

**Benefit or Burden: Providing Access and Engagement with Wales's  
Garden and Park Heritage**

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## Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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## **Abstract**

In this dissertation I aim to chart the development and practice of garden landscape visiting, from a pastime for the cognoscenti to an essential element of national heritage tourism that has helped in saving and cherishing places of cultural importance, while promoting public health and wellbeing.

However, there is still a dearth of information on how the admission of visitors has influenced their management and I therefore seek to remedy the omission from the hitherto somewhat neglected perspective of owners and managers in the public, private and charitable sectors. The main thrust of this sub-set of the academic discourse and practice is concentrated in Wales but, of necessity, largely because of the historic, societal cross-border connections with England and the overarching reach of relevant legislation and regulatory practice, this study is rooted partially in England.

It concludes in the era of climate change and proposes some changes in approach, including a reversal of the Arcadian concept of art triumphing over nature.

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## 1. Introduction: The Garden Landscape Heritage in Wales

“For the honour of the country, let the Parks and Pleasure Grounds be ever open to cheer the hearts and delight the eyes of all, who have taste to enjoy the beauties of nature”. Loudon, J.C. (ed.), 1840, *The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Late Humphrey Repton Esq: Being His Entire Works on These Subjects*. London, Longman, A. & C. Black, p. 616.

### Introduction

Visiting garden landscapes was once a favoured pastime for the intrepid traveller, notably during the Age of Enlightenment and as part of the Grand Tour, followed then by exploring the concept of the Picturesque. Showing off your newly refashioned park and garden to one's peers was commonplace and the more philanthropic might allow conditional access to local people.

Gradually owners realised that opening to the public more widely was worth the doing, both for their social standings as well as their pockets, even if there were commensurate headaches in so doing. It was later realised that it was a prudent innovation to provide parks specifically for their political and social benefits, while most recently that, with the emergence of the charitable sector, garden landscapes have become among the most popular visitor destinations, world-wide.

Given the internationally acknowledged importance of England's heritage of garden landscape it is therefore something of a curiosity that for at least the last two hundred years adjoining Wales allegedly lacked the wealth of notable parks and gardens celebrated in England. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Loudon had reported of Wales that, 'There are no public gardens ... and the number of gentlemen's seats is very limited'<sup>1</sup> and as late as 1986, the usually authoritative *Oxford Companion to Gardens* had asserted that, 'With the exception of Erddig and Powis Castle there does not seem to have been in Wales an equivalent of the type of formal garden common in England at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century'. Since there are now some 400 Welsh parks and gardens designated of national historic importance that statement is now seen as nonsensical. Even though the current edition has redressed the balance somewhat the misconception of a paucity of notable Welsh garden landscape heritage still lingers and, as Harden observes, the Garden Museum's

exhibition in 2012, 'Garden Open Today! 300 Years of Garden Visiting', failed to include any reference to Wales.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter reviews the admittedly rather scant literature and other sources of relevant information relevant to Wales, with especial emphasis on visiting. Possible reasons for this poor showing are explored briefly, followed by a note on the methodology adopted in this dissertation. In succeeding chapters I attempt to describe and analyse the growth of interest in visiting from a pastime for the cognoscenti to an essential component of national heritage tourism and the promotion of public health. Two contrasting case studies from Wales contain commentaries on how owners and managers have achieved (or failed) to meet their varying aims in that regard and I conclude with some projected future trends in the light of growing, contemporary concerns about the growing impact of man-made climate change.

### The Evidence

From about the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, descriptions of visits to gardens were circulated, usually privately among friends or fellow devotees, often by word-of-mouth. Many found their way into publications, and more than a few are reminiscent of today's TripAdvisor, including the characteristically pithy and sometimes scathing comments. Landowners and occasionally their spouses, having practical knowledge of manipulating their own landscapes, would contribute critiques during their travels and, following suit, their head gardeners would report on the accomplishments – or otherwise – of their peers. Freeman's online archive already contains classified extracts from over 1,500 published and manuscript accounts of tours and guidebooks to Wales in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries and is an indispensable source.<sup>3</sup>

Of the academic literature on Welsh history, Jenkins', *The Foundations of Modern Wales: Wales 1642-1780* provides an admirable account of the social and political scenes of the period;<sup>4</sup> likewise Morgan's, *Rebirth of a Nation - Wales 1880 – 1980*,<sup>5</sup> and Donald Moore's *Wales in the Eighteenth Century* is characteristically masterful in tracing the development of Welsh rural society and landholdings and contains a comprehensive chapter on Hafod and Penrice by Patricia Moore.<sup>6</sup> However published evidence of the development of Welsh

garden landscape is scant; and visiting even more so, at least until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Works purporting to deal with Britain generally exclude Wales, other than for fleeting references.<sup>7</sup>

So what is left? Hamner's *Garden Book* is the first, Welsh-based account (see below), but Whatley's *Observations on Modern Gardening* of 1770 got no further west than the Wye Valley.<sup>8</sup> Today, Whittle's *Historic Gardens of Wales* is still the definitive source, though clearly written within a restricted official budget and is now worthy of revision and expansion. Most entries contain snapshot references to visitor's reports.<sup>9</sup> Harden's account of *Gardening Visiting in Wales 1639 – 1900* is also an indispensable, Pan-Welsh source and is referred to later.<sup>10</sup>

Based on his earlier *Gardening in Britain* Hadfield's *A History of British Gardening* was perhaps the earliest of this genre and set the standard for the many that followed. His comment that Hamner's work was aimed at least partially at those with more money than sense, but inexpert and dull in their gardens<sup>11</sup> certainly rings true and demonstrates the gap in the market exploited thereafter by the entrepreneurial agricultural and landscape 'improvers' - Brown, Emes, Kent, Repton, Woods et al. Otherwise Hadfield confines himself to brief notes on Powis Castle, Hafod and Bodnant. Taylor's account of the rescue of Erddig is of particular interest, but there is no more.<sup>12</sup> The brief account of Wynnstay in Jacques's *Georgian Gardens* is illuminating,<sup>13</sup> but apart from a passing comment on Hafod his work is predominantly England-based. Pace his sub-title 'The History of Gardens in Britain and Ireland', Thacker's *The Genius of Gardening* confines itself largely in Wales to describing the development of the Powis Castle grounds and brief references to Chirk, Erddig, Hafod, Llanarth, Llanerch, Piercefield, Plas Brondanw, Trawscoed and the Ladies of Llangollen;<sup>14</sup> half a dozen pages out of 350 plus. Tinniswood's *The Polite Tourist* barely mentions Wales, except for the National Trust's role at Erddig<sup>15</sup>. Williamson's *Polite Landscapes* concentrates on garden design in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England and contrives to describe the picturesque movement without mentioning Hafod or Piercefield.<sup>16</sup>

Taylor's compendious and revised *The Oxford Companion to the Garden*, sees Wales subsumed into the 'British Isles', but there are only nine short references to Welsh gardens and, curiously, the only two places deemed worthy of mention

in the previous edition (Erddig and Powis Castle) are both omitted here. There is, however, a useful international perspective on garden visiting.<sup>17</sup>

Otherwise references continue to be fleeting and these include Fearnley-Whittingstall's *The Garden*, but the sub-title 'An English Love Affair' gives the game away,<sup>18</sup> as does Mowl's *Gentlemen & Players*, sub-titled 'Gardeners of the English'.<sup>19</sup> Elliot's definitive account of Victorian gardens describes the pioneering Penllergare orchid house<sup>20</sup> – of which more later but, yet again Wales is ignored, likewise with Wickham's *Gardens in History* and Brown's *The Pursuit of Paradise – A Social History of Gardens and Gardening*.<sup>21</sup>

It might have been expected that the six volumes of *A Cultural History of Gardens*, under the general editorship of Dixon Hunt, would have redressed the situation. Not so and only Bending's volume, *The Age of Enlightenment*, redeems the situation somewhat with Richardson's account of Llanerch Hall in her chapter on Visual Representation, together with Lambert's widely applicable chapter on Use and Reception.<sup>22</sup>

Works of fiction occasionally nodded to prevailing fashions in landscape. For example, Peacock's fantasy of 1816, of a gathering of 'men of taste and philosophers' at *Headlong Hall* in Caernarvonshire, evinces a statement from Mr Milestone ('a picturesque landscape gardener' and modelled on Capability Brown) that, 'these grounds have never been touched by the finger of taste', whereas Sir Patrick O'Prism, 'a dilettante painter', ripostes that he'd, 'never seen one of your improved places ...which are nothing but big bowling greens ...'.<sup>23</sup> In doing so Peacock is echoing a prevailing criticism of Brown's improvements at Cardiff Castle, 'only calculated for the town bowling green.'

What became the very British picturesque movement was, as opined by the late Mavis Batey, then President of the Garden History Society (GHS), best described by Austen in *Northanger Abbey* as, 'viewing the country with the eyes of persons accustomed to drawing and deciding on its capabilities of being formed into pictures with all the eagerness of real taste'.<sup>24</sup>

Even today – and not just in Wales - there is a dearth of published literature on visiting, but Benfield partially fills the gap with his global view in *Garden Tourism* and his complementary *New Directions in Garden Tourism*.<sup>25</sup> The



former contains a useful summary of the almost still-born National Botanic Garden of Wales (NBGW).<sup>26</sup> In addition, although she takes a UK-wide perspective, Connell has provided several ground-breaking analyses of which her *Managing gardens for visitors in Great Britain: a story of continuity and change* is among the indispensable.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, as noted in the next chapter, the acquisition by the National Trust of some major estates has helped to revive interest in the wealth of Welsh designed landscape and assured their sustainability, usually as paid-for visitor destinations. Unsurprisingly therefore the Trust has contributed substantially to the literature and guidance to good practice.<sup>28</sup> These will be referred to again, but Denyer's chapter on, 'Gardens Open to View' in *Rooted in History* is a particularly insightful contribution.<sup>29</sup> But these are relatively few when compared with the extensive coverage of visiting museums where the heritage discourse is often rehearsed *in extenso*.<sup>30</sup> This omission is returned to later.

In pursuit of its charitable objects the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust (WHGT) has overseen several, mainly county-specific gazetteers by its members and it is hoped that the rest of Wales can be covered similarly in due course.<sup>31</sup> However, Sclater's, *National Botanic Garden of Wales* was the precursor of Welsh site-specific studies, with its somewhat starry-eyed celebration of that nascent project<sup>32</sup> and Penny David's *A Garden Lost in Time – The Mystery of the Ancient Gardens of Aberglasney* set a new standard of scholarship in this field.<sup>33</sup> A notable initiative by the Clwyd Branch of the WHGT assisted with the transcription of Sir Thomas Hanmer's *The Garden Book* of 1659, one of the earliest and most important garden books in the English language by this distinguished horticulturist.<sup>34</sup>

Conservation Management Plans (CMP) are usually mandatory for places seeking grant-aid and advisable for all others. The larger, more prestigious estates will commission designed landscape surveys and that for Parc Dinefwr is an example of what can be valuable historic sources.<sup>35</sup> As with CMPs they are generally unpublished, but the UK-wide, on-line 'Parks & Gardens' project is gradually assembling an archive of them.<sup>36</sup>

## Why This Dearth?

Even excepting Whittle's authoritative, if somewhat abbreviated national perspective,<sup>37</sup> Harden's narrower one and a handful of sites-specific studies, admirable as they are, why this lack of literature on Welsh garden landscape? A possible reason lies in Wales's long-standing political, economic and social subordination to England. For 'Britain', read 'England', even though Scotland characteristically took its own path. To some degree this lumping together was not unjustified on political and economic grounds but, looking closer, there were some different circumstances among the landowning classes. The burgeoning Age of Enlightenment was centred within well-educated and well-heeled English. The surge of intellectual and artistic interest in the Picturesque was also largely reflected in those classes, despite Wales knowing all about it already, albeit without giving it a label.<sup>38</sup>

Although the indigenous Welsh landowning families tended to be educated in England, their relative poverty often necessitated their carrying out their own improvements, whereas in England, the 'improvers' could be hired to do the work for them. As Harden vividly describes, atrocious roads made journeying in upland Wales especially difficult pre-Turnpikes,<sup>39</sup> overnight accommodation was often seen as sub-standard, even though Wales was nearer than the Lake District or Scotland for seekers of the picturesque experience.

In the next chapter I note the devastating decline in the numbers of country houses and their garden landscapes, originating in the industrial revolution and reaching a climax in the 1960s. Belated moves to safeguard the built heritage and consequent legislation originated in England and latterly it was concern about preserving the heritage of garden landscapes that led to the creation of the GHS in 1965. In turn this led to a burgeoning of both academic as well as public attention, and a commensurate surge of published research. Possibly because of the leading role of the Society that initially concentrated its work in England and led the establishment by example of English county trusts, much of the academic attention to historic garden landscape followed suit (notably led initially by Goodchild at the University of York) and so, by default, the rest of Britain was overlooked, as the foregoing search for relevant literature publications has revealed.

Consistent with it having deferred to England with regard to the built heritage, Wales has been a latecomer to the garden history party. The WHGT was not founded until 1989 and the first volume of the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest did not appear until 1994, whereas the English version had been established a decade earlier.<sup>40</sup> Guidance by the English and Scottish heritage agencies almost always precede their Welsh counterparts.<sup>41</sup>

What Wales should do about this 'poor showing' is outside the scope of this study, but it assuredly should be put right. Meanwhile, although Welsh sources will be used where they are available, much of what follows will of necessity be based on England, largely because of these historic, societal cross-border connections with England and the overarching reach of relevant legislation and regulatory practice.

### Methodology

The next chapter, *Visiting Early Days*, traces the history of garden landscape visiting<sup>42</sup> derived from the widening public interest in gentry heritage and the realisation among some owners that, promoting visiting could accrue worthwhile benefits – and headaches, especially in challenging financial circumstances. Meanwhile societal and political pressures led to the creation of parks for public recreation, admirable in concept but often faltering in execution.

*Chapter 3, Visiting Today*, develops that narrative with the political and social context of garden landscape visiting in contemporary Wales, the growth of the charitable sector and continued problems with providing public parks without adequate legal status and funding. It is illustrated by some appended snapshots.

The case study, *Private Paradise and Public Park*, at Chapter 4 illustrates how the nascent but failing country park at Swansea's Penllergare became a major tourist destination through charitable intervention, and how the heritage values of the associated public Parc Llewelyn, created to alleviate the effects of industrialisation, were belatedly recognised following a post-graduate dissertation at the University of Wales.

Finally, *Conclusions - What's Next* conjectures how the effects of climate change, disease and continued financial exigencies will impact on our garden landscape

heritage as visitor destinations, despite their growing importance in sustaining the health and well-being of future generations.

## Endnotes

1. E. Whittle, 1992, *The Historic Gardens of Wales*, Cardiff, Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments, p.4.
2. B. Harden, 2017, *The Most Glorious Prospect – Gardening Visiting in Wales 1639 – 1900*, Llanelli, Graffeg.
3. <https://sublimewales.wordpress.com/>
4. G. Jenkins, 1993, *The Foundations of Modern Wales: Wales 1642-1780*. Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: October 2011 DOI: 0.1093/acprof:oso/9780192852786.001.0001.
5. K. Morgan, 1982, *Rebirth of a Nation - WALES 1880 – 1980*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
6. D. Moore, (ed.), 1976, *Wales in the Eighteenth Century*, Swansea, Christopher Davies.
7. Meanwhile there is a dozen or so of academic works devoted to historic Scottish gardens.
8. T. Whatley, 1770, *Observations on Modern Gardening of 1770* republished with editorial matter by Michael Symes, 2016, Woodbridge, Boydell.
9. Whittle, 1992.
10. Harden, 2017.
11. M. Hadfield, 1960, *A History of British Gardening*, London, Spring Books, pp 94-95, quoting Hamner, pp. 94 & 95.
12. P. Taylor, 1991, *Period Gardens – New Life for Historic Landscapes*, London, Pavilion, pp. 85-99.
13. D. Jacques, 1983, *Georgian Gardens – The Reign of Nature*, London, Batsford, p.61.
14. C. Thacker, 1994, *The Genius of Gardening*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 150.
15. A. Tinniswood., 1989, *The Polite Tourist*, Oxford, Blackwell, p. 91.
16. T. Williamson, 1995, *Polite Landscapes*, Stroud, Sutton.
17. P. Taylor(ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Garden*, 2006, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
18. J. Fearnley-Whittingstall., 2002, *The Garden*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
19. T. Mowl., 2000, *Gentlemen & Players*, Stroud, Sutton.
20. B. Elliot, 1986, *Victorian Gardens*, London, Batsford, pp. 30-32.
21. L. Wickham, 2012, *Gardens in History - A Political Perspective*, Oxford, Oxbow and J. Brown, 1999, *The Pursuit of Paradise – A Social History of Gardens and Gardening*, London, HarperCollins.
22. S. Bending, (ed.), 2013, *A Cultural History of Gardens (Vol 4) in the Age of Enlightenment*, London & New York, Bloomsbury Academic. Lambert's chapter on *Use and Reception* (pp 93 – 114) is required reading.
23. T. Peacock, 1816, *Headlong Hall*, Rockville, Serenity Publications, pp 29-30. Squire Headlong is described therein as being, 'caught between the two worlds, a traditional country landowner who "had actually suffered certain phenomena, called books, to find their way into his house" p.14.
24. J. Austen, 1818, *Northanger Abbey*, Ch 14; quoted by Batey in the preface to the (unpublished) Hafod Conservation Plan 1991.
25. R. Benfield, 2013 and 2021, both Wallingford & Boston, CABI. He echoes my theme in observing that it is difficult to understand why garden tourism has been, and still is, so often neglected (p.157).
26. Benfield, 2013, pp 210-213. See also the references in the Appendix.

