



COWBRIDGE  
PHYSIC GARDEN  
GARDD BERLYSIAU'R  
BONT-FAEN

Patron: HRH the Duchess of Cornwall  
President: Dan Clayton-Jones OBE, KStJ, TD, DL

# Newsletter

Issue 21 May 2014

## Great inspiration gets the recognition it deserves

On April 6th members of the CPGT heard Dan Clayton-Jones speak on 'The Development of the Walled Garden through the Ages', after the AGM of the South and Mid Glamorgan Branch of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust. I'm sure there very few people present who did not learn some new and fascinating piece of information on the subject.

There was, however, another reason why people came. Cowbridge Physic Garden was a creation inspired by Dan when he was Chairman of the WHGT Branch from 2003. Without his foresight, determination and ability to inspire people we would not now have such a wonderful garden.

It was therefore an inspired idea by the present Branch committee to enable Dan's contribution to be recorded for posterity in the form of a slate plaque. Its installation in 2014 also marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of the WHGT and Dan has been a member since the outset.



When we arrived in the garden there was a Welsh flag against the Church Street wall and Dan was asked to pull a cord which revealed the plaque. The surprise and delight on Dan and Carolyn's faces assured all those present that the secret had been very well kept! Do visit the garden and look at the plaque: it provides a wonderful reminder of how one man's inspiration can make such a difference to the lives of so many people.

*Jean Reader, WHGT Chairman*

# Message from the Chair, Jo Homfray



Is there any countryside more beautiful in the month of May than our British one on a glorious sunny day? I don't think so. As I write the hedgerows have burst into vibrant apple green life, with cow parsley, buttercups, shepherd's purse, dandelions and pink campion all jostling for position! The Physic Garden, too, has erupted into energetic growth and is wonderful to behold. Take five minutes to restore yourselves on one of the benches and admire the beauty of this special place.

The AGM in March was a great success, and I would like to thank all those Members who attended, and also all those Garden friends who were present afterwards to hear Justin Albert, Director of The National Trust for Wales, give his most interesting talk. The Plant Sale at the end of April was also wonderfully supported by those who helped to swell our coffers by purchasing plants. Thanks to you all, and of course to the stalwart volunteers who work enormously hard both before the Sale and during, to make it the success it is.

We say goodbye this month to our young Dutch volunteer, Esther Boots, who is moving to West Wales with her husband Taco. Esther will be very much missed – she has brought youth, fun and joy to us all on a Thursday, and we wish her well in her new home and hope that she will stay in touch.

Our Members Summer Garden Party is on Friday 27th June and I do hope you will all come to what is always an enjoyable event full of friendship and laughter.

## Volunteers News

### January 2014

It was still but cold in the garden yesterday, but there is an air of expectation and waiting for spring. The jackdaws are enjoying the fallen crab apples, and any scraps of food they can get hold of and our resident robin peers out slightly anxiously from the bare branches of the trees hoping we will hoe the soil and visitors hurry through.

And yet... go and feast your eyes on the Old Hall corner by the gate under the lovely naked branches of the Fig Tree! The winter



aconites (*Eranthis hyemalis*) are in full flower self-seeding beautifully, and clearly very happy in their sheltered home by the wall. And what a lovely winter corner this is – with the red *Cornus alba* stems, the *Helleborus foetidus* and the little tiny cyclamen by the gate.

And by the Church road gate, the snowdrops under the *Magnolia grandiflora* with its brown undersides of the shiny leaves are beginning to flower. In fact, look all around and the shoots of narcissus, snowdrops and spring bulbs are to be seen everywhere.

We have had some damage as you know in the winter storms. The large branch which was torn off the Mulberry has been removed and Gareth has pruned other large branches and has root-pruned the tree and winched and staked it back into an upright position. So we hope it will survive and prosper.

## February 2014

The torrential rains and storms of winter are hopefully over and in the last days of February we have basked in some glorious sunshine. Beth Chatto in her book 'The Shade Garden' comments in her February chapter, 'Already February is flashing by too quickly! We are in double figures and can have tea by daylight... we have had more than our usual share of sunshine for this time of year. Too often we are submerged for weeks in winter beneath sullen, grey skies... but when the low sun beams through... my spirits fly up like a jack-in-a-box, and everyone on the nursery is smiling.'



Well, we are certainly all smiling at the Physic Garden with the prospect of spring round the corner. On the last Thursday of February the soil was drying out and we were able to get on the beds and lightly fork them over at last.

