

Scottish Rhododendron Society

2018 Spring Garden Tour of North, West & South Wales:
Sunday 22nd – Sunday 29th April 2018

Programme of Garden Visits

Introduction:

Inexplicably, it is quite rare to have the opportunity to participate in a Tour Group visit to see the Rhododendron Gardens of Wales; indeed, it is almost twenty years since the S.R.S. organized a tour to the gardens of South Wales. There are many interesting and historic gardens to be seen in Wales and this Tour encompasses a great selection of gardens of differing ages, styles and plantings; some private and opened especially for our visit, and others open to the public during the main season for a limited period. This is your opportunity to see some remarkable gardens with a group of very sociable members who enjoy a wide variety of plants and trees.

Bodnant Garden



Nestling in the Snowdonia foothills, Bodnant is one of the most magical gardens in the U.K.; an 80 acre paradise filled with plants collected by famous plant hunters. Many enthusiasts will recognize the name of Lord Aberconway, President of the R.H.S. for many years, and an immensely knowledgeable gardener with boundless inspiration when opening-up and laying-out new areas of a garden. He had a love of rhododendron species and hybrids, being an avid hybridizer, and the long list of crosses created at Bodnant include R. 'Elizabeth', R. 'Winsome', R. 'Fabia Tangerine', R. 'Conroy', R. 'Bluebird', R. 'Matador', R. 'Peace' and R. 'Vanessa', to name a few of the 28 that have gained awards from the R.H.S. The garden includes Italianate terraces, beautiful glades, a dell with waterfall, large trees and a lakeside walk. The garden has an array of changing colours throughout the year from daffodils, camellias, magnolias and masses of rhododendrons. Bodnant Gardens are now supervised for the National Trust by Lord Aberconway. On our visit we hope to have the benefit of being shown around the garden by the gardener who is in charge of propagation. As there is so much to see at Bodnant we will be spending most of the day there before moving-on in the mid-afternoon to a second garden at nearby Llanwyst.

Maenan Hall Garden

Maenan Hall Garden, owned by the brother of the present Lord Aberconway, covers a superbly beautiful 4 hectares on the slopes of the Conwy Valley, with dramatic views of Snowdonia, set amongst mature hardwoods. Maenan Hall is a fine example of a late medieval dwelling house. It was originally timber-framed and had a cruck-built central hall. It is a two-storeyed dwelling, built in the shape of a "T", and has a hipped slate roof and short chimneys. The ground floor has a main cross passage, post-and-panel decorated partitions and beamed ceilings, which probably date back to the sixteenth century. The Elizabethan decorative plasterwork is particularly noteworthy; it includes various heraldic badges and emblems, the initials of Queen Elizabeth I 1582 appears more than once. The gardens of some 4 hectares (10 acres) are on slightly sloping ground and surrounded by bluebell carpeted woods each spring. Both the upper part, with sweeping lawns, ornamental ponds and retaining walls, and the woodland dell contains copious specimen shrubs and trees, many originating from Bodnant. Magnolias, rhododendrons, camellias, pieris and cherries are amongst the many specimens in this breathtaking garden. It is a short journey to the Waterloo Hotel at Betwys-y-Coed for our overnight stay.

Welsh Highland Railway (not to be confused with the Snowdon or Ffestiniog Railways)



Whilst continuing to travel south through the mountain passes of Snowdonia, and by way of a change en-route to our next garden, we will be taking the opportunity to enjoy a scenic morning steam-hauled railway journey from Caernarfon to Porthmadog on one of the restored 'Little Railways of Wales'; a major restoration project, re-opened throughout as recently as 2011. The historic town of Caernarfon is impressive, and is where the Prince Charles was invested as Prince of Wales at its ancient fortified Castle. Most of the trains are hauled by one of their impressive ex- South African Beyer-Garratts – the largest two-foot gauge steam locomotives in the world! You will be travelling in comfortable, modern carriages with toilet facilities and heating. During the 25 mile journey through the Aberglaslyn and Beddgelert Passes you will have a chance to see the spectacular scenery around Mount Snowdon. On arrival at Porthmadog, on the shores of Tremadog Bay in Central Wales, we will have Lunch at the Railway Station before being met by the coach for the short journey around the Bay to visit a most unusual attraction.