27. J. Connell, 2002, 'A Critical Analysis of Gardens as a Resource for Tourism and Recreation in the UK', for the Department of Geographical Sciences and Faculty of Science, University of Plymouth Library Item 9006601861. Also, 2003; *Managing gardens for visitors in Great Britain: a story of continuity and change*, Department of Marketing, University of Stirling; and also 2003, 'The purest of human pleasures: the characteristics and motivations of garden visitors in Great Britain', both the latter accessed at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com) on 11 February 2022.
28. Organised by the National Trust Foundation for Art & Oriel, the exhibition *Hortus 'Cambrensis – Decay and Revival in the Gardens of Wales'* – August 1991 – February 1992 was a major contribution to the raising of national realisation of the importance of Welsh landscape art and gardens.
29. S. Denyer, 2001 in *Rooted in History – Studies in Garden Conservation*, London, The National Trust. Ch. 8, p. 148.
30. For example, G. Corsane (eds.), *Heritage, Museums and Galleries*, Abingdon: Routledge. And K. Walsh, 1992, *The Representation of the Past*, also Routledge.
31. C. Palmer, et al, 2004, *Historic Parks and Gardens of Ceredigion*, Llandeilo, Ceredigion Branch WHGT. H. Thomas, (ed), 2007, *Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan*, South and Mid Glamorgan Branch WHGT. WHGT, 2016, *Historic Parks and Gardens of Carmarthenshire*, WHGT, Gomer. P. David, 2017, *Rooted in History – Celebrating Carmarthenshire's Parks and Gardens*, Lampeter, Fern Press.
32. A. Sclater, 2000, London, HarperCollins.
33. P. David, 1999, London, Weidenfield & Nicolson.
34. T. Hamner, *The Garden Book*, MS book, 1933, re-published 1991, Mold, Cyngor Sir Clwyd County Council Library & Information Service. In fact Sir Thomas, of ancient Welsh lineage, was probably the only gardener west of Offa's Dyke known to English gardeners of the period.
35. Colvin and Moggridge, 2003, 'Parc Dinefwr – Designed Landscape Survey', unpublished.
36. [www.parksandgardens.org/conservation/conservation-management-plans](http://www.parksandgardens.org/conservation/conservation-management-plans)
37. E. Whittle, 1992. Elisabeth held the post of Cadw's Inspector of Historic Parks, Gardens and Landscapes for 21 years. She also oversaw the compilation of the Register, now accessible in a somewhat abbreviated format and without cross-referencing at Cof Cymru (<https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru/search-cadw-records>). The original, full register with sources is accessible for some sites at Coflein (<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/search/>)
38. Whittle, 1992. This view may explain why Wales compiled a complementary Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest, unique to Wales.
39. Harden, 2017; especially pp 16-25.
40. However, following the enactment of the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Wales has become the first nation in the UK to recognise that historic parks and gardens should be protected in the same way as listed buildings and scheduled monuments.
41. Such as the essential guidance by Whimster Associates, 2015, *Easy Access to Historic Landscapes*, London & Swindon, for Historic England.
42. For the purposes of this dissertation the term 'garden landscape' is generally taken to be an area contiguous to a principal dwelling and includes parks, pleasure grounds and kitchen gardens. The terms 'visitor' and 'tourist' are used interchangeably, according to context. Garden visiting is of course an international occupation, but this dissertation is necessarily, largely confined to Britain, and especially Wales. Similarly, important as they are, it generally excludes private gardens that are opened for charitable purposes, notably the National Garden Scheme.

## 2. Visiting Early Days: Welsh Garden Landscapes 17<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Using sources not wholly confined to Wales this chapter sets out to show that today's techniques of garden landscape opening were already being practiced in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries, and that the creation and management of public parks through the Victorian era raised issues that still engage present day owners and managers.

If the 900-year-old College Garden of Westminster Abbey holds the longest record in Britain for free public access,<sup>1</sup> it was not until the Georgian period that saw visiting grand houses and writing accounts of such visits becoming a favoured amusement. Few travellers before then were specifically looking for gardens, though they often commented on them en passant. The earliest was John Leland, Henry VIII's antiquary, who travelled widely in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in search of manuscripts and noted, '... the building of many new mansions with 'fair made' walks, gardens and orchards'.<sup>2</sup> Another early traveller was Celia Fiennes who toured Britain on horseback between 1685 and 1703, and her often-overlooked writings vividly record her 'sensory immersion in the landscapes she rode through, and her awe and wonder at the interactions of natural and human processes in the continuous work of making landscapes'. 'Landscapes are not fixed entities, to be mapped and compartmentalised by historians and thus rendered comprehensible by the expert eye; they are made and given meaning through the interactions of mind and body'. 'Her curiosity was unbounded, and she liked 'exact fine gardens'. Visiting Hawarden (Flintshire), Fiennes noted that, 'In a tarresse walke in my Relations garden I could very plainly see Chester and the River Dee with all its Washes over the Marsh ground which look'd very finely ...'.<sup>3</sup> She will reappear in later chapters.

### Private Gardens and Estates

The 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the acknowledged 'Age of Taste', saw the real dawn of country house visiting at a time when tourists were being bombarded with the new theories of aesthetics and standards for appreciating architecture and landscape.<sup>4</sup> Also, as Jenkins notes, it was the golden age of the prosperous Welsh landlord and fashion-conscious landowners, who lavished considerable pride and affection on their estates,<sup>5</sup> and gardens progressively emerged as

attractions in their own right, the emphasis usually being on the grounds rather than the house.<sup>6</sup> Many agreeable features beckoned discerning travellers: the hanging beech woods at Erddig were a sight to behold, Powis Castle's famous terraces and loggia were still a delight to the eye (but see below), and the orangery at Margam invariably drew admiring comments.<sup>7</sup>

A favourite theme of Latin poets was 'the identification of a man's estate with its owner' – design and association.<sup>8</sup> Thus walking or driving around one's own property, or that of someone else, was a significant part of aristocratic leisure time:<sup>9</sup> 'guests or visitors, having done the circuit of the rooms, did the circuit of the grounds',<sup>10</sup> and views were carefully devised as conversation pieces; 'the triumph of art over nature'. Even taking the right or indicated way round a thematic garden was important (in itself a quasi-political statement of conformity) and the gardener cum guide directed visitors on their first experience; though regular guests could presumably do it their way, for, as Peacock's Mr Milestone commented, how was a person expected to distinguish the designed character of unexpectedness for the second time.<sup>11</sup>

Again, Austen was especially perceptive in illustrating the prevailing fashion for gardens and landscapes as being places to 'take a turn' for amorous or conspiratorial purposes,<sup>12</sup> so when, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady Catherine called to object to Elizabeth daring to love her nephew, she observed, 'Miss Bennett, there seems to be a prettyish kind of a little wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a turn in it, if you will favour me with your company,' much to the delight of the aspirational Mrs Bennett at this tacit acknowledgment of the rectory being in the van of fashion.<sup>13</sup>

Conversely, the success of the unadorned, 'elegantly dull' Brownian landscapes was that they were created to be driven around fast and safely in the recently introduced, well-sprung carriages; not meant to be lingered over, but to be enjoyed at a spanking pace: the perfect treat for visiting ladies.<sup>14</sup> No necessity for hard horse riding because the estate could be circumnavigated in a half an hour's drive with no interruptions to polite chat, though ornamental buildings might provide for light refreshments en route.<sup>15</sup>

Status certainly played a role. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century park and gardens at Raglan Castle were said to match the buildings in splendour and King Charles I visited several times in 1645 and played bowls on the green.<sup>16</sup> At Painshill, privileged 18<sup>th</sup> century visitors were sometimes taken round the landscaped gardens in 'a commodious garden chair', but they paid five shillings to be driven round this 'living painting' in a pony trap. At Chirk Castle it was reported that Sir Thomas Myddleton used the summerhouses to entertain visiting judges with beer and biscuits.<sup>17</sup>

As for the discerning cognoscenti, one could always take a chance and turn up at the front door, and if the housekeeper or the head gardener liked the look of you, you would be shown round, as was the case when Austen's Elizabeth and her aunt were invited to view Mr Darcy's house and grounds. But increasingly travellers were eager to see for themselves the landscapes that reflected the Renaissance style they so admired. Crandall describes how these travellers became proficient in 'scene-hopping', their travel itineraries carefully planned to see the main sights without wasting too much time - exhibiting a kind of visual restlessness and desire for cultural consumption that is reminiscent of the modern-day tourist.<sup>18</sup> However, visitors were not uncritical. Lord Lyttelton was fascinated by the sublime and during his foray into North Wales in 1756 he felt that, at Wynstay, 'the William-Wynns had missed an opportunity by not including the gorge of the River Dee in the designed layout. 'If the park was extended a little farther, it would take in a hill with a view of a valley, most beautifully wooded, and the river Dee winding in so romantic and charming a manner, that I think it exceeds... any confined prospect I ever beheld'.<sup>19</sup> When John Byng visited the already celebrated gardens of Powis Castle in 1784, when the family was living away, he was aghast to find that 'the castle is 'hourly falling into decay' ...'the terraces are falling down and the horses graze on the parterres'.<sup>20</sup> Even when proposals to blow up the celebrated layout were thwarted, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century the gardens were still 'grass-grown ... descending in the forsaken grandeur of the last century'.<sup>21</sup>

All-comers might be welcomed, subject to conditions. At Erddig, in 1799, Philip Yorke proudly opened what could be said to be the first public park in Wales, putting up the following notice at the entrance lodges



Mr York[e], having at great Expence, and the labour of many Years, finished the Ground and Wood Walks, desires to acquaint his Neighbours, that they are extremely welcome to walk in the same for their Health and Amusement. All he requires is that they will enter and return by the Path across the Meadow, over the Wooden bridge; That they will keep the Gravelled paths, and not disturb the Grass or Turf. That they will not pull any of the flowers, or meddle with the Trees or Shrubs ....<sup>22</sup>

Yorke was worried about depredations, and he was not alone. Maintaining a degree of privacy was also a consideration, but whatever the motive for inviting people onto your property – and many welcomed visitors out of a sense of benevolent duty – there were bound to be consequences. Chief among those were overcrowding and meeting the costs.

Limiting numbers by issuing entry tickets was an early device, sometimes free of charge, but others charged fees to pay guides; in some cases, retaining workers who were too old for manual work, but there were also unwanted diversions of staff from their given duties. Timed tickets were also adopted to obviate surges of intending visitors; not unfamiliar today. In other instances, head gardeners were allowed to run their own lucrative guided tours and tea rooms were also commonplace by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Nathaniel Wells of Piercefield paid his gardener a shilling a day to escort visitors embarked on the Wye Tour and that entailed going up and down the three miles of walks up to six times a day.<sup>23</sup> However there were abuses and the Hafod snapshot illustrates one such, to the distress of the owner and fury of intending visitors. The first guidebook was produced at Stowe in 1744, although it concentrated on the built rather than the natural landscape.<sup>24</sup> Otherwise descriptions by visitors, both published and unpublished, sufficed to determine the route and what to observe.

However, by the 1780s the contrived dullness of the Enlightenment was being supplanted by the 'in your face' Picturesque. As Batey observes, 'Picturesque travel, pioneered by Gilpin, enabled tourists to discover the picturesqueness of their homeland, just when unrest on the Continent had discouraged the Grand Tour.'<sup>25</sup> As I have noted, in *Northanger Abbey* Austen captures the mood with the observations of her fashionable Tilneys,<sup>26</sup> while, in Wales there was an artistic rediscovery of the 'Cambrian Alps' by gentlemen of culture and leisure,

journeymen to genius, all seekers of the Picturesque. Pre-eminent was Turner who undertook five tours of Wales<sup>27</sup> thereby placing the tourist in an active, rather than passive role.<sup>28</sup> But as already noted, Wales was ill-prepared for visiting, largely because of the deplorable condition of its roads – ‘... below even the unexact standards of the time,’<sup>29</sup> as well as a dearth of ‘appropriate’ lodgings.<sup>30</sup> However visitors were principally interested in the scenery, the horrid and sublime – and would not be alert for gardens, even if they existed or worthy of notice, although Hafod, ‘a mysterious paradise isolated in the mountain fastnesses’, was a long-standing exception, as described in the Appendix.<sup>31</sup> In any case, if not supplanted by absentee English or Scottish landowners by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century – for example, the once proud estate of Peterwell in Cardiganshire passed to a London lawyer - the newly wealthy and often English-educated Welsh landowners were adopting the evolving fashions in garden landscape design from across the border, exemplified by the strategic changes to Dinefwr Park in Carmarthenshire, mostly at the instigation of the Lady Cecil<sup>32</sup> and admired by Capability Brown who summarised his visit of 1775 by, ‘Nature has been truly bountiful and Art has done no harm.’<sup>33</sup>

Of those that survived, despite increasing visitor pressures and the accompanying financial and organisational burdens, most landed gentry still regarded opening to the public, not as a way of generating revenue; more an act of benevolence and for promoting good relationships though, as already noted, the issuing of tickets and sometimes charging a small entry fee, was one way of controlling numbers. Not so at Eaton Hall in Cheshire that the prescient Marquess of Westminster managed as a financially self-sufficient visitor attraction, where any surplus after paying the staff guides went to charity. Likewise at Warwick Castle where guides were hired, the entrance fee was raised, opening times were extended and publicised. As a result, visitor numbers increased (reaching 40,000 per annum by 1905) and the enterprise became commercially profitable.<sup>34</sup>

By now the rising numbers of visitors were more likely to be stimulated by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Arts and Crafts movement, intent on rurality and the vernacular heritage. As Mandler notes, these people, ‘had fallen in love with the country, but not with the country house.’<sup>35</sup> Mass participation in country and garden

visiting as a discrete leisure activity was facilitated by the advent of the railways, group tours in charabancs and car ownership.<sup>36</sup>

An increasingly literate and leisured public, interested in horticulture and home gardening, prompted the appearance of numerous gardening magazines that also opened new horizons for informed garden visiting. Pre-eminent were J.C. Loudon (botanist, garden designer and author) with his wife Jane (a horticulturist) and their publications such as *The Gardener's Magazine*, were aimed at this new market. Following in the footsteps of earlier travellers, Loudon was also a trenchant commentator, not hesitating to criticise owners whose practices he found wanting and recommending all his fellow-gardeners, '... whether in or out of place, to call and see other gardens as frequently and extensively as they possibly can.'<sup>37</sup> He was specially scathing of Wales in that, 'There are no public gardens ... and the number of gentleman's seats is very limited', although he may have visited Penllergare (Chapter 4) in 1895 and he did undertake some Welsh commissions here, principally at Llanarth Court near Raglan.