The garden was full of visitors with children enjoying half-term almost a festive atmosphere and finding warm areas to sit in the sun even for a short period. The birds were all happily singing, particularly the blackbirds and looking around for nesting materials. The jackdaws, their feathers gleaming in the sunshine, are still on the scrounge and scratching away at the last of the fallen crab apples.

The scent from the wallflowers in Jo and Rose's bed is absolutely fabulous and could be appreciated from the lawn. They were matched by the Daphnes near the Medlar whilst standing on the nearby paths. Some of the *Cornus mas* are fully out and lighting up the east wall. The Snowdrops are increasing well and the rich colours of the *Cyclamen coum* are beautiful.

Visit us at: [www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk](http://www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk)

## March 2014

The startling beauty of this time of the year is reflected in our lovely garden. The giant Elecampane, Tansy and Cardoon have not yet taken off so we can really appreciate the small gems in the borders. My attention was particularly caught by the early flowering Pasque Flower – *Pulsatilla vulgaris* – with its gorgeous purple flower heads, the cowslips, Sweet Violet and primroses and different narcissi (what a lovely name for one – ‘Sulphur Phoenix’!) stand out against the dark earth beneath. And the Leucojum and Muscari are doing well along the shrubbery wall. In the Pleached Bed some Hyacinth and Wallflowers are flowering as is the Rosemary in the inner beds.



In the garden we are busy reducing the girth of our giants such as Elecampane and Lovage as they have become unwieldy and far too large! And Tina has done sterling work on the pergola roses and the old roses in the Fragrance bed which looks beautifully ready for the summer.

## April 2014



April has to be one of the loveliest and most encouraging months with spring and summer stretching ahead of us. I wandered round the garden today revelling in the new growth. In the bed near the Office, the Quince is in full flower, the Cercis is about to flower and the bed is full of hardy geraniums and self-seeded *Aquilegia*.

Dotted round the garden the late-flowering pheasant-eye *Narcissus* are in flower, the Welsh poppies and bluebells. Catching my eye in the Dye bed, hiding beneath the elderflowers is the stunning architectural Angelica and the Woad is waving its yellow heads around. The new Box plants are thriving and the new growth makes the whole garden glow with a lemony green and my eye was also

caught by the yellow flowers of the Greater Celandine, the modest Lily of the Valley, the architectural Solomon’s Seal, Comfrey, blue flowered Rosemary and Sweet Cicely.

The blackbirds are much in evidence and two fledgling blackbirds were hopping around the garden today. Jan T. pointed out a dunnock singing loudly from the Walnut tree. She tells us that the females are extremely promiscuous – indeed she called them the ‘floosies’ of the bird world!

*Val Thomas for the Gardening Group. See the website for the latest Newsletter*

# Good Teamwork Triumphs at the Plant Fair

The weather forecast for Saturday April 26th was not hopeful but we are British and we continued with our plans for the annual Plant Fair. By the Thursday before the big day we were already inundated with plants, but Sue, Mary and their Gardening girls were on top of the labelling and pricing, and we were on a high.

I arrived about 8.30am to find the Maintenance boys had already erected the gazebos, and the plants were being ferried from the Physic Garden to Old Hall garden. This year we had 'let' 9 tables, 8 to local nurseries, who were already displaying a variety of shrubs, herbaceous plants and annuals, and one to the Welsh Historic Garden Trust, who were selling second hand books to raise funds for their 25th anniversary celebrations.

By 9.30 the first customers were already arriving – the early worm etc.! Trading was soon in full swing, including the sale of raffle tickets, Brendagh's preserves, Gillian's prints and a selection of cards and notelets. The weather was kinder than expected, with just the occasional squally shower.

All the volunteers and stall holders were fortified with a regular supply of tea, coffee and fantastic cakes, organised by Esther and her girls. Sandwiches were purchased from local shops, but still the drinks and cakes kept on coming.

The plant stall was continuously restocked but the trading gradually declined so we drew the raffle and started to close down. Unsold plants were taken back to Physic Garden where plants are available for sale any Thursday morning – just ask a volunteer for help.

My abiding memory of the day – the buzz which comes from working with an enthusiastic cheerful team, especially when the results are record breaking! On the day we raised £1152.30 (compared to £1013.55 in 2013) which, after expenses for advertising etc., boosted our funds by £1057.70.

Thank you to everyone who contributed this year – from our President, who bought a lot of plants for his own garden, to the tea girls who kept us going. This also includes you, the members, who support us throughout the year. Great teamwork! *Val Caple*

Visit us at: [www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk](http://www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk)



# CPGT AGM

At The AGM we said goodbye to the last two Founder Trustees, Robert Cope and Derrick Kingham, who have given such excellent support over the years, and also to Brendagh Richards, who has taken the Minutes of the Trustee Meetings for many years. Jo thanked them and gave them each a small memento.



