



COWBRIDGE
PHYSIC GARDEN
GARDD BERLYSIAU'R
BONT-FAEN

President: Dan Clayton-Jones OBE, KStJ, TD, DL

Newsletter

Issue 54 May 2025

Visit of the Legendary Jan Pennings and his Wife Ans

Last year, as a result of a rare plant and bulb plantsman Timothy Clarke and our Trustee Rob Evans, we were given some super pre 1800 bulbs from the nursery of Jan Pennings who lives in Holland. To thank Jan, I sent him a copy of our book on The Cowbridge Physic Garden. The result of this is that Jan and Ans visited Cowbridge on Sunday April 6th before going to see Rob at Pheasant Acre.

Sue Duffield, Gillian Griffiths and I met with them on a gloriously sunny afternoon and we felt so very privileged to be in their company! Jan is truly 'Royalty' in the bulb world, known throughout the world for his extraordinary knowledge and expertise especially in the field of daffodils and hyacinths. He has been on many horticultural committees but earned widespread recognition serving as Chair of the RHS Bulb Committee, where he was awarded The Queen Elizabeth Medal of Honour, was on the Board of the renowned Keukenhof Gardens, and also is a recipient of the Gold Medal from the American Daffodil Society.

Jan's bulb farm in northwestern Holland has been run by three generations, and whilst he still keeps an eye on things and lives on the property, the business is managed by his son and son-in-law. He has travelled all over the world in search of new and rare varieties and talking to him was truly fascinating.

Before leaving us he asked that we dig up a small piece of the Easter Pasque Flower, *Pulsatilla vulgaris*, for his 'Friendship Garden' back home. He said it will remind him of The Cowbridge Physic Garden whenever he sees it. We were truly honoured! *Jo Homfray*

Message from the Chair, Jo Homfray

I am writing this at Easter – a time of year very much associated with rebirth and renewal. In the Bible, gardens play an important part in the story of Christianity – whether it be the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, right at the start, or places like the Garden of Gethsemane, a place of great resonance for Christians.

Gardens have also featured very much in the Jewish and