For owners fresh challenges lay ahead, heralded by the severe agricultural depression in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, if offset in part by regional industrialisation. The aftermath of the First World War, with its toll on estate owners, heirs and workers, increased the pressures on landowners already struggling to survive and the costs of maintaining a house and garden in many instances could no longer be met through income; the spectacular gardens at Llannerch (Conwy) and Garth in Powys among them. Worse was to come with the Second World War and the post-war socialist government's fiscal policies alarmed many owners who foresaw threats to their status.<sup>38</sup> More owners therefore grasped the nettle, managing their estates and gardens as businesses. Following the earlier example of the Marquis of Westminster, and provided that the sometimes-painful adaptations were achievable, one ready cash-earning role was obvious - public access. '... Now the country estate was to become a public museum in private ownership, a recreational and educational facility generating income from predominantly middle-class visitors, intent not so much as an intellectual exercise but an enjoyable day out with the family.'<sup>39</sup> Otherwise, and all-too

frequently, it was the heavy-maintenance garden landscapes that were the losers, not only to dereliction or worse, but to memory as well.

### Public Parks

Thus far I have argued that garden landscape visiting has been the preserve of private owners, but wider social, cultural and even political factors were also in play. The earliest free public space in Britain came with the opening of Hyde Park in 1637, followed by St James's Park by the newly reinstated Charles II in 1660. Batey and Lambert recount that, when Queen Caroline, wife of George II, 'asked Sir Robert Walpole, what it would cost to restrict its [St James's Park] use to members of the royal family, it was the Prime Minister's famous riposte, 'Only three crowns, Madam', that scuppered that particular notion, anticipating many such situations elsewhere<sup>40</sup> when once an area became a public space, it was unlikely to revert easily to a private one, whoever the landowner.<sup>41</sup>

Thereafter and responding to the social upheavals of the industrial revolution, a broad consensus emerged among the propertied and ruling classes, expressed publicly as a philanthropic concern for the general health of the working population. But there were underlying motives; some utilitarian, aimed at improving workers' productivity, as well as pre-empting any nascent demands for political and social change that might be triggered by the American and French Revolutions.<sup>42</sup>

Robert Slaney MP took the initiative, prompted by the success of The Quarry in his constituency of Shrewsbury that had been opened as a public walk through local private philanthropy in 1719.<sup>43</sup> He argued that

... the formation of public park near a town ... is a beneficial direction of expenditure. It seems somewhat extraordinary, that in this country, where the good of the whole is so much thought of, so little care has hitherto been taken to provide public walks and places of exercise.<sup>44</sup>

And

... some place where the working classes maybe amused, and induced to take exercise, is of much greater consequence then we may at first sight

deem it; if they have none they are driven on Sundays and holidays to public-houses, where, brooding, over real or imaginary grievances, they often read the worst publications, and listen to idle schemes of hasty or impracticable schemes.<sup>45</sup>

Slaney convinced the House of Commons in 1833 to establish a Select Committee, with himself in the chair and the ensuing report's conclusions were both clear and bleak. Britain needed open spaces and public walks; if this did not happen, then physical health and, perhaps more important, social morality would disintegrate. Without spaces to walk, the working classes would only have access to pubs and drinking dens, whereas with such spaces a new man would emerge, and

... it is by inducement alone that active, persevering and willing industry is promoted; and what inducement can be more powerful to any one, than the desire of improving the condition and comfort of his family.<sup>46</sup>

Seemingly concurrently and coincidentally (from this distance) a Parliamentary Select Committee on drunkenness recommended, as an antidote to the evils of alcohol, 'the establishment ... of public walks, and gardens, or open spaces for healthy and athletic exercises in the open air, in the immediate vicinity of every town, of an extent and character adapted to its population'.<sup>47</sup> Finally the Public Health Act 1848 (it is still extant) allowed local authorities to acquire and maintain land for recreation and to raise government loans to do so, without having to seek individual legislation for each site, thereby enabling the upkeep of public spaces offered by benefactors, as will be seen in Chapter 4. The health of the general population was now established irrevocably as being of political, economic and social importance, as was the provision of recreational green spaces to meet those needs. In the 1880s added concerns for the physical condition of urban children led to the provision of smaller, more active recreation grounds.

In Wales it was generally the newly wealthy industrialists who took the initiative, even if their motives were rarely entirely altruistic. In Cardiff the Marchioness of Bute<sup>48</sup> began laying out the Sofia (Sophia) Gardens in 1854 and visitors were granted access to compensate for the closing of the castle grounds.<sup>49</sup> Again in

Cardiff, Roath Park originally had an extensive botanical garden, but it was ambitiously re-conceived to provide wide-ranging recreational, sporting, and educational facilities.

In the industrialising South Wales coalfield the initial impetus for urban parks fortuitously stemmed from the mid-century need for clean drinking water for the growing population. However, in Swansea, the new reservoirs at Cwmdonkin proved unsuccessful and in 1853 the Waters and Sewers Committee had already explored the 'the practicability and cost of converting the lands round the two reservoirs into walks and pleasure grounds for the advantage and recreation of the public', and the ensuing park was opened in 1874.<sup>50</sup> Today the extended Cwmdonkin Park is renowned for its associations with Dylan Thomas in his childhood.<sup>51</sup>

As I will describe in Chapter 4, it is probable that the Dillwyn Llewelyns would have been well aware of the deleterious effects on working people in the grimly industrialised Tawe valley. But it was William Thomas, albeit an industrialist in the self-same valley, who championed the improvement of the quality of life of ordinary people, and not in the essentially wealthy, middle-class suburbs of Cwmdonkin et al. In July 1874 he promoted the provision of playgrounds and open spaces for public recreation, and this was followed by a prize competition for the best essays on 'the desirability and advantages of recreation grounds for the working classes and poor children in Swansea.'<sup>52</sup> He wrote to local landowners to tell them about the ideas they contained and John Dillwyn Llewelyn of Penllergare responded accordingly.

By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century public parks had become essential parts of the urban fabric of Britain, complementing the provision of public baths, libraries and museums, thereby contributing to the raising of urban living standards.<sup>53</sup> Latterly parks were concentrated within the residential areas, because prompted by the provisions of the Public Health Act and the earlier Open Spaces Act, it was finally recognised (as it had been in Swansea) that many of the larger parks were inaccessible to residents, many of whom disenfranchised and in need of them most; an issue that still has relevance today.<sup>54</sup>

However there were other issues that were all-too often overlooked, the fundamental one being that once the capital works have been completed and the opening ceremony reported in an adulatory column in the newspapers, who was responsible for management and paying the bills thereafter? Also, as Dreher notes, given that the designation of public space conferred a sense of ownership and responsibility to the users, then came the difficult issue of whether public parks should cater only to model citizens, or to all.<sup>55</sup> It was simple enough to appoint a park-keeper, but how were the sometimes-conflicting imperatives of security and upkeep – ‘watching’ and ‘working’ – to be resolved? And whereas an orderly park for a deserving public was a matter of civic pride and for posed picture postcards, the reality was all too often quite the reverse. A report from Manchester observed that

... [the park] was frequented by a number of exceedingly ill-behaved young men and women whose dress and language was both disgusting and filthy ... that many respectable persons in the neighbourhood were deterred from visiting the park for fear of being insulted or exposing their children to the risk of hearing language and perhaps witnessing conduct of a most detestable nature.<sup>56</sup>

Concurrently, reformers attempting to reshape public behaviour in parks clashed with each other, other park-goers and with park authorities, sometimes physically, over ‘rational’, political and religious activities, sports and sexual morality. Eventually such conflicts were resolved by the creation and enforcement of byelaws to accommodate the broadest range possible of park-goers and park activities.<sup>57</sup>

In essence, therefore, public parks became arenas where social and physical, political and religious issues, customs and conventions, were played out – many with implications beyond their boundaries - from quiet enjoyment to active participation and recreation. health and wellbeing for all-comers. But the issues of ‘who does what’, and, crucially, ‘who pays’ had not gone away.

This chapter has explored the origins of opening private garden landscapes to visitors, ranging from polite societal intercourse, the approbation of discerning antiquarians, occasional altruism, as well as attracting people prepared to pay

for the privilege. And latterly – increasingly driven by financial exigencies - to cater for all-comers intent on an enjoyable family day out and getting their money's worth. In passing it has noted what appears to be an insufficiently acknowledged role of women in the design, management and understanding of garden landscape.

It has summarised the provision of parks for public recreation and the underlying motives of the ruling and industrial classes - philanthropic or self-serving, politically defensive or commercially driven, as well as hinting that the provision of essential protection, management and funding remain as perennial and sometimes unresolved issues.

With the charitable and voluntary sectors playing an increasingly important role and the paying for upkeep a recurring and heavy burden for all sectors, the next chapter deals with the delivery of garden landscape visiting today. As well as a new manifestation of visitor destination in the country park, it also demonstrates that public parks today are more than ever important for the health and wellbeing for all-comers.

## Endnotes

1. 'Westminster Abbey, Abbey Gardens' <<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/about-the-abbey/history/abbey-gardens>>.
2. L. Toulmin-Smith, (ed.) 1907-10. 'The itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535 – 1543', Vol I, p.xli.
3. N. Whyte, 2022, *Landscapes on the move: The travel journals of Celia Fiennes (1685-c.1712)*, for University of Exeter. Published by Elsevier Ltd. And C. Morris, (ed.), 1947, *The journeys of Celia Fiennes*, London, pp.1 & 58. At a time when the Grand Tour was fashionable for men, she also recommended that by travelling at home both sexes would 'cure the evil itch of over-valuing foreign parts'.
4. G. Jenkins, 1993, *The Foundations of Modern Wales: Wales 1642-1780*, Oxford Scholarship Online: October 2011. DOI. 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780192852786.001.0001 Ch. 7.
5. E.g. in A. Tinniswood, 1989, *The Polite Tourist*, Oxford: Blackwell
6. M. Freeman, *Early Tourists in Wales*, <https://sublimewales.wordpress.com/local-services/investing-in-tourism/>
7. Jenkins, Ch. 7.
8. Tinniswood, pp. 76-77.
9. D.Jacques, 1983, *Georgian Gardens – The Reign of Nature*, London: Batsford, p. 61. Girouard, M., 1978, *Life in the English Country House*. London: Yale University Press, p.210.
10. J. Fearnley-Whittingstall, 2002, *The Garden*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, p.77.



11. T. Peacock, 1816, *Headlong Hall*, Ch 4. *The Grounds*, p.30.
12. J. Sales, 2018, *Shades of Green*. London: Unicorn. p.89. Williamson goes as far as suggesting that such companionable facilities promoted changes in polite society and relationships between men and women: T. Williamson, 'Lancelot Brown & Local History', British Association for Local History Annual Lecture, 2016, <https://www.bath.org.uk/download/?fde=publication-tlh-the-local-historian-volume-46-number-4-october-2016&pub=tlh>
13. Quoted in J. Fearnley-Whittingstall, J., 2002, pp. 175-76.
14. T. Mowl, T., 2000, *Gentlemen and Players*, Stroud: Sutton, p. 163.
15. S. Bending, (ed), 2013, *A Cultural History of Gardens (Vol 4) in the Age of Enlightenment*, London & New York, Bloomsbury Academic. p.48. And T. Williamson.
16. E. Whittle, 1989, The Renaissance Gardens of Raglan Castle: *Garden History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 83-94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/15869>
17. Whittingstall, J., 2002. p.77.
18. G. Crandall, 1993, 'Nature Pictorialized: "The View"', *Landscape*
19. D.Jacques, 1983, *Georgian Gardens – The Reign of Nature*, London: Batsford. p.61.
20. J. Byng, 1934, ed. C. Bruyn Andrews, 4v. I.137.
21. C. Thacker, 1994, *The Genius of Gardening*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson. p. 150. Happily, the 4th Earl and his wife belatedly came to the rescue between 1891 and 1952 and the place passed into the care of the National Trust.
22. E. Whittle, 1992, *The Historic Gardens of Wales*, London HMSO for Cadw Welsh Historic Monuments, pp 5 & 6. Also – P. Taylor, 1991, *Period Gardens – New Life for Historic Landscapes*, London, Pavilion. Pp. 85 -99. The formal layout of Erddig's early 18<sup>th</sup> century escaped the later landscaping craze, but by the 1970s only its bones were still visible prior to the arrival of the National Trust that, building on the Yorkes' respect for their servants, pioneered the now commonplace visitors' approach via the domestic offices.
23. C. Clark, *Tour of Wales in August and September 1828*, NLW MS 15002A.
24. M. Symes, 2019, *The English Landscape Garden*, Swindon: Historic England. p. 50. But the reverse was the case at The Leasowes where carefully observed views of 'natural' landscape predominated.
25. M. Batey, 1991. Unpublished Preface to *the Hafod Conservation Strategic Plan*.
26. J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Folio Society. p.98.
27. National Trust Foundation for Arts & Oriel, 1991-92, *Hortus 'Cambrensis – Decay and Revival in the Gardens of Wales'*. This exhibition was a major contribution to the re-awakening of interest in the landscape art and historic gardens of Wales.
28. Tinniswood, 1989, p.113.
29. Batey, 1991
30. A. Dodd, 1925, *Roads of North Wales 1750 - 1850*, Gwynedd Archives Service. Ref. GB 219 XM12123. 30. "We got a comfortable room at ..... and ordered some mutton but it may have been goat and we had it replaced by Welsh rarebit the only other eatable to be had. ... After retiring to rest, we were serenaded by a congress of dogs ably supported by all the geese and pigs in the neighbourhood, the dogs in general began the subject and were seconded by the geese who were immediately followed by the base of the pigs forming a fugue; we never ascertained the cause of this attention but were extremely sorry that the poor animals staid up all night on our account." William Sandys, (1792-1874), Sampson Sandys (1797-1880) (brothers), 'A Tour Through Wales in October 1819'.

31. Dixon Hunt postulates in his Reception Theory that whereby sites can 'trigger the imaginations of their visitors, often resulting in a panoply of words and images, best exemplified by the Picturesque where '... words were used to invoke the 'full visual and sensual appeal of a garden for its visitors'. (J. Dixon Hunt, 2004, *The Afterlife of Gardens*, London: Reaktion., p. 92)
32. The contribution of women to agricultural and landscape management historically is too often overlooked. B. Donagh, 2017, *Elite Women & the Agricultural Landscape 1700-1830*, London: Routledge. For example, Eleanor of Castile, Queen of England, the first wife of Edward I, travelled widely with the King and is said to have had considerable influence on the design and expenditure on the royal gardens, including most of the places where she stayed. In Wales it is possible that she had a hand in the layout of the geometric gardens at Conway Castle. Victoria and Albert Museum, 1979, *The Garden: a Celebration of One Thousand Years of British Gardening*, London: Note 1. See also Emma Thomasina Dillwyn Llewelyn's work at Parc Llewelyn in Chapter 4.
33. Compare with Jemima Marchioness Grey's criticism of Stowe in that, 'Nature has done very little for it, & Art so much that you cannot possibly be deceiv'd'. J. Hubberstey, 2021, 'For the Owner I Am Convinced Has Neither Much Taste or Genius': Accounts of the Gardens at Stowe and Hagley'. *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 p. 69.
34. Connell. p.203.
35. P. Mandler, 1997, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*. New Haven: Yale University Press. p.217.
36. For example, G. Turner, 1884, *Picturesque Wales: a handbook of scenery accessible from the Cambrian railways*, W. J. Adams.
37. J. Loudon, 1990, 'Calls in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Surry, Sussex and Middlesex, July -August 1829'. *The Gardener's Magazine*; extract from *In Search of English Gardens: The Travels of John Claudius Loudon and his wife Jane*, ed. Boniface, P., National Trust Classics, Century. p.33. Quoted B. Harden, p. 37.
38. 'Wales has lost a far high number of [country houses] than in either England or Scotland'. T. Lloyd, 1989, *The Lost Houses of Wales*, 2nd edn., London: Save Britain's Heritage. p.3. In rural Dyfed, between 1900 and the 1980s over 100 country houses were demolished or just fell into dereliction.
39. A. Tinniswood, pp. 181-84. M. Batey, and D. Lambert, 1990, *The English Garden Tour*, London: Murray. p. 254.
40. L. Wickham, 2012, *Gardens in History - A Political Perspective*, Oxford: Oxbow; and J. Brown, 1999, *The Pursuit of Paradise - A Social History of Gardens and Gardening*, London: HarperCollins. pp. 170-71.
41. Wickham. Quoted on pp 5 & 6.
42. K. Layton-Jones and R. Lee, 2008, *Places of Health and Amusement: Liverpool's historic parks and gardens*, Swindon: English Heritage. St James Walk in Liverpool followed, prompted by the need to provide employment during a period of high food prices, as well as being freely open as public green space.
43. R. Slaney, 1824, *Essay on the Beneficial Direction of Rural Expenditure - On the Advantage Derived from Public Walks and Gardens*. London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green. p. 204. Quoted in L. Wickham, p.173.
44. Slaney, p. 206.
45. *Report from the Select Committee on Public Walks, Session 1833, HC 449*. The report could have added that parks would be an additional civilising influence in that they would be the only other form of entertainment open on Sundays.
46. *Report from the Select Committee of Inquiry into Drunkenness among the Labouring Classes of the United Kingdom, 1834*, PP VIII, p. viii.