## Similar heritage – bigger scale!

This year's guest speaker at the AGM was Mr Justin Albert, Director of the National Trust for Wales. The title of his talk was 'Enjoying, Interpreting and protecting the great Gardens of Wales'. He was extremely entertaining and enthusiastic, showing slides of Erddig, Powys Castle and Colby Gardens and the ever-popular Bodnant. His overall message was very thought provoking, encouraging the audience to think about how these gardens could be sustained and improved to attract further visitors and members, and gave us some illuminating insights into the considerations and difficulties with which the National Trust has to deal. Our garden may be small, but we are thankfully free from many of the financial pressures and maintenance issues that the NT faces day in and day out.

It was an excellent evening and from the feedback, enjoyed by all. *Martyn Hurst*

# Visit to Kobe Nunobiki Herb Gardens in Japan

Johnny and I have just returned from a most fascinating two weeks exploring the cities around the coast of Japan. One of the places we visited was the Kobe Nunobiki Herb Gardens. They are one of Japan's largest herb gardens with about 75,000 herbs and flowers of about 200 kinds blooming throughout the year. The garden



stretches right down a massive hillside. In April there are mountain cherry blossoms, In May and June, roses, June to July, many different varieties of lavender, in August hundreds of different Lilies and of course in the autumn wonderful Acers with resplendent colours. All this on top of the herbs used for both culinary and medicinal purposes. It really is exquisitely beautiful and as you can imagine, immaculately kept. There was also a restaurant which could be visited serving meals using the herbs grown, a concert hall and lecture theatre for lectures on the plants, glass houses full of Fuchsia, Hibiscus, Bougainvillea, Banana, Guava and Papaya as well as a profusion of different Geraniums. You can even soak your feet in a herbal footbath!

If you ever get the chance, do visit this wonderful and memorable place. *Jo Hornfray*

# Meet the Volunteer

## Val Thomas

I've worked in the Physic Garden since the summer of 2009 and in 2010 I was asked to write a monthly diary/newsletter for the volunteers about the garden and what we had been doing. I hope my ramblings have been enjoyable and informative!



I retired from school teaching in 2004 and was filled with anxiety about what I was going to do. A stroke of luck put me on to the horticulture courses in Pencoed College where I so enjoyed four years of learning about horticulture and garden design. After three years I was asked to take on a garden to help out another gardener and before I knew it I had set up a small garden maintenance business with far too much work! I was also asked to take on teaching gardening in adult education in Cardiff and started a steep learning curve using my gardening business, and volunteering in the National Botanic Gardens to help me on the practical side. Also, volunteering in the Physic Garden has introduced me to the world of Physic Gardens and medicinal plants. I have loved the teaching and we have a close knit group of students who return year after year.

I've always been someone who revels in the natural world, co- running the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme at school and walking both in Wales and in the Alps and the Pyrenees. What can beat walking in fields of gentians in the Alps, or along the West Wales coastal path on a sunny day, chuntering on my newly acquired allotment or indeed pottering in our lovely garden in Cowbridge in the sun amongst the plants chatting to visitors and our lovely band of volunteers!

## Esther Boots

The volunteers held an impromptu party to say farewell to Esther and thank her for all her hard work, both in the garden and in her kitchen. As usual Esther supplied the cakes for the party!



You may have seen Esther's beautiful photographs in the Newsletters and on the website. She also put on an exhibition for the Duchess of Cornwall's visit last year.

We will all miss her but happy to know that she and Taco are settling in a property near Llandeilo so we can keep in touch.

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# Cards and gifts

There is a range of cards and notelets as well as umbrellas and tea towels for sale at The Bay Tree, Cowbridge.

They are also available, together with a range of plants in the Physic Garden on Thursday mornings.



## Dates for your diary!

### The Social Event of the Year – June 27th 2014

The Members' Garden Party will take place on Friday, June 27th. It WILL be a fine evening, of course, to enjoy the garden looking at its best, but just in case Derrick the Weatherman gets it wrong and the rain is pouring, we will repair to Old Hall.

So get your tickets (£10 each) and enjoy an evening of tasty canapés, glasses of champagne and wine, sparkling conversation and gentle music from local harpist, Ioan Wardlaugh.

### National Garden Scheme

There are a number of Glamorgan and Gwent gardens opening for charity in the NGS scheme. Details can be found at [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk) or the local calendar of opening days is available in the Physic Garden.

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