will be carefully considered. How much Honey should be taken?

This is entirely up to the individual beekeeper and very often the wrong decision results in winter losses due to starvation and not the winter weather. Autumn is fast approaching and as if to confirm this an observant beekeeper will see the Drones being evicted from the hives.

Why does this happen?

Well the workers (the ladies) who do all of the work and organise colony welfare know that swarming is not going to occur over the winter months, so these males who's only task in life is to mate with new Queens and not to help in provisioning a colony are surplus to requirements, hence their eviction which results in their death from starvation and cold. A very neat and practical solution don't you think!

- Can you buy the honey in the shop?

NO. You can of course buy garden produce and most of it is courtesy of the pollinators.

Christmas Lunch

By Val Cagle

Once again we had a very enjoyable meal at the Blue Anchor in Aberthaw. The room was beautifully decorated and the food and company were

excellent.

We received over £80 in donations for the flower arrangements and preserves which will go towards the buggy for the garden. Many thanks to Barbara for arranging the event and to all of you who supported us.



A Family Visit to Dyffryn

By Mary Evans

We have been there most of today with my daughter, son-in-law and our two grandchildren visiting from London. I made use of a courtesy wheelchair as recovering from surgery on my foot. My husband and I plus grandchildren and wheelchair were whizzed up through the

arboretum in the vehicle bought by FOD. Parents following on foot. Delighted to give it my first try. The volunteer who drove us was a great ambassador for Dyffryn. He dropped us by the arboretum and my husband successfully pushed wheelchair up to the adventure area where the children played and picnicked for well over an hour. Our grandson followed a new trail of clues from the



arboretum through the grounds and the house to complete the missing word. Lunch in the cafe, tea and Welsh cakes later outside. Crocuses, snowdrops, primroses, and a few Daffs emerging. Highly recommend.

O Christmas Tree

By Val Caple



Indus Tree

The 12 alternative Christmas Trees were each decorated to tell a different part of Dyffryn's story.

All were imaginative, some were beautiful,



Above – Flower \Power

Top right: Branch Out
Right: Plain Sailing

some were challenging!. Congratulations to the volunteers who decorated the 'trees'.



Programme of Events 2018/2019.

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 Birtsmorton Court,



Wednesday 20 th March 2019	Coffee Afternoon. Sue Duffield will be giving a presentation entitled 'Tresco and The isles of Scilly' 2.00 to 4.00 pm at the Cory Education Centre
Thursday 11 th April 2019	Coffee Morning. Presentation by Harold and Barbara Williams on 'The importance of Bees'. 10.30 am– 12 M.D in the Cory Education Centre
Tuesday 30 th April 2019	Coach trip to The Merchant's House, Marlborough, and Malverleys, a private garden near Newbury See Application Form for Details
Wednesday 22 nd May 2019	Friends of Dyffryn Gardens Annual General Meeting 2.00 to 4.00 pm in the Cory Education Centre (with possible tour of garden afterward.)
Tuesday 11 th June 2019	A Summer's Evening at Dyffryn Gardens See Application Form for Details
Tuesday 24 th September 2019	Coffee Morning. Presentation by Rita White 'Plus Souvenirs de Paris'. 10.30 am in the Cory Education Centre

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

For National Trust events contact Dyffryn Gardens