47. N. Piercey, *A Brief History of British Public Parks Before 1870*  
<https://www.playingpasts.co.uk/Articles/The-Great-Outdoors/A-Brief-History-of-British-Public-Parks-Before-1870>. Posted 30 April 2020. Curiously, however, there was often no obvious provision for overall management of the parks.
48. The third Marquess of Bute, John Patrick Crichton Stuart, was instrumental in promoting the public celebration of Corpus Christi at Cardiff and he permitted the walled grounds around the castle to be transformed into an open-air place of worship with temporary altars arranged for a Eucharistic ceremony, the processionists progressing from the public (profane) sphere of the streets to the temporary (sacred) space in the private grounds of the castle. P. O'Leary, *Processions, Power and Public Space: Corpus Christi at Cardiff, 1872-1914*. p.89.
49. The Butes were largely responsible for turning the then sleepy backwater of Cardiff into one of the greatest coal exporting ports in the world.
50. Waters and Sewers Committee minutes, 23 Sept 1853 (TC 67/1/2: 174).
51. *Cwmdonkin Park*, <http://www.dylanthomas.com/dylan-thomas-trails/uplands/cwmdonkin-park/>. It was ... 'A world within the world of the sea town ... full of terrors and treasures ... a country just born and always changing ... and that park grew up with me ...'. 'The ball I threw while playing in the park has not yet reached the ground'. During World War 2 the reservoir was a fire-fighting water source, and in the 1950s it was drained and filled in, using rubble from the bombed centre of town to form a playground.
52. R. Davies, 1875, First Prize Essay on the Desirability and Advantages of Recreation Grounds for Swansea. Swansea: Cambrian DigiMap: © Crown Copyright/database right 2006. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service. Retrieved March 2006. From: [www.digimap.co.uk](http://www.digimap.co.uk)
53. For 19<sup>th</sup> Century affluent city dwellers in England, purpose-built pleasure gardens made no pretensions of public benefit, but concentrated on commercial entertainment. But this was a short-lived interlude and former clients could now travel easily out of the city by train for such entertainment and increasingly had their own pleasure gardens.
54. Both Acts are still on the statute book and have been invoked in recent times; the acquisition of Warley Woods near Birmingham by a charitable trust being a successful example. (<https://warleywoods.org.uk>).
55. N. Dreher, 1993, *Public Parks in Urban Britain, 1870-1920: Creating a New Public Culture*. Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations. 2673. <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2673>. p.371.
56. D. Lambert, 2005, *The Park Keeper*, London: English Heritage, p.7. Quoting Manchester Parks and Cemeteries Committee, vol. 122, December 1895. He could have added there was equal concern about visitors who were verminous.
57. The bylaws of many modern parks still reflect their Victorian origins, encouraging disciplined use and appropriate behaviour.

### **3. Visiting Today: Welsh Garden Landscape into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

I have shown that many of today's practices for garden landscape visiting had already been established by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Likewise, a continued acceptance by owners and authorities that they have to manage their holdings as businesses that may well include providing paid access and facilities. The alternative usually remains partitioning, commercial development, repurposing, diversification, or simply selling up and down-sizing. Then, almost invariably, it will be the gardens and landscapes that suffer; from neglect, vandalism or inappropriate changes. However, the emerging concept of garden landscape heritage and its application within the also emerging charitable and voluntary sectors will occasionally save the day; even as country parks as will be seen later, although relationships with museums sometimes seems unclear.

Drawing on examples largely from Wales this chapter deals with the development into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century of garden landscapes within a specialised and complex heritage environment for a mass and diverse market. In doing so it highlights some of its conflicts, shortcomings, and possible alleviatory measures.

#### The Charitable and Voluntary Sectors Emerge

The term 'heritage' became applied to historic gardens, largely through the founding of the Garden History Society in 1965 that tapped into a new wave of people who saw the conserving and recording of historic gardens as a matter of supreme importance, especially those regarded as 'lost' and it was therefore redolent of the earlier quest for antiquaries. Largely therefore through voluntary initiative the study of garden history has emerged as an academic sub-discipline in its own right.

However it was not until 1984 that devolution began with the Hampshire Garden Trust, whereas the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust (WHGT) was not formed until 1989.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, despite some missteps, the National Trust had saved some significant gardens in conjunction with the Royal Horticultural Society, the first in 1948. In Wales, the Trust acquired Powis Castle in 1952, followed by Chirk, Erddig, Bodnant, Dinefwr Park, Colby Gardens, Llanerchaeron and latterly, Hafod. Bodysgallen Hall and its restored gardens is one of three premier hotels in the UK donated to the Trust by a private benefactor. The Trust attempts to

ensure that the original intentions of the designer are respected and interpreted, whilst at the same time acknowledging the practical realities of contemporary public access, and supporting their usually rural communities. In short, 'we will make sure our places keep evolving, attracting people and inspiring them'.<sup>2</sup> It has therefore played a major role in reviving Welsh historic garden landscapes, nearly all dependent to a greater or lesser extent on paying visitors. Notably the WHGT has played a major complementary role as progenitor and its initiatives are summarised at the Appendix and in the case study on Penllergare at Chapter 4.

Founded in 1927 the UK-wide National Garden Scheme raises funds for charitable causes by encouraging a plethora of types of gardens to open on occasion, from private residences to Royal gardens, to full-scale visitor attractions.<sup>3</sup> In doing so they set standards of excellence that are either inspiring or depressing, according to the temperament of visitor.

As well as cemeteries gardens have also been traditionally used as memorials. In Wales a recent example is at the Aberfan cemetery and Garden of Remembrance,<sup>4</sup> but another notable example with a Welsh resonance is the Greenham Common Peace Garden that incorporates a sculpture representing the Welsh Group "Women for Life on Earth" from Cardiff, they being the first on the scene.<sup>5</sup>

The Gateway Gardens Trust was another Welsh initiative that introduced disadvantaged groups, including inner-city children, to the pleasures and benefits of garden visiting, but it was brought to an untimely end through lack of funding, although its modus operandi has now been widely copied elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

### Public Parks

Historically, despite some mixed motives among promoters and failures to think through the ramifications of managing the parks and their not always very compliant visitors, the original designers knew what they were about. Reflecting on the contributions of public parks - financially, practically, physically and psychologically - Conway observes that these are just as valid today.<sup>7</sup> Even so, public parks and open spaces have been, for decades, the Cinderellas of national strategic planning for leisure and recreation. The provisions of the Local

Government Act 1972 saw many park departments being absorbed into leisure and amenity services and having to compete even harder for funding with sports grounds, museums, libraries and playgrounds, since (curiously in the light of their proven benefits) there is still no statutory obligation on local authorities to provide recreational green space, as will be noted later.

A further blow came with the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in the 1980s and 90s when dedicated keepers and staff were replaced by peripatetic gangs, foreseeably resulting in reduced standards of work and public engagement. Thus, 'where parks are allowed to fall into disrepair, or their original design is corrupted, antisocial behaviour often increases'.<sup>8</sup> Woudstra agrees, in contrast to the National Trust's approach noted above

Limited budgets lead to poor quality repairs, use of inappropriate materials, and a loss of design features. There is a general lack of consideration for the historic value and landscape quality of parks with decisions made in an ad hoc fashion without considering the character and design of the place.<sup>9</sup>

However it is the importance of parks and green spaces for people's health and well-being and the lack of revenue to maintain them that remain as central issues. The report in 2018 by the Fields in Trust highlights the financial benefits to the NHS and the economy and crucially – given the original purpose of public parks - the value of parks and green spaces is also higher for individuals from lower socio-economic groups and from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. This means that any loss of parks and green spaces will disproportionately impact upon disadvantaged and under-represented communities, emphasising the increasing inequity of the decline in park funding.<sup>10</sup>

In its report in 2021 the Association for Public Service Excellence takes a similar line. '... the value of free access to parks ... is critically important in areas of high deprivation, the very areas where the number of parks in a fair or declining state appears to be increasing'. However, 'even before the pandemic hit ... visitor numbers were increasing and, therefore, whilst users increased, budgets continued to reduce ... which added to the existing strain on parks budgets through the need to provide and maintain social distancing measures, [and] deal

with increased 'wear and tear' etc.' Thus, 'The greatest hope in helping to ease some of this strain is the work of Friends Groups and volunteers who have been invaluable, either through direct operational activities, or by accessing outside funding many local authorities cannot apply for....'.<sup>11</sup>

The National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) Space to Thrive review in 2019 adds that access to parks and green spaces offers opportunities for social integration and community engagement (e.g., through volunteering), as well as connecting with nature, which in turn brings benefits in terms of wellbeing.<sup>12</sup>

But despite some isolated initiatives there has been an almost total failure by government to respond to these fundamental individual and societal needs. The recommendations by the House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee on Public Parks in 2017 that simply reiterated the need to seek funding beyond the public sector, and to engage with the community and volunteers, was a major setback and in marked contrast to Slaney's ground-breaking report in 1833. As Crowe observes, a telling conclusion was the Committee's resistance to a new statutory duty requiring local authorities to maintain public parks, citing evidence that such a requirement would be 'burdensome and complex, particularly if the duty could not be accompanied by sufficient funding to support the service.'<sup>13</sup>

This de facto shrugging off of any such responsibility, without apparent regard for the consequences, would have doubtless been a relief to many cash-strapped local authorities. Nevertheless, some have risen to the challenge. For example, the charitable Love Leeds Parks, set up in early 2021, provides or assists in the provision of publicly accessible green space and in so doing, supports community-led enhancements, promotes community engagement, generates donations and prioritises deprived areas. There may therefore be more to follow the examples of Leeds, and also Newcastle that has gone a step further with its charitable body, Urban Green Newcastle.<sup>14</sup>

However this problem of corporate responsibility for the upkeep of public space had already been foreseen in the foundation of post-war Milton Keynes. Here the independent, charitable and self-financing Parks Trust is a modern throw-back to the early public parks, as well as to the garden city movement, founded by

Ebenezer Howard in 1898. His description of a utopian city in which people live harmoniously together with nature, responding to William Morris's Arcadian vision, was first realised at Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities.<sup>15 16</sup>

In Wales the most recent application of Howard's concept has been at the post-World War 2 town of Cwmbrân in Torfaen.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise Welsh Government seems content with the *status quo ante* as confirmed in the newly introduced Historic Environment (Wales) Bill,<sup>18</sup> and apart from the aspirational Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 it confines its role to planning policy and provision, principally through advising on their application to open space of public value, both land and water.<sup>19</sup> In Cardiff – echoing the House of Commons report – the Council simply recognises the role of community engagement in the management and development of parks and green spaces and supports the network of 'Friends of Parks' and volunteer groups.<sup>20</sup> At the time of writing (August 2022) Swansea has simply posited an Open Space Strategy, or possibly a Green Infrastructure Strategy.<sup>21</sup>

### Country Parks

In contrast to the stalemates with parks, but responding to the surge of public interest in outdoor recreation and access to the countryside, the 1966 White Paper, 'Leisure in the Countryside' proposed the establishment of country parks and picnic sites; for those seeking easily accessible, open-air recreation without adding to road congestion; to ease pressures on more remote and solitary places; and to reduce the risk of damage to the countryside. Some were established in major country estates - the fate of many of which has already been noted - that had been acquired by public bodies for a variety of purposes, including requisition in wartime. What though was liable to be overlooked at the point of acquisition was that the mansions – the usual objects of the original transaction - were often set in extensive grounds. Therefore, when the original purpose was discharged, whereas the mansion could be repurposed or abandoned, their settings of pleasure grounds and parklands, sometimes of significant historic importance, would remain potentially as a substantial liability. For local authorities the prospect therefore of funding through the Country Commission to create country parks in such places could be irresistible, even if grants to manage them thereafter was unlikely to be forthcoming (indeed the



scheme was withdrawn entirely in 1992), usually leaving the financial burden for upkeep squarely on those authorities, already struggling to maintain their public parks.<sup>22</sup>

However there were some who saw commercial opportunities in their inadvertently acquired heritage assets. For example, of the four designated country parks in Neath Port Talbot, Margam Park is notable for its prehistoric and Cistercian abbey remains, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century gardens and landscaping and is cited by Cadw as, 'a multi-layered site of exceptional historical interest'.<sup>23</sup> Today it is a regionally important, commercial tourist destination and has received awards accordingly. Likewise, The Gnoll is the survival of a largely 18<sup>th</sup> Century landscape park of great quality, its industrial antecedents being mainly coal, copper and subsequently a source of clean water during the 19<sup>th</sup> century outbreaks of contagious disease.<sup>24</sup> Acquired by the local authority initially as a site for a war memorial its continued decline was halted when grant-aid enabled its revitalisation as a country park. In its current manifestation Penllergare in nearby Swansea is managed by a charitable trust and is technically also a country park, as described in the next chapter.

When properly funded country parks complement public parks and paid-for visitor destinations. Fortuitously, many are also recognised as being of national importance, historically, culturally, as well as for their biodiversity. In Wales the development and role of its country parks therefore demands further study.

### Museums and Parks

Whereas visiting museums is considered to be part of an evolving heritage discourse, what is seemingly often overlooked is that some museums are themselves set in historic garden landscapes. Indeed, some National Trust properties are accredited museums and those in Wales include Newton House in Dinefwr Park, Llanerchaeron and Erddig although, in most cases, the grounds in which they are set are generally seen as being distinct from the collections within, despite national designation in their own right.

At Abergwili, in the former Bishop's Palace, the County Museum's collections celebrate the landscape and people of Carmarthenshire but – albeit until recently – the historic, cultural and ecological values of its garden landscape setting have

been ignored, as noted at the Appendix. At St Fagans National Museum of History, the Castle Gardens are also registered as being of exceptional historic interest but, except for a note in the publicity narrative that they complement the historic buildings in their interpretation of the past, there is seemingly no attempt to capitalise on the relationship.<sup>25</sup>

But there is common ground. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century gardens, parks and designed landscapes were being regarded as creative works of art and managed accordingly, and if they are now open to the public, this entails informing, educating and inspiring visitors. Likewise, curatorship of museums entails the same principles when caring for developing, displaying and interpreting collections of artefacts and – yes - works of art. Given that it is becoming commonplace for museums, galleries, heritage and tourism attractions to develop collaborative relationships and share collections, as well as their expertise, then their related parks and gardens surely qualify for inclusion too. This is certainly the case with the Yorkshire Museum, a regional museum with internationally important collections and the vision set out in its 2014/15 annual report was, 'to use our worldwide collections and the Gardens to encourage a wider appreciation of the world, its peoples and their cultures, and its environments'.<sup>26</sup>

I argue therefore that this apparent gap between these two categories of collections should be recognised and bridged more comprehensively.<sup>27</sup>

### The Heritage Narrative

The Ancient Monuments Act 1882 applied statutory protection to some 68 structural sites in Great Britain (only one of which was in Wales), but parks and gardens could only be officially recognised as historic in England, a whole century later. And in Wales the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest was not given statutory status until 2022. Why these delays, despite repeated representations in the now burgeoning heritage community? The first clue is in the ICOMOS Florence Charter (1981) that defines an historic garden somewhat ambiguously in terms of 'an architectural and horticultural composition of interest to the public from the historical or artistic point of view [but] whose constituents are primarily vegetal and therefore living, which means

that they are perishable and renewable'. 'Thus, its appearance reflects the perpetual balance between the cycle of the seasons, the growth and decay of nature and the desire of the artist and craftsman to keep it permanently unchanged.'<sup>28</sup> The validity of that final statement is open to challenge and Lambert comments that it is hopeless to attempt to legitimise garden conservation in terms of the 1882 Act; 'preservation cannot be applied to living, dying things'. The fabric of gardens is not the only consideration, and he adds that, 'It is the meanings and the sensual, spiritual and visual aspects of parks and gardens that are of the greatest importance'.<sup>29</sup>

In essence, therefore, devising a form of hegemonic authorized heritage discourse (AHD) to guide management and conservation practice by promoting a consensual version of history by state-sanctioned cultural institutions, as espoused by Smith et al, will struggle in this somewhat ephemeral context.<sup>30</sup> English Heritage agrees in that thinking on the historic environment 'owes its present value and significance to people's perceptions and opinions, or in other words to their personal beliefs and values'.<sup>31</sup> To which Lambert adds, 'Hence, the expert evaluation of significance needs to be counterbalanced by a recognition of the "value of local perception and ... of other people's non-expert values".<sup>32</sup> Echoing earlier approaches to the Picturesque, visitors' understanding of authenticity may therefore be entirely different to its definition within the AHD, with its emphasis on inherent material qualities, now to be overlain by concepts of emotional and experiential authenticity.<sup>33</sup> One can visualise Fiennes nodding agreement at this.