Portmeirion Woodland Garden



Portmeirion was designed and built on the peninsula by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis between 1925 and 1975 in the style of an Italian Village, and is now owned by a Charitable Trust. It has been described as, '*an artful and playful little modern village, designed as a whole and all of a piece a fantastic collection of architectural relics and impish modern fantasies*' Portmeirion is fascinating and intriguing, in both its architecture and conception, but if you want to see the Village this will need to wait to another occasion, as our objective today is to visit another unremarked gem, as hidden away behind the village is a most unusual woodland garden by the sea. Providing a soothing contrast to the many colours of the stucco-washed buildings, are the heterogeneous plantings of Chusan palms, topiary of Bay, tall narrow Irish Yews resembling Italian cypresses, ramparts of hydrangeas and many mature rhododendrons. Sir Clough Williams-Ellis purchased the Gwylt Woodlands in 1941 and here, on a headland overlooking the Bay, in a natural woodland of birch, sessile oak and rowans, Henry Seymour Westmacott had planted many exotics since the 1850's. Some of the conifers still survive, among them the deodars, Douglas firs, Monterey pines and Wellingtonias. Around 7,000 different species and cultivars are grown here, to say little of the range of rhododendrons, other than the large-leaved *R. sinogrande* and the scented *R. maddenii* both do well, as does the unique hybrid *R. 'Gwylt King'* (*griersonianum* x *arboreum* subsp. *Zelanicum*) with its characteristic intense red flowers, which grace the dinner plates in the range of Portmeirion tableware. Later this afternoon our coach will take us further south-east to stay overnight at Caer Beris Manor Hotel, near Builth Wells.

Caer Beris Manor

After Breakfast we will take a tour of the gardens at this historic Manor, once the home of Lord Swansea, Admiral Algernon Walker-Heneage-Vivian, who's Builth Wells Estate totaled 11,000-acres. The hotel is set in a 27-acre mature parkland with the River Ifon bordering the property. The grounds were planted in the early 20th Century by the Vivien family who subscribed to the seed collections of the early-plant hunters, and the family is better known for the creation of the gardens at the Clyne Castle Estate on the curve of Swansea Bay. The Admiral's interest is also shown in the number of hybrids that were raised at Clyne and some of these found their way to Caer Beris. Many varied specimen trees form an Arboretum, and the large displays of rhododendrons are a feature each Spring.

Llysdinam Garden



Llysdinam Gardens are among the loveliest in Mid Wales, especially noted for a magnificent display of rhododendrons and azaleas in early Spring. Covering about 6 acres the plantings include shrubs, grasses, conifers, rhododendrons, azaleas, ferns, bulbs and self sown seedlings all vying for space. The garden has a variety of habitats, including ponds for wildlife. There are also areas of bog, woodland, damp shade and a mini meadow. Following the visit we will continue our journey south to Carmarthen, where our overnight stay will be at the Ivy Bridge Hotel, said to be the favorite retreat of Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton.

Picton Castle Gardens



A large, mature, mostly level 40-acre woodland garden with unique collection of rhododendrons and azaleas, many bred over 42 years, producing hybrids of great merit and beauty. By the 1980's many of the rhododendrons in the woodland had grown so tall that the flowers were lost from view, so these were cut-down by Mr. Leo Ekke, the then Head Gardener, so they could start again. Many large specimens remain, including a huge planting of the hardy hybrid, R.'Old Port'. The Walled Garden, some distance from the castle, is very old and full of interesting plants and herbs. There are many rare and tender shrubs and trees, including magnolias, myrtle, eucryphia, together with flourishing scarlet embothriums interplanted with white 'Tai Haku' cherry trees. Other interesting plants include roses, ferns, herbaceous and climbing plants together with a large clearly labeled collection of herbs.