Thus garden landscape heritage is a humanly modified landscape, important for the interplay of official, unofficial, cultural and natural values, and the outcome is as much of opinion as fact. However, if visiting gardens is a form of taking possession – if only temporarily - Folsom offers a somewhat philosophical view in observing that gardens contribute to the moulding of people's sensibilities through exploration and familiarisation, through presenting new forms, ideas and ideals to contemplate and consider.<sup>34</sup> Pace the Florence Charter viewing gardens can therefore be deeply personal and quite different to the perceptions of the creator even if, as Denyer observes, 'Gardens that stand the test of time seem to be able to transcend social and cultural boundaries and speak a

language that is as relevant now as it was when they were created.<sup>35</sup> However Connell provides a more pragmatic view in that

Whether the gardens visited feed into the creative process for developing our own private gardens, a social arena for group visiting, or simply a quiet and contemplative setting to enjoy peace and beauty, undoubtedly the pleasures are multiple and enduring.<sup>36</sup>

### Visitor Motivation

The National Trust has identified three groups that dominate the core of their visitors and supporters. *Curious Minds*: empty nesters, very interested in history, nature and conservation - knowledgeable and curious to learn more. *Explorer Families*: families with quite young children whose primary aim is that the children would have a great time. And *Out and Abouts*: people who really enjoy the long walk, the physical exercise. They would visit the house as well as the garden and are intent on experiencing as much as they can in a day.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, research by Vista describes six groups motivated to visit cultural heritage sites: *Explorers*: curiosity-driven with a generic interest in the content of the site. *Facilitators*: socially motivated. *Experience Seekers*: motivated to visit because they perceive the site as an important destination. *Rechargers*: primarily seeking to have a contemplative, spiritual, and/or restorative experience. *Hobbyists*: who feel a close tie between the site's content and their professional or hobbyist passions; in this case, gardening. And *Community Seekers*: those with a strong sense of heritage and/or personhood. They view the site as an important part of their heritage and identity.<sup>38</sup> In contrast West has an almost whimsical approach in categorising audiences as: *Skimmers*; e.g. walking the dog and a coffee being the priorities; *Dippers*; e.g. a general interest in the place, referencing the information leaflets and website, but not exclusively so; and *Divers*; e.g. with a particular interest in one or more aspects of the place, people and / or project, possibly involving some research and participation.<sup>39</sup>

There is, however, a sub-group of visitors, overlooked by the Trust and Vista, but hinted at by Lambert and West's Skimmers, and can be categorised generically as co-owners or 'community'. Reflecting the underlying purpose of

public parks and mostly resident within 300-400 metres walking distance or 30 minutes' drive-time, these people visit their local park or informal / natural greenspace for quiet recreation, exercise and social activities, regularly and often daily and sometimes over generations. They both justify the provision of the park or greenspace, perhaps supported by community heritage grant-funding, as well as forming cadres of volunteers that may often be the backbone of the workforce for upkeep and facilities, including the all-important Friends support groups. This topic will be illustrated in Chapter 4.

Communicating experiences has also undergone a revolution.<sup>40</sup> Whereas, historically as noted in Chapter 1, visitors would report back in letters or journals with relatively restricted circulations, today's visitors are as likely as not to revert to social media, in real time and to all who have access to it. What has not changed much however is the generally critical content and tone of these communications: the 18<sup>th</sup> Century visitor might criticise the design concept and the avarice of the staff, whereas today's TripAdvisor posts moan about poor value for money and other people's dogs.

### Destination Management

This section summarises the sometimes-conflicting criteria necessary to develop and maintain a successful, welcoming and sustainable visitor destination, without compromising standards of conservation and presentation, but within the constraints of national legislation. Denyer for the National Trust sets the scene

We need to offer pleasure, understanding and involvement in creative, dynamic and sustainable ways, so that people are welcomed as constructive and essential parts of the life of gardens, and at the same time conserve and sustain the places in our care.

She continues that the essential balance is ensuring that the intentions of the original designer are respected and interpreted, whilst at the same time acknowledging the practical realities of contemporary public access. Echoing in part the ICOMOS Florence and Quebec Charters she observes that from the moment of their creation garden landscapes begin to change as the processes of nature take over, 'and so what visitors come to enjoy is actually the result of a

series of negotiations with the forces of change: a present-day evocation of the intentions of their creators combined with the effects of time, all overlain by the perceptions of those who have nurtured them'. Reflecting historic conventions and practices, she adds that many landscapes were designed to control views as 'surprises' and their effect can be diminished by seeing other people within it; 'maintaining a feeling of privileged access to the few, consistent with retaining the capability of inviting the many'.<sup>41</sup>

Sales, one-time Head of Gardens for the National Trust, concurs that the scramble to cater for visitors may lead to the loss of innate characteristics of mystery, solitude and peacefulness. 'Gardens must be protected to enable them to refresh the spirit as well as interest and entertain.'<sup>42</sup> In his insightful essay on 'Use and Reception' in *Bending* (2013) Lambert implicitly takes us back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Perhaps what we need to restore as much as any 'heritage fabric', is a way of seeing; slower, more meditative, associative, poetic; the garden not as fabric, but as a series of prompts to the imagination, which may be historical or may be contemporary, a free space the viewer is allowed physically and mentally to make sense of.<sup>43</sup>

However, while gardens are inherently dynamic and cannot remain static, 'needing to be constantly renewed and adapted to changing circumstances', Sales adds pragmatically that, 'nor is it right to justify new development entirely on the perceived need to pursue management goals, especially financial'.<sup>44</sup> Cadw agrees in that 'compromise may be needed to balance appropriate conservation with income generation'.<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding, given the diversity and accessibility of available attractions on offer, maintaining cash-flow will always be a major consideration and increased footfall will often be seen as the essential aim. But herein lies a potential problem and it was experienced in earlier days, as noted in the previous chapter.

The upshot will therefore be to span the entire spectrum, from the multi-dimensional AHD to the availability of car-parking and quality of the catering. However converting buildings as visitor facilities may not only be costly, but adaptations may be impracticable. Denyer warns that, 'Particularly in well-visited

gardens, putting up a new building is often the only realistic solution. Whether these buildings should be a statement or pretend to be invisible is debated long and hard'.<sup>46</sup> There is also the challenge of maintaining the attraction (i.e., cash-flow), year-round, especially with regard to plantings. Looking their best year-round is almost an insuperable challenge and complementary attractions and events must be planned for and put in hand.<sup>47</sup>

Echoing Denyer's earlier comment on the need to retain an element of surprise Taylor notes an unhappy paradox whereby visitors themselves sometimes become the most strikingly visible feature and he cites instances where [at Sissinghurst Castle] the desired ambience was not only transformed by an inundation of visitors, but the crush of visitors also damaged the fabric of the place they had come to admire; no path of finely mown turf can withstand the tread of 4,000 visitors a day! At Longleat, paths had to be widened to avoid congestion and garden features emboldened because surges of visitors tend to move fairly fast and opportunities for close scrutiny are denied. Even privately owned gardens are not immune to such pressures.

All this means that gardens have in their essence become, simply, something completely different and, more often than not, something at odds with the impulse that created them. The refuge from the pressures of an overcrowded world, ... the place pervaded by harmony where nature and art hold sway, has become just another stopping point on the tourist's route." ... .<sup>48</sup>

And quoting Fearnley-Whittingstall, and agreeing with Lambert, Taylor comments that, 'The hectic pace of the garden tour leaves no time to dwell on any part of the garden - best to snap it quickly and get on to the next', to which Wemyss and Lambert add that visitors now are more likely to view gardens almost exclusively through a lens, and gardens are judged largely according to their pictorial quality,<sup>49</sup> an observation that echoes the earlier recording of Picturesque features.

Lambert adds tellingly that, the 'visitor experience' is increasingly stand alone, or parallel to direct experience of the place and its strangeness; not only mediated by, but replaced by the experience of the visitor centre, the shop and

the restaurant.<sup>50</sup> Or as a harassed property manager has observed, 'they just want three things: a view, a brew and a loo'.

Meanwhile, as well as problems with wear and tear from feet (and he could have mentioned dog paws) Sales criticises managers who fail to appreciate the consequences of holding events on grassland unable to cope with heavy loads and manoeuvring ( Powis Castle comes in for particular criticism), as well as pervading traditional influences where upkeep was driven what he called, 'the graveyard approach: no trees or shrubs, close-clipped grass, and crisp edges round every artefact'.<sup>51</sup> There is also the age-old conundrum: if as Milestone observed while visiting Headlong Hall, or as Yorke of Erddig insisted, one had to keep to the allotted and presumably way-marked paths - or could one make one's own routes, appropriating the terrain for one's own purposes? But might this invade privacy, damage structures or plantings, or even court danger?

I have already hinted at an understandable tendency for managers to concentrate on facets of the garden landscape for which there is funding and, if volunteers are not available, to hope that the rest will look after itself by default. But Nature is the default manager and resists human intervention. Furthermore the owner / manager / keeper has 'two simultaneous roles to fulfil, being responsible for caring for the park's physical fabric, both structural and horticultural, as well as its protection and security', although Leyton-Jones reiterates that visitors are essential to help to pay for that care.<sup>52</sup> Balancing where the priorities lie is therefore the fundamental issue when planning the management of garden opening, not just the capital to set up the place but also the revenue to run it, if only for set-piece events.<sup>53</sup> To which must be added providing on and off-site learning, reflecting the importance of engaging young people with heritage values, as well as running wild' developing self-reliance and taking risks.<sup>54</sup>

### Governance and Management

There remains the matter of accountability. As I noted in Chapter 1 it was by no means uncommon for ownerships and tenures to falter and fail for lack of business acumen, lack of funds or unforeseen misfortune. Little has changed since and, despite all the guidance and funding sources now available, it is



almost inevitable that some garden landscapes will fall into dereliction, bankruptcy; or both.

The National Trust's pioneering role in rescuing, conserving and opening garden landscapes has already been referred to and despite occasional lapses its corporate governance has been broadly equal to its core task, assisted by its substantial assets and supporter base, although an unencumbered transfer of tenure and adequate endowment were always prerequisites. By contrast, at Hafod, Bishop's Park Abergwili and the NBGW it was the nascent, impecunious and independent WHGT that stepped forward, often in the last resort as described at the Appendix. None of this would have been possible without personal commitment and benevolence, the support of grant-making trusts, occasional government grants, the massive and now indispensable surge in volunteering and, latterly the equally indispensable Lottery schemes.

But the potential benefits of a fresh start under a new regime may be unavailing when faced – at least initially – by indifference, conflicting priorities, or even downright opposition on the part of landowners or their agents. Frequently the main obstacle is obtaining the requisite interest in tenure and therefore surety for funding, especially where there is intense competition for grants. I return to these factors in the next chapter. There is a further consideration, sometimes overlooked. Progenitors are characteristically visionaries and A. Sclater (2000) described them vividly in the case of NBGW, whereas pragmatists are essential for the project's delivery. Balancing vision against reality, optimism against pessimism, is a critical process. Get it wrong and the dream will crash. In any case, and as will be noted with Penllergare, progenitors' individual commitments are likely to wane, either because of a desire to move on, or through simple exhaustion. The transition to a new governance regime is therefore a critical point, not least because new incumbents may not possess the go-getting characteristics as their predecessors. However professionally qualified or committed the staff a governing board perceived to be faltering and unequal to the task will haemorrhage support, including funding at a critical point where capital works have to be sustained from revenue. The case of NBGW, that faced bankruptcy shortly after opening, illustrates one such phase (summarised at the Appendix) and the truism, so often overlooked, that the easiest phase of a

project – particularly one that stands alone - is undertaking the capital works and opening to the public. The most challenging will always be sustaining the upkeep and a healthy balance sheet thereafter and in the case of charities, potentially at odds with the immutable principles of public benefit.<sup>55</sup>

I have dealt in this chapter with the development of garden landscapes open to visitors within a complex and evolving heritage discourse for a mass and diverse market, the growth of the charitable sector, the continued problems of funding public parks, the emergence of country parks, as well as an apparent anomaly in the relationship with museum collections. I have also sought to summarise the frequently conflicting criteria that face today's owners and managers that entail balancing the preservation and conservation of the special characteristics of the place, especially its emotional and experiential authenticities, against maximising paid-for footfall; issues that are dealt with next.

### Endnotes

1. Significantly the Hampshire Trust was formed and still works in in close cooperation with the county council, whereas the Welsh trust is [in 2022] largely side-lined by Welsh Government and its agencies.
2. National Trust Annual Report 2020/21.
3. [ngs.org.uk/](https://ngs.org.uk/)
4. Cof Cymru, 'Aberfan Cemetery and Garden of Remembrance', PGW(Gm)69(MER). <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru/search-cadw-records>
5. 'Greenham Peace Garden'. <https://greenhamcommonpeacegarden.org.uk>
6. [gatewaygardenstrust.org/about-us.html](https://gatewaygardenstrust.org/about-us.html)
7. J. Woodstra and K. Fieldhouse (eds.), 2000, *The Regeneration of Public Parks*, H. Conway, *Parks and people: the social function*: London, E & FN Spon.
8. D. Lambert, 2005, *The Park Keeper*. London: English Heritage. P. 14.
9. J. Woudstra, 2000. *Introduction: the regeneration of public parks* in J. Woudstra and K. Fieldhouse (eds), *The Regeneration of Public Parks*. London: Spon. P. 5.
10. L. Crowe, 2018, 'Policy Review - The future of Public Parks in England: policy tensions in funding, management and governance', Sheffield Hallam University, *People, Place and Policy: 12/2*. And Fields in Trust [https://www.fieldsintrust.org/Upload/File/FIT\\_ImpactReport\\_2018.pdf](https://www.fieldsintrust.org/Upload/File/FIT_ImpactReport_2018.pdf)
11. Association for Public Service Excellence, 2021, *APSE State of UK Public Parks 2021* <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/research/current-research-programme/state-of-uk-public-parks-2021> and Fields in Trust, 2018, *Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces*. <https://www.fieldsintrust.org/Upload/file/research/Revaluing-Parks-and-Green-Spaces-Report.pdf>  
FIT\_ImpactReport\_2018.pdf. The effects of the Covid pandemic, short and long-term, are currently being assessed (July 2022), but the National Lottery's report at [www.heritagefund.org.uk/blogs/how-coronavirus-covid-19-affecting-heritage-sector](https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/blogs/how-coronavirus-covid-19-affecting-heritage-sector) provides a starting point.
12. J. Dobson, C. Harris, W. Eadson, and T. Gore, 2019. London: *The NLHF and the National Space to thrive: A rapid evidence review of the benefits of parks and green*

*spaces for people and communities - Lottery Community Fund.* The Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks Programme was launched in 1996 to confront the crisis in the condition of public parks but, despite its substantial impact, it was withdrawn in 2000 and park authorities are now forced to compete with applicants from wider constituencies

13. House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 'Public parks', Seventh Report of Session 2016–17.  
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/45/4504.htm> and L. Crowe, pp 61-2.
14. <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regid=1193205&subid=0> Possibly prompted by Leeds University, 2018, 'Leeds Parks Survey: Full Report', A. Barker, D. Churchill & A. Crawford. The emerging cooperation between the public and charitable sectors, underwritten by the National Lottery, is also characterised in the City of Newcastle, that faced by swingeing budgetary cuts, has set up the charitable body, Urban Green Newcastle. The expected outcome will be access to new funding sources, better accountability and engaging more constructively with Friends groups.  
<https://urbangreennewcastle.org/> The memorandum of understanding between Penllergare and Swansea Council is returned to in Chapter 4.
15. E. Howard, 1898, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. Reprinted in 1902 as *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. Also, A. Ruff, 2015, *Arcadian Visions, Pastoral Influences on Poetry, Painting and the Design of Landscape*, Oxford, Windgather, p. 172.
16. The Parks Trust, 2014, 'Annual Report and Financial Statements 2014/15'.  
<https://www.theparkstrust.com/our-work/about-us/about-the-parks-trust/> (The Parks Trust,).
17. S. Fielding, S. 2021, *Cwmbrân New Town An Urban Characterisation Study*, Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru - Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales  
<https://shop.rcahmw.gov.uk/collections/downloads/products/cwmbran-new-town-an-urban-characterisation-study>.
18. <https://senedd.wales/media/i0yfcfba/pri-ld10184-em-r-e.pdf>
19. Planning Policy Wales, 'Technical Advice Note16: Sport, Recreation and Open Space. Annex A'. <https://gov.wales/technical-advice-note-tan-16-sport-recreation-and-open-space>  
Consistent with that approach Natural Resources Wales has developed a toolkit to determine the desired provision of accessible, natural green spaces.  
<https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/what-we-do/green-spaces/local-green-spaces/?lang=en>
20. <https://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s55354/Cabinet%2020%20Jan%202022%20Community%20engagementnet%20parks.pdf>.
21. <https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/s27703/Open%20Space%20Strategy%20updated%20290416.pdf?LLL=1>
22. D. Lambert, 2006, 'The history of the country park, 1966–2005: Towards a renaissance?' *Landscape Research* Vol. 31, No. 1, pp.43 – 62. And, 2009, 'A new era for country parks?'. Seminar Proceedings of the Countryside Recreation Network Country Parks: a historical perspective.
23. PGW (Gm) 52 (NEP).
24. PGW (Gm) 50 (NEP). The importance here of clean water supplies was replicated in nearby Swansea, as described in Chapter 1. It is possible that if the declining estate of Middleton Hall, acquired by Carmarthenshire County Council after World War I, had not been divided up and leased to young farmers intent on an agricultural career

- it, too, could have been a country park. Instead it became the National Botanic Garden of Wales, as described with Margam and The Gnoll at Appendix.
25. <https://museum.wales/media/54155/Operational-Plan-2021-2022.pdf>
  26. <https://www.yorkmuseumstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/York-Museums-and-Gallery-Trust-signed-accounts-for-YE-31.03.15.compressed.pdf>
  27. Tellingly, the Horniman Museum and Gardens have been awarded the Art Fund Museum of the Year 2022. <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/news-stories/>
  28. S. Berjman, 2001, *Historic parks and cultural landscapes*, ICOMOS-IFLA International Scientific Committee of Historic Gardens-Cultural Landscapes. <https://www.icomos.org/risk/2001/gardens.htm>. She could now usefully include the effects of climate change.
  29. D. Lambert in S. Bending, 2013, *In the Age of Enlightenment: A Cultural History of Gardens*, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 99 – 100.
  30. L. Smith, 2006, *Uses of Heritage*, Abingdon, Routledge. P. 4 and 11-12.
  31. English Heritage, 1997, *Sustaining the Historic Environment*. London: English Heritage.
  32. Lambert in Bending. p. 94.
  33. Smith p. 41.
  34. J. Folsom, 2000, *Viewpoint: the terms of beauty*, *Public Garden* 15(2), pp. 3-6 & 239.
  35. M. Calnan, (ed), 2001, *Rooted in History, Studies in Garden Conservation*, London: National Trust; S. Denyer, *Gardens Open to View*. p. 147.
  36. J. Connell, 2004, The purest of human pleasures: the characteristics and motivations of garden visitors in Great Britain, *Tourism Management* 25 (2004). pp. 229–247.
  37. F. Reynolds, 2012 *Creating the right culture for public engagement*, <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Creating-the-right-culture-for-public-engagement..Dame-Fiona-Reynolds..2012-1.pdf>
  38. <https://www.vista-ar.eu/en/how-audience-segmentation-can-enrich-the-visitor-experience/>
  39. S. West, (ed). 2010, *Understanding Heritage in Practice*: Manchester University Press.
  40. L. Smith p, 29, though her observation that increasing sophistication in writing about tourism has led to the realisation that heritage tourists and other heritage visitors are far more active and critical – or ‘mindful’ – than they have previously been portrayed, [Smith. P. 5], and it has been shown in the previous chapter that this may not be always so.
  41. S. Denyer, pp.148-9 and 161 and consistent with Capability Brown’s concepts, for example in Phibbs, J., 2017, *Place-making – The Art of Capability Brown*, London: Historic England.
  42. J. Sales, 2001, ‘The Future of the Visited Garden’, *The Horticulturist*, Vol. 9, No. 1, WINTER 2000, pp. 11-12, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45139081> At the National Trust criticisms and concerns over over-crowding continue. In response to a members’ resolution on overcrowding at properties at a recent AGM, it was reported that, ‘... we have well-established medium-term mechanisms to respond: investing in places to mitigate or avoid impacts (e.g. paths directing visitors away from sensitive areas), relocating access points to disperse visitors (moving car parks). *National Trust Annual Report 2020/2021*.
  43. In Bending, 2013, p. 103.
  44. J. Sales, 2018, *Shades of Green*. London: Unicorn, pp. 30 - 32.
  45. Cadw, 2017, *Managing Change to Registered Historic Parks and Gardens in Wales*, Cardiff. S. 2.2. <https://cadw.gov.wales/sites/default/files/2019-05/20170531Managing%20Change%20to%20Registered%20Historic%20Parks%20%26%20Gardens%20in%20Wales%20>
  46. Denyer, p.159.

47. In August 2022, NBGW was offering displays of British birds of prey and forest bathing.
48. P. Taylor, 2006, *The Oxford Companion to the Garden*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 180-81.
49. J. Fearnley-Whittingstall, 2002, *The Garden*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, p.310.
50. In Bending, 2013, p. 99.
51. Sales, p.309.
52. K. Layton-Jones, 2014, 'National Review of Research Priorities for Urban Parks, Designed Landscapes, and Open Spaces, for Historic England', p. 37. She could have added paths, steps and all other forms of access.
53. For example:

J. Watkins and T. Wright, (eds), 2007, *The Management & Maintenance of Historic Parks, Gardens & Landscapes*, London: Frances Lincoln.

The exceptionally comprehensive policy and practice note for 'Living with Environmental Change', 2016, *Taking account of heritage values of urban parks and gardens, Living With Environmental Change Policy and Practice Notes*. Note No.36, <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/081221-NERC-LWEC-PPN36-HeritageValuesUrbanParksGardens.pdf>

In Wales Cadw's 'Managing Change in Historic Parks and Gardens in Wales', 2017 [<https://cadw.gov.wales/sites/default/files/2019-05/20170531Managing%20Change%20to%20Registered%20Historic%20Parks%20%26%20Gardens%20in%20Wales%2>]

The UK regional agencies have issued their own practical guidance on opening to the public and creating a positive visitor experience documentation, perhaps the most helpful being Whimster Associates, 2015, 'Easy Access to Historic Landscapes', for English Heritage, revised edition [www.HistoricEngland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/easy-access-to-historic-buildings-and-landscapes/](http://www.HistoricEngland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/easy-access-to-historic-buildings-and-landscapes/)].

For owners less familiar with the procedures the Capability Brown Festival 2016 issued 'A Manual for Owners. Opening Your Garden or Landscape to the Public' and this is an indispensable in setting out the criteria for a successful visitor destination. [www.capabilitybrown.org](http://www.capabilitybrown.org)

54. Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning's 'High Quality Outdoor Learning for Wales', 2018. [https://evolve.edufocus.co.uk/evco/assets/conwy/high\\_quality\\_outdoor\\_learning\\_welshenglish.pdf](https://evolve.edufocus.co.uk/evco/assets/conwy/high_quality_outdoor_learning_welshenglish.pdf)

The well-established, UK-wide Learning Through Landscapes charitable project sets out to inspire and enable positive outdoor experiences through cultural change, and the transformation of school grounds and outdoor community spaces. <https://www.ltl.org.uk/>

M. Norman, 2019, 'The Representation and Interpretation of Penllergare', for University of Wales, Trinity Saint David.

B. Jones, 2018, 'Everything Speaks. Seven Working Principles for Interpretation for National Trust'. <https://silo.tips/download/everything-speaks-seven-working-principles-for-interpretation>]

## **4. Private Paradise and Public Park:**

### **Penllergare & Parc Llewelyn as Case Studies**

This case study illustrates some of the trends outlined in the preceding chapters through the development of two related, but distinct garden landscape projects in Swansea. Acting initially for the WHGT I was the progenitor of the Penllergare project, during which a job placement for Rob Skinner, a post-graduate student at University of Wales Lampeter, resulted in his thesis of 2007 on Parc Llewelyn. This, in turn, led Cadw to register the park as being of special historic interest, nationally.

Penllergare had been created by the Dillwyn Llewelyns as a private family paradise in the prevailing romantic, picturesque style of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but it was eventually abandoned in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century although the gardens and landscape in Valley Woods were retained purely for their development potential, including a country park, now managed - after many vicissitudes - by the independent and charitable Penllergare Trust.<sup>1</sup> Parc Llewelyn was created through the philanthropy of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century self-same family as a public park to benefit the expanding, industrialised population nearby and has survived as such, despite changes to its socio-economic environment.

#### Penllergare – Private Paradise

In its heyday, and following contemporary practice, head gardeners and gardening journalists were invited to admire and report on the Dillwyn Llewelyn's creation. In August 1910, an anonymous correspondent for the South Wales Daily News observed that

The real glory of Penllergare consists of its truly magnificent grounds, and its rare and beautiful plants which add a superabundance of attractions to a spot already marked by nature for special favours...For beauty and scenery there is nothing in the whole land of Morganwg to excel the valley of Penllergare.<sup>2</sup>

But as urban Swansea spread nearer the family decamped to a more rural seat, although the estate was later retrieved for its potential for commercial development and the valley was top sliced by the M4 motorway. The Local

Authority agreed that the valley was suitable for substantial, unobtrusive, mainly recreational usage and there followed a succession of over 30 schemes ranging through wildlife, country and theme parks, to a championship golf course and hotel, a leisure complex and housing: all still born, including what was billed as Swansea Bay's answer to Disneyland. Upwards of a million visitors per annum were forecast. Eventually planning permission was given in 1991, reinforced by a legal agreement that tied residential and commercial development to the provision of what was to be the country park for 125 years. But the developers defaulted, and despite its special qualities of seclusion, drama and charm, what is now termed Valley Woods fell further into dereliction, cloaked by vegetation, the target for vandalism and mayhem. Enforcement proved futile and registration by Cadw for Penllergare's special historic interest was no more than a material consideration in planning terms.<sup>3</sup>

The Council and potential partners backed away for lack of cash and potential liabilities. The walled garden complex, described as one of the most extensive surviving in Wales outside a major stately home, despite its dereliction, was encroached upon by an adjacent commercial development.<sup>4</sup> The equatorial observatory was retained, but falling into dereliction.

However, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century family provided a somewhat unexpected legacy because they initiated what was to become an indefinite love-affair of Penllergare for the local public. The grounds were open to the public three times a year, with special openings for local Sunday Schools. The new village Council School logged Nature Study Excursions on the estate. The enjoyment of Penllergare, which this public access encouraged, remained and grew beyond the family's departure, leading to a sense of public ownership for their Valley Woods that has persisted through the generations to the present day. The younger and more adventurous adopted this beautiful, neglected wildscape and there are numerous fond memories of fishing, swimming, exploring ruins, and generally mucking about as children and teenagers, particularly during the 1960s and 70s.

Years of wonder and delight are the memories of my childhood at Penllergare. It was a magical place. Penllergare was my playground of delight, discovery and learning.<sup>5</sup>

Such considerations cut little ice with the commercial developers and Valley Woods remained derelict and unsafe to visit.

Independent action was seen as the only way of saving this unique place and so, under the auspices of the nascent WHGT, that had already initiated a major campaign of advocacy, research and survey there, the independent charitable Ymddiriedolaeth Penllergare Trust was set up in 2000 to further the protection, conservation, restoration, maintenance, as well as knowledge and appreciation, of the cultural landscape of Penllergare and the protection and conservation of wildlife.<sup>6</sup>

Fine words on the page, but without legal tenure the Trust's remit was limited to more research, surveys and community engagement. Meanwhile the mayhem continued, as reported by a staff member in Summer 2009

Last Saturday I led a walk of over 40 people who wanted to see the Penllergare estate and learn about its history. I was appalled at the dereliction and palpable danger, not only to my group but also to other people who were walking, blackberrying and innocently enjoying what should be a safe and beautiful place. I counted 15 wrecked vehicles. A recently abandoned car near the waterfall was torched in front of me by some young children, youths with air rifles were shooting at targets on a public bridge, and joyriders on motorcycles and in cars were roaring up and down the drives ..... The situation is fast going out of control. Someone very soon, whether perpetrator or bystander, is going to get seriously hurt.<sup>7</sup>

An independent consultant's report concluded that

Penllergare's appearance is one of continued slow decline, exacerbated by the failure to carry out basic (management) ... and its appeal is greatly reduced by the effects of anti-social behaviour, theft and criminal damage and an unsafe atmosphere. ...This is a country park in name only. It is difficult to imagine a site which is supposed to function as a place which actively encourages public access that could be so discouraging'.<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, perseverance paid off and the leasehold tenures were reassigned to the Trust, but so were the associated rental commitments, now totalling some



£35,000 per annum, with the condition that, for the greater part of the Woods, public access on foot was to be permitted, free of charge. A major drawback was that, other than the equatorial observatory, the mansion and its ancillary buildings had been destroyed, necessitating providing visitor facilities from scratch. Notwithstanding, a decade after its inception the Trust had raised upwards of £1 million, including Lottery grants and had re-opened the historic path network and built bridges, begun the regeneration of the lakes and woodlands and delivered a comprehensive community and learning programme that did much to engender that unique community support, ownership and involvement, including the use of volunteers in all aspects of the Trust's operations.<sup>9</sup>

Today, Valley Woods is a regionally unique and diverse visitor attraction, not so much for its cultural heritage, but as a recreational green space with an adjacent catchment area now exceeding 130,000 people, the largest in north-west Swansea. In acknowledgement of this achievement the Trust and Swansea Council signed a memorandum of understanding in 2013, belatedly setting out the benefits of cooperation.<sup>10</sup>

Unsurprisingly though, the Trust has no option but to undertake intensive commercial and fund-raising operations to comply with its charitable objects, as well as those standing tenure commitments. Volunteers, many prompted by that traditional love affair, therefore supplement the few members of staff and a coffee shop and charged-for car-parking were early initiatives, as was the complementary and now thriving Friends fund-raising group. This indispensable commitment was summarised by this volunteer. 'If you value and enjoy Valley Woods, then you must help look after them'.

### Commentary

This brief overview describes a fate not untypical of many other such gentry estates. Regardless of its familial and cultural antecedents the Penllergare estate was retained by its 20<sup>th</sup> Century owners solely for its pecuniary value; and other than for portions sold-off for development, that remains the position.

Designations for its historic importance, as well as its recreational value for the local community and status as a country park, had signally failed to protect the garden landscape from dereliction, vandalism and encroachment. The planning

system was powerless against the intransigence of landowner and developers. In this instance only a charitable initiative was judged capable of resolving the impasse, albeit as a commercial tenant. But will an independent charity without endowments be capable of sustaining a recreational green space of this size, complexity and heritage importance in the long term?

From its inception until the acquisition of tenure the Trust's overheads were minimal and fund-raising could therefore be concentrated on research, surveys, learning and community engagement. This all changed when the leases were signed and the Trust became responsible, not just for the land, including its structures, vegetation and watercourses (all mostly unmanaged), but also for permitting free and - by implication, safe - public access to the valley. And the charging of an annual rent added to the burden.