Colby Woodland Garden



This is an 8 acre woodland garden in a secluded valley with a fine collection of rhododendrons and azaleas. The site itself played an active part in the Pembrokeshire coal industry during the 1790s when landowner John Colby acquired it. The garden only really came into its own in the 1870s when a pharmacist named Samuel Kay bought the land and house, Colby Lodge. He began the planting and his descendants continued the legacy in the 1920s by incorporating ponds and additional horticultural features. There have been a number of key figures at the Colby estate since, with the National Trust taking on the site in the late 1970s. It also has a wildflower meadow, stream, ornamental walled garden with an unusual gazebo designed by Wyn Jones.

Tradewinds

This is a small garden of 2 and a half acres, but it is a plantsman's garden with an abundance of perennials, shrubs and trees giving year round interest. This is a picturesque garden in a tranquil setting. There are large borders of grasses, herbaceous plants and conifers, together with an arboretum containing oaks, willows, catalpa, and numerous rhododendrons and azaleas.

Ffynone Mansion Garden



This is a large woodland garden with lovely views and fine mature specimen trees; there are formal gardens near the House with massive yew topiary, together with rhododendrons and azaleas in the woodland walks. John Nash was commissioned to design the House in the early 1790s; construction work began in 1794 and was completed by 1799. Materials included locally quarried stone, as well as stone from other parts of Britain. The House was laid out to a classical Georgian plan. 60,000 trees were sourced from John Mackie, a Norwich nursery man, and hundreds of tons of topsoil were brought in. Later additions and garden terraces are by F. Inigo Thomas in 1904. The House, in 20 acres of woodland, was bought and restored from 1988 onwards by Owen Lloyd George, 3rd Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor and his wife, who are credited with saving the house.

Or (subject to decision on access arrangements yet to be made)

Upton Castle Garden

Upton is a 35 acre mature garden and arboretum in a lovely location in a tranquil valley leading to the upper reaches of the Cleddau estuary. The castle is 13th C and the chapel is 12th C and these are surrounded by many rare trees and shrubs. There are formal rose gardens, herbaceous borders, wildflower meadow and woodland walks. In 1927 Stanley Neale from Cardiff bought the Upton Estate and made it his life's work to create a garden. He planted the camellias, rhododendrons and magnolias which we see today in their maturity and also planted the Arboretum on what was then a meadow. Terraces were formed on the south side of the formal lawns and the walled garden. In 2007 the gardens were in a very run down condition. Over the past 10 years much hard work has been carried out to bring the gardens back to their former state. It is an ongoing project and not one that will ever be finished but an enormous amount of progress has been made.

Gliffaes Country House Hotel

Gliffaes gardens lie in a spectacular position on a plateau 120ft above the fast flowing River Usk. There are 33 acres of parkland with many ancient and ornamental trees, fine maples, new tree plantings, bulbs, rhododendrons, azaleas and many other interesting shrubs.

High Glanau Manor Garden

Henry Avray Tipping, a wealthy architectural historian, was born in France, became an English writer, joined Country Life as their Architectural Editor and was largely responsible for making the magazine a popular periodical. As an Arts & Crafts architect, he designed several of the houses and gardens where he resided over the years, including High Glanau Manor in 1922, where the plantings were aimed to soften the hard vernacular architectural lines. Some of the original features include impressive stone terraces with far reaching views over the Vale of Usk and Brecon Beacons. The gardens have a Pergola, herbaceous borders, Edwardian glasshouse, rhododendrons, azaleas, an orchard with wild flowers and many woodland walks.

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Bodnant, Portmeirion, Picton Castle, Colby Woodland & Ffynone Mansion – John M. Hammond

Welsh Highland – Welsh Highland Railway Co.

Llysdinam – Llysdinam Estate.