As I argued in Chapter 3, from a business viewpoint, what principally motivates people to visit and spend money is sometimes more a matter of personal gratification than cultural or social considerations and while the major grant-making bodies largely redress the balance, even they must make hard choices. At Valley Woods one consequence has been to undertake only those tasks for which there are potential grants or income, regardless of their importance or urgency. For example (in 2022), despite its national and unique historic and cultural significance, the equatorial observatory (the oldest surviving in Wales) had been renovated with grant-aid, but now stands unused for lack of appropriate revenue-earning uses, including astronomy. The walled kitchen garden, and admired by the Royal Commission for its completeness - has now almost entirely lost its *raison d'être*. Practically all the original structures, including the pioneering orchideous house, are derelict and the site will simply become a heritage orchard and a low-key activity area. Community engagement and learning were largely instrumental in promoting and maintaining the support of local people in the project's early days, but they are costly in staff time and facilities and bring in little income.

Visitor motivation was also dealt with in the previous chapter and at Valley Woods it is only exceptionally that the AHD exemplified by the Cadw Register that draws visitors. The most recent visitor survey, in 2017, reported that the largest segment was 'coffee and strollers', followed by dog walkers, family

groups and leisure walkers, reflecting those of West (2010).<sup>11</sup> However recent posts on social media indicate a growing interest in wildlife and biodiversity (one of the Trust's charitable objects) and this is consistent with my argument that nature should be regarded as default manager, a point that will be returned to again.

Penllergare is just one of several potentially competing garden landscape attractions in South Wales. Easy access via the M4 and the major road network is advantageous, but if quiet enjoyment is in doubt, then visitors will go elsewhere; likewise, if the historic or natural assets and facilities are uninteresting, inaccessible or poorly maintained. Again, if some locations (e.g., the walled gardens in future) incur an entrance charge then they must look the part in all seasons, otherwise the all-important repeat visits will not occur. This is particularly applicable – as was the case at NBGW in the early years where plantings are immature. Social media and TripAdvisor increasingly influence such decisions.

The previous chapter also highlighted the impact of large numbers of visitors. Penllergare was laid out for the quiet enjoyment of family and visitors and not thousands of people, their children, dogs and bikes. Footpaths, the river and its riparian zone, and very particularly the waterfall that is the usual focus for visits, all suffer from repeated erosion and require repair and maintenance, the costs of which, including disabled access, are not recoverable from visitors, or favoured by grant-making bodies. Media location hire charges are welcome, but the resultant damage is often considerable. Car-parking and facilities are not easily accommodated within the historic setting and any sense of welcome on arrival is lacking. Since the public is permitted free access on foot to the valley within the terms of the lease there is no scope for variation.

In common with other such sites, climate change will precipitate further damage to structural and horticultural assets that contribute to the attractiveness of the Valley Woods as a visitor experience. As well as proliferating pests, diseases and invasive species, mainly affecting but not limited to plants, the now certainty of more flooding, erosion, high winds and fire will damage ground surfaces, built structures, as well as plantings, and therefore add to the cost of mitigatory

measures, even if increasing warmth will favour some plants and the woodlands will provide cooling relief to people from adjacent urban heat islands.

Fostering public engagement is vital in promoting and explaining the place and project. This will range from making visitors feel welcome on arrival, to the full range of digital and social media. Whole-life learning is a vital component of promoting continued community engagement and support consistent with the Trust's charitable objects, but the initial, very successful programme had to be abandoned for lack of funding.

Independence confers a degree of freedom of action, but a major drawback is the need for a full complement of in-house, 'head office' services. At Penllergare, the Trust's founding trustees and managers were qualified and experienced in heritage management, whereas their more local successors are not to the same extent.

In summary, Penllergare's historic, cultural and community values failed to protect it from dereliction and inappropriate development: its designation through the planning system as a country park, likewise. Visiting, local and regionally, was inhibited initially by illegal and anti-social activities. In the absence of interest in involvement by existing authorities and agencies its acquisition by a charitable trust was therefore the last resort and it is now a major regional visitor destination for all-comers. But at a price: willy-nilly the Trust has to concentrate on paying the rent and for basic upkeep. Voluntary involvement helps, but car-parking, coffee shop and paid-for activities generally, some damaging, tend to take precedence over Penllergare's multifaceted heritage narratives.

All this is a far cry from its origins as a private family paradise, one described by that anonymous correspondent as, 'marked by nature for special favours'.

Notwithstanding, Penllergare's role as an oasis of wildscape in the surrounding urbanisation will be of ever-increasing importance to local people in future, if not so much for its AHD. Further, and if (referring back to Chapter 3) Swansea followed the example of Leeds and Newcastle in adopting a collaborative approach to the provision of recreational green space, then Penllergare would be an obvious candidate. In any event, a degree of cooperation or interdependence

with another organisation with similar objectives would therefore be worth the exploring.

### Parc Llewelyn – Public Park

Even in their private paradise of Penllergare it is probable that the Dillwyn Llewelyns, with their Quaker roots, would have been aware of the awful living conditions of the people crammed into the industrialising Tawe valley to their east and the need to do something to alleviate them, especially where the enclosure of previously common land was depriving working people of opportunities to enjoy public open spaces<sup>12</sup>. Chapter 2 introduced William Thomas and his advocacy of 'the desirability and advantages of recreation grounds for the working classes and poor children in Swansea'<sup>13,14</sup> and John Dillwyn responded with an offer to donate a 42-acre farm, together with £1,000 to help convert it into a public park. The attraction of this auspicious offer was reinforced by the farm's location, overlooking and equidistant along the industrialising valley, upwind of pollution and with extensive views out. The Corporation of Swansea accepted John Dillwyn's gift in February 1875 and matched it with an additional £1,500 from the public purse. Officially the scheme was to be directed by the Borough Surveyor, but from the outset the family maintained an overseeing role in laying out the grounds. A subsequent letter from John, published in *The Cambrian*, states that the park found its origins with his wife, Emma; the 'carrying out of the design' was her work and that it is only through her 'energy and perseverance' that the scheme was completed, reflecting a marital relationship that was highly egalitarian for its day and echoing Lady Cecil's earlier strategic role at Dinefwr.<sup>15</sup>

What could go wrong?

An extravagant realisation was not proceeded with because it was incompatible with the site's boundaries, topography and its probable costs. A simpler layout was adopted, but even so there are hints that its even incomplete completion was a struggle. As Skinner remarks, 'Evidence suggests that [it] proved to be an expensive undertaking that had an unforeseen financial impact on J D Llewelyn [with] costs that spiralled beyond the initial £2,500'.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding, the Deed of Covenant for the transfer of the land to the Corporation was executed on 24 July 1878 and states in part that the park, '... shall forever hereafter be utilised as a Public Park only and for no other purpose or purposes whatsoever', and the successors to the original trustees should, 'for all times and hereafter maintain the grounds as a public park'. At the opening of the park in October 1878, fittingly during the mayoral year of William Thomas, *The Cambrian* noted that some features were unfinished but, '... when this is done, and when nature, improved by cultivation, has had a little time to put forth her beautifying energy. [But] At the present time it is everything that could be wished for the health and recreation of a large population, who are crowded in their works and houses, and who, after work, ought to have an outlet for play and health'.<sup>17</sup> From the outset Parc Llewelyn was extremely popular; thousands duly flocked to this green space that provided fresh air and drinking water. As John's son remarked, this place was now formally handed over to the people and was their own legally.<sup>18</sup>

In common with British public parks elsewhere and reflecting the culture of its largely working-class locale Parc Llewelyn reached its zenith in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the addition of new attractions and more sports facilities.<sup>19</sup> However, after World War 2, when much of the park had been devoted to 'dig for victory', there was a sharp decline in the park's popularity and it experienced a loss of facilities in competition with more visited ones nearer the city centre, as well as losing its original raison d'être with the closure of the heavy industry below.

As was the case elsewhere funding for maintenance was always a problem and Parc Llewelyn became neglected, lost much of its original detailing and culturally significant facilities, as well as its park keeper. Hence the now familiar spiral; the less the park is used, the less the desire to invest in its upkeep, and so further cutbacks were the only option. This is especially relevant at Parc Llewelyn, where, as Skinner observes

As a breathing space the location is ideal, but this benefit lost its relevance over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as Swansea [was] transformed from a place of heavy, polluting industry... In addition, the

sports facilities that developed at Parc Llewelyn were superseded as ... other better-designed, more accessible, resources were built elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

Matters came to a head in 2002 with threats of encroaching development for a golf course, at which point the newly founded Penllergare Trust stepped in - as the Dillwyn Llewelyns would have undoubtedly wished - with the invocation of the Freedom of Information Act to publicise the founding deed: thereupon all proposals for development evaporated. It was then only with the formation of the Friends of Parc Llewelyn in 2006,<sup>21</sup> that there was a proper recognition of the cultural and historic importance of the park<sup>22</sup> and the need for its continued upkeep for the health and well-being of today's community.<sup>23</sup>

In summary Parc Llewelyn has much in common with other British urban parks with its origins in philanthropy, persisting problems with funding and its much-altered constituency, including an active Friends' group. In this context, however, it is uniquely the antithesis of the private paradise of Penllergare to which it owes its origin, and belatedly recognised for its special historic interest.

#### Endnotes

1. I.R. Morris, 1999, *Penllergare A Victorian Paradise*, Llandeilo, Penllergare Trust.
2. M. Norman, 2012, 'Penllergare – A Paradise Almost Lost', *Trafodion*, Issue 2, Welsh Historic Gardens Trust  
<http://whgt.wales/documents/trafodion/Trafodion2.pdf>
3. Documents, including many unpublished, and arising from the early development of the project are available for public access at West Glamorgan Archive Service.
4. The now statutory registration for Penllergare(aer) PGW (Gm) 54 (SWA) is at <https://cadwpublic-api.azurewebsites.net/reports/parkgarden/FullReport?lang=&id=241> The previous, full citation is at <https://coflein.gov.uk/media/16/213/cpg240.pdf>
5. C. Briggs and G. Ward, 2000, 'Preliminary notes to accompany a survey of the kitchen garden at Penllergare', for RCAHMW, unpublished.
6. School children recorded verbatim in J. Eyers, (ed), 2006, *Penllergare – Echoes from Valley Woods*, Llandeilo: The Penllergare Trust.
7. Elusen Gofrestredig 1082128 Registered Charity. Cwmni Cyfyngedig 4004593 Limited Company.
8. Unpublished correspondence with BJ Group, the then leaseholders.
9. Anthony Jellard Associates, 2005, 'Penllergare Country Park, Swansea – State of the Park', unpublished.
10. Grant funding was raised from a wide variety of sources – private donors, commercial sponsorships, major Lottery grants, and the EU-supported and innovative 'One Historic Garden' project in 2010-14 that aimed to establish a 'Centre of Excellence' through existing gardens attractions in Southwest Wales, linked by a common historical thread.

11. Its aim being, 'To further the protection, restoration, regeneration and upkeep of the natural and cultural landscape of Penllergare Valley Woods for the benefit of the people of Swansea'.
12. 11.GKA & Letha Consultancy Limited, 'Activity Plan – 2017 - 2022 Final Report - March 2017', for Penllergare Trust (unpublished). After the waterfall, the coffee shop is the most popular destination.
13. R. Skinner, 2007, 'Parc Llewelyn, The Origins, Historic Development and Cultural Significance of a Victorian Public Park,' unpublished MA thesis (University of Wales, Lampeter).
14. Also because his father, Lewis Weston, owned the Cambrian Pottery on the Strand close to the valley and was the founder of Swansea porcelain.
15. Possibly also reinforced by an article in *The Cambrian* on 3 March 1865 that, '.. we sigh in vain for some nobleman or princely merchant to devote a few acres of his estate to such a noble purpose as a public park.'
16. As noted in Chapter 3. John had wanted it to be named 'The Lady's Park' to mark Emma Thomasina's key role, but was over-ruled, perhaps understandably given the mores of the times. R. Skinner, *ibid*, p.48 and J D Llewelyn in *The Cambrian*, 4 October 1878.
17. R. Skinner, p. 44.
18. Rumours that users of the park did so 'by kind permission of Mr. J. D. Llewelyn' were inaccurate because the park was the people's own, and in using it they need ask the kind permission of no one. *The Cambrian*, 3 October 1878.
19. A.Green., 2019, 'Greening Swansea: a forgotten pioneer'.  
<https://gwallter.com/history/greening-swanse-a-forgotten-pioneer.html>
20. For example, J. Wouldstra and K. Fieldhouse 2010, p. 10.
21. R. Skinner, p.76.
22. Their constitution states that the aims of the Friends group are to:
23. Enhance the appearance of the park and improve facilities
24. Promote better access
25. Access funding as necessary
26. Ensure the City and County of Swansea properly maintain the Park.
27. 22. The Park was registered by Cadw for its special historic interest (PGW(GM)75(SWA)) on the recommendation of the Penllergare Trust, citing Skinner's thesis as evidence.
28. 23. *The Cambrian* on 23 August 1878, remarked presciently that, 'Park Llewelyn is a gift, but it will require permanently to keep it in repair at least five men at £1 each per week' ... 'and from this statement the public will be able to judge of the advisability of adding further to the local burdens at the present time for open spaces'.



## 5. Conclusions: What Next?

“The best improver is he who leave most to nature”. Thomas Hornor, 1813. Surveyor turned artist Hornor (1785–1844) depicted the 18<sup>th</sup> Century redesign of the Middleton estate in a series of watercolours that have been invaluable in its restoration by the NBGW. With its translation “Y gwellhäwr goreu yw yr hwn sydd yn gadael fwyaf i natur” these quotations are one of several engraved into visitors’ benches.

This dissertation has shown that, whereas garden landscape remains under-represented in Welsh literature, the basic practices of opening for garden landscape visiting were well represented here in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries. They evolved from invitations to a privileged few and critical cognoscenti, through a period when the Welsh Picturesque experience was at centre-stage, to today’s mass and diverse market, intent on interest, entertainment and refreshment, as likely to focus on an enjoyable day out as on heritage discourses.

Whereas many owners accepted that managing their holdings as businesses entailed providing paid access and facilities, external economic forces often led to losses of estates to non-Welsh owners. Wales followed England in the provision of public parks, but the inadequacy of funding for upkeep has been unresolved to this day. The charitable sector was also slow to emerge in Wales, but it has demonstrated a significant, if limited capacity to support the private and public sectors in meeting the demand for access to garden landscapes, although there are some still-unresolved anomalies in the relationships with museum collections. Meanwhile, country parks helped relieve the pressures for recreational greenspace, perhaps echoing – if only faintly – traditional Arcadian values, while sometimes, almost as an after-thought, offering much-needed opportunities for entrepreneurial public authorities.

The heritage discourse, originating in the charitable sector, continues to evolve in terms of scope and complexity, where the hegemonic AHD exemplified by official designation of historic garden landscapes by virtue of their origins must be complemented by a sense of place, human activity and intervention.<sup>1</sup> I have also demonstrated that providers and visitors can become involved in mutually beneficial relationships, participatory in nature and centred on co-curatorship, often through voluntary commitment. However, the practical realities of maintaining an equilibrium between providers and visitors can lead to sometimes

unsought and difficult choices for the former, some of which were already familiar in previous centuries, not least in straddling the persisting gap between the official AHD and visitor motivations described in the previous chapter.

Now all this must be re-assessed in the context of present-day and future epidemics, conflict and economic stringency, overlain by the effects of advancing climate and environmental change.<sup>2</sup> If destinations in the private and charitable sectors will be badly affected economically and climatically, it seems almost inevitable that, given continued and flawed statutory priorities, public parks will suffer even more, with consequential, further pressures on Local Authority budgets; and this despite the growing importance of accessible green space to help in the alleviation of physical and mental stress. However Crowe's reservations, that whereas innovative and entrepreneurial approaches could lead to real benefits and creative approaches, 'tensions can also develop due to increasing dependency on volunteers and third sector organisations, the commodification of spaces and the commercialisation of services, even privatisation' are surely misplaced in the light of the several innovative and collaborative projects already under weigh, as presaged in Chapter 3.<sup>3</sup> Experience with multi-faceted, sometimes income-generating country parks will be relevant to those considerations. As I have illustrated at Penllergare, the need to adapt to and mitigate accelerated environmental change and the associated costs will require difficult decisions about how to manage assets and allocate resources, with collaboration becoming the norm.

The larger, financially secure visitor destinations may be able to bear the long-term adaptive costs, but smaller, independent ones are likely to struggle and even fail. How those that contrive to remain open will depend on their individual characteristics and circumstances, but collaborative, entrepreneurial schemes will undoubtedly gain ground here too.

Nevertheless, significant adjustments to original layouts and plantings will be necessary, as well as limitations on access, including during more frequent storms that could result also in fluvial damage. Some structures will be inaccessible close to, but plantings and some water features, not necessarily welcome, will become dominant. In any case, some of the more complex, designed layouts will deteriorate and incur higher upkeep costs resulting from

the effects of changing and faster plant growth - disease, drought and deluge. Visitor safety will become an even more important consideration, although burgeoning vegetation will provide welcome oases of cool shade.

I suggest therefore that these factors herald a re-examination of the Age of Enlightenment's rationalisation of Arcadian practices whereby nature was embraced and celebrated, not suppressed. There may be no alternative where designed garden layouts become blurred by overwhelming vegetation and the costs of upkeep financially unsustainable. If so one could echo Morris's vision of the Arcadian future in his 'News from Nowhere' where Guest's guide remarks

As to the land being a garden, I have once heard that they used to have shrubberies and rockeries in a garden once, and though I might not like artificial ones, I assure you some of the natural rockeries of our gardens are worth seeing.<sup>4</sup>

In 1994 Holland and Rawles perceptively opined that, '... appreciating that perpetuating meaning is often more important than preserving fabric'. And 'instead of focusing on loss and 'letting go', more nuanced approaches could acknowledge the possibilities of 'letting be' or 'letting become': that cultural remembrance is not necessarily dependent on preservation and perpetuation, but also through change and disturbance, destruction and renewal.<sup>5</sup> More recently DeSilvey et al for Historic England have followed suit in arguing that the protection of designated heritage assets from decay and decline (currently described as threats and failure to deal with them adequately therefore regarded as neglect) should be complemented in certain contexts by, 'an intentional accommodation of ongoing deterioration in the management of a designated heritage asset.' They therefore introduce a new conceptual framework of adaptive release that, 'may involve 'a gradual transition from primarily architectural interest to primarily archaeological interest, as change 'releases' new narrative and interpretive opportunities', thereby still limiting their context to the traditional AHD.<sup>6,7</sup>

It is therefore conceivable that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century passions for rediscovering 'lost gardens' through adaptive release will be revived, where only access is possible and with an emphasis on presentation and digital interpretation. And, in so

doing, the Arcadian concept of art triumphing over nature may well indeed become comprehensively reversed, with mankind working in peaceful harmony with nature, due for a reset, necessitating a further extension and modification to the hegemonic narrative.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, owners and managers must therefore reappraise how – or if - to remain open to visitors in the light of these latest threats – or opportunities. Meanwhile, the dearth of literature on Welsh garden landscape could be alleviated by a latter-day Celia Fiennes.

But now

“Omnia, hospites, vidistis. Vobis gratias agimus”. Nunc, fortuito mingite”.  
“Visitors, you have seen everything. We thank you. Now happily \*\*\*\* off”.  
Inscription of farewell in the Labyrinth Garden at Alnwick, one of the UK’s most successful, recent garden landscape destinations; see Appendix.

### Endnotes

1. As neatly summarised by J. Pina-Trengove., 2020, ‘Revival and relevance: The walled kitchen garden in 21st century public history’, submitted to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Masters by Research in History, pp. 40-41, 67-9.
2. Recent analysis suggests almost four in five sites on the National Heritage List for England will face high levels of risk by the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with climate-driven hazards intensifying the impact of background environmental processes such as weathering and erosion. In Wales it is estimated that of the currently nearly 400 registered historic designed landscapes, parks and gardens, over half could be affected by coastal and inland flooding alone. Welsh Government, 2020, ‘Historic Environment and Climate Change in Wales Sector Adaptation Plan’. <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/climate-change/adapting-to-climate-change>
3. L. Crowe., 2018, ‘Policy Review - The future of Public Parks in England: policy tensions in funding, management and governance’, Sheffield Hallam University, People, Place and Policy 12/2, pp. 58-71. <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ppp-online/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/future-public-parks-england.pdf>
4. W. Morris., C. Wilmer (ed) 1991, *News From Nowhere And Other Writings*, London, Penguin Classics, p. 106. Quoted by A. Ruff, p. 172.
5. A. Holland and K. Rawles., 1994, ‘The Ethics of Conservation: Report Prepared for, and Submitted to Countryside Council for Wales (*Thingmount Working Paper Series on the Philosophy of Conservation TWP 96-01*)’. Lancaster: Lancaster University, p.46. Quoted in Douglas-Jones, R., Hughes, J., Jones, S., and Yarrow, T., 2016. ‘Science, Value and Material Decay in the Conservation of Historic Environments’, *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 21: 823–33.
6. C. DeSilvey, H. Fredheim, A. Blundell, and R. Harrison., 2022, ‘Identifying opportunities for integrated adaptive management of heritage change and transformation in England: a review of relevant policy and current practice’. Prepared for Historic England, Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment. Research Report Series no. 18/2022. <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/8680/IdentifyingOpportun>

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<https://www.exeter.ac.uk/research/esi/research/projects/landscape-futures/>
7. Adaptive release is increasingly reflected in the National Trust delivery and communication plans and its updating of its conservation principles, conservation practice and monitoring activity. The LFCC project, 2022, 'Landscape Futures and the Challenge of Change: Project Report and Recommendations'.  
<https://landscapedecisions.org/landscape-futures-and-the-challenge-of-change/>
  8. NLHF's priorities for heritage for 2019-2024 are already focussed on landscapes and nature and community heritage.  
<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/strategic-funding-framework-2019-2024>

## Appendix

### Examples of the Diversity of Garden Landscapes as Visitor Destinations

#### *Going It Alone*

Despite the 20<sup>th</sup> Century surge of demolition and dereliction of country houses and their curtilages there have been heartening exceptions.

#### **Penrice Castle**

The setting of Penrice Castle on the Gower is described by Cadw as, 'one of the outstanding eighteenth-century ornamental landscapes in Wales. Not only has it survived remarkably intact, but the outstandingly beautiful setting also retains its historic and natural character'.<sup>1</sup> Thanks very largely to an unbroken familial connection dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, the not inconsiderable cost of maintaining the garden landscape is offset by income from the wider estate, but, 'We hope that our visitors will enjoy and appreciate Penrice and Gower as my family has done for generations'. In this context Penrice echoes the opening of opening family gardens to the public in former times.

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<https://penricecastle.co.uk/penrice-estate-history>].

The 19<sup>th</sup> century flower garden was laid out under the direction of Lady Mary Talbot of Penrice and Margam (see entry), whose youngest daughter, Emma Thomasina, inherited her mother's passion for planting and married John Dillwyn Llewelyn of Penllergare: see Chapter 4.

#### **Bodysgallen Hall**

Bodysgallen Hall Conwy is notable for its exceptional terraced and walled gardens, the long terrace walk giving superb views and the rose and kitchen gardens in a landscaped park setting. One of the least altered in Wales they, together with the house of equal historic merit, were rescued by the premier Historic House Hotels group, and are now in the ownership of the National Trust.

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## **Hawkstone**

Across the border in North Shropshire the range of dramatic and rugged natural sandstone hills was reconfigured in the romantic picturesque style and Hawkstone became one of the most visited landscapes in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. But the family ownership line failed and the site then fell into dereliction and remained overgrown and ruinous, unvisited by all but locals and historians, until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when the owners of the adjoining hotel realised that the designation of this unique site as being of exceptional historic interest, merited restoration and reopening to paying visitors.

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## ***The Charitable Sector Emerges***

## **Aberglasney**

Despite its late arrival the nascent Welsh Historic Gardens Trust (WHGT) soon embarked on some major projects and to prove its worth it firstly had to convince potential funders that it had the capacity to get them under weigh. An early success was the 15<sup>th</sup> Century *Aberglasney* mansion and gardens in Carmarthenshire that were unoccupied and vandalised. The Trust is not structured to manage projects beyond their development stage and it was the generosity of an American benefactor that enabled the founding of the Aberglasney Restoration Trust that bought the site in 1995 and, following extensive archaeological investigations, the restored gardens were opened to the paying public in 1999, followed by horticultural training facilities.

## Reference

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## **Hafod**

The rescue of *Aberglasney* was effectively a straight-forward transaction with the previous owners, whereas most of the other WHGT-initiated projects have been in cooperation with the current owners and managers. *Hafod* was the first.

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the derelict mansion had been demolished and the now stripped woodlands replaced by commercial, non-native conifers and unsympathetic driveways by the Forestry Commission. The way back was presaged in the 1980s by the Friends of Hafod, a local voluntary group that championed the historic and cultural importance of the estate. However it was the offer of £100,000 private funding to the founders of the newly-created WHGT that triggered the revitalisation of Johnes' great landscape. Having convinced the local forestry managers that a partnership with a charity with a proven capability to raise substantial funds was both feasible and desirable the independent Hafod Trust was set up in 1994, in partnership with Forestry Commission Wales – latterly Natural Resources Wales that, in 2022, leased the estate to the National Trust.

The Partnership's strategic vision statement opens with its policy, 'To help reconcile the wishes of all those with an interest in Hafod, including the public for whose benefit the project exists' and it emphasises that, 'The conservation of the genius of the place at Hafod for public benefit will entail sustainable balances between financial objectives; protection and access; growth and decay; upkeep and renewal; work and leisure; continuity and innovation'.

Today, now almost returned to its 18<sup>th</sup> Century heyday, save for its ruined mansion, Hafod welcomes walkers to its restored Johnesian path network throughout the year, free of charge. Visitor facilities are limited to the provision of free car-parking, a well-designed website and publications. Hawthorn Cottage is available as a holiday let.



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<https://www.hafod.org/vision.html>

### **Middleton Hall – National Botanic Garden of Wales**

Paxton's park at *Middleton Hall* was described in the sale catalogue of 1824 as being, 'richly ornamented by nature, greatly improved by art'. But successive owners failed to save the estate; the park and garden fell into ruination and this great landscape was gradually lost to public consciousness until, in 1987, a visitor on a nature ramble discovered the remnants of designed watercourse. In 1990 another described her impressions, thus

What remains is in many ways a ghost. There is a void where the neo-classical mansion stood, its platform site now marked by a heap of tyres weighing down the manure pile – sic transit gloria! The elaborate double-walled garden encloses grass, and the vegetable, vines and fruit trees that once filled it have left behind only a few traces, such as the metal fruit labels ..."

Whereas the origins of Kew Gardens can be traced to the merging of the royal estates of Richmond and Kew in 1772, the emergence of what was to become the *National Botanic Garden of Wales* (NBGW) in 1990, led by the nascent WHGT, could have hardly been more different, sometimes faltering and riven with foreseeable issues.

Dyfed County Council, the current owner, had sub-divided the estate into tenant farms, but with its potential benefits to the local economy, on a national stage, it was an early supporter of the concept. Under the guidance of the WHGT, an application was made to the Millennium Commission to fund Britain's first

national botanic garden for 200 years. The charitable company was set up in 1994, the Garden was officially opened in 2000 and with estimates of 250,000 visitors annually, the future looked assured. And yet final closure was announced on St David's Day, 2004. What went wrong?

Three themes were to underlie the design and management of the garden: sustainability, conservation and the visitor. It was expected that research grants and governmental support would be forthcoming, but the business case depended substantially on visitor income and particularly repeat visits. But that case was flawed in both conception and early implementation and this reflects the sometimes conflicting objects and approaches of the progenitors. In terms of product development, the major flaw was the public's expectation on opening that all the plants would be mature, flourishing large and spectacular. The Garden did not establish a brand at the outset, believing that the uniqueness of the concept would create its own brand and then misjudged the market when it did; and, as for positioning, the Garden never really established it in the marketplace and NBGW is still better known nationally rather than locally.

It is only relatively recently that the Garden has mitigated those early missteps and achieved what appears to be a sustainable financial position, underpinned by public funding, including the Lottery, volunteering, commercial contracts, as well as that indispensable visitor income. An acknowledgement that the imperative to inspire, challenge, educate and entertain visitors is now complemented by a growing public interest in biodiversity and the adapting to the impact of climate change. Even if such attractions as a British birds of prey centre, antique road shows, forest bathing and choral concerts are somewhat peripheral to the core functions of a botanic garden, with its wider view of its place in society and championing national conservation issues, the Garden has finally got there; but it was a near-run thing.

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### **Bishop's Park, Abergwili**

What had been the episcopal residence of the Bishops of St David's from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to the 1970s was disposed of and became Carmarthenshire County Museum. *The Bishop's Park* and its immediate setting was broken up into six compartments, the site had lacked coherence of tenure and management, an all-too familiar feature of latter-day designed landscapes, but particularly relevant in this small area. As a result the historic design and character of the pleasure grounds was lost, the walled garden, divorced from the pleasure grounds, had become derelict and overgrown, and visitor facilities and interpretation were minimal. Crucially, there was no income being generated by the park to help support the upkeep of the grounds or their security.

What is now the Tywi Gateway project originated with a number of happy coincidences, including a pre-existing topographic survey, a proposal by the Museum staff that envisioned 'a Park and County Museum for all'. And 'On its completion, the parkland and museum will be a centre for learning, leisure and health for the local community, as well as an exciting tourist destination', as well as the readiness by the Church in Wales to reintegrate management of the walled garden and meadow with the pleasure grounds, support from local community and the readiness of the local WHGT branch to act as progenitor and raise the initial funding. However, as noted above, the WHGT is not structured to manage projects beyond their early stages and, following precedent it therefore sanctioned in March 2016 the setting up of the independent charitable Tywi Gateway Trust to undertake the development and management of the project. In so doing the Park will aim to integrate its visitor facilities with those of the Museum to help assure the future of both through an innovative and sustainable stewardship of a shared cultural heritage. Meanwhile, however, the Museum's Interpretive Strategy observes that while the Museum is a beautiful building in stunning setting, there is currently a disconnect between them, whereas the Trust aims

To put Bishop's Park and Carmarthenshire Museum on the map as an outstanding destination for visitors to explore beautiful, landscaped

gardens, parkland and views across the Tywi valley, discover fascinating wildlife and history, and enjoy the benefits of being outdoors in nature.

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**The Cowbridge Physic Garden** was created by the local branch of the WHGT on the site of what had been part of a walled garden for the 18th Century Old Hall, but by the end of the 20th Century it was an overgrown wilderness. Its transformation into the Physic Garden has been the work of the Cowbridge Physic Garden Trust.

#### Reference

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### ***The Public Sector***

As noted in Chapter 3 the initiative of the Countryside Commission in the 1960-70s to create country parks resulted in the rescue and revitalisation of a number of notable garden landscapes. Another such in South Wales is the setting of **Craig-y-Nos** Castle at the head of the Swansea valley, once the home of Adelina Patti (1843-1919), the greatest operatic diva of her day, but notable here for its 19th Century designed landscape, alongside the River Tawe. Today it is designated by Cadw for its great historic value and managed as a country park by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, providing a starting point for the exploration of the Fforest Fawr Geopark and the Beacons' International Dark Sky Reserve.

#### Reference

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### ***Personal Initiatives***

#### **Plas Cadnant**

There have been notable exceptions whereby private owners have played an exceptional part in saving and maintaining their own properties. Penrice has been referred to already, but Anthony Tavernor's saving of *Plas Cadnant* in Anglesey is a notable example, where there were only tantalising hints that there had been a garden at all when he bought the estate in 1966. Now open to the paying public, despite catastrophic storm damage, this is an object lesson in private determination and enterprise.

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#### **Alnwick Gardens**

The *Alnwick Gardens* project was the brainchild of the Duchess of Northumberland comprising a decade-long, revitalisation of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century garden as a contemporary pleasure garden and a major visitor destination. Designed to accommodate 67,000 visitors per annum, the figure is now nearer 350,000, drawn there by seasonal festivals and prioritising the attraction to children, including the Poison Garden with its attendant storytellers and billed as the Most Dangerous Garden in the World. Among the penalties of this success, however, is the need to re-turf the most heavily trodden areas every 6 – 7 weeks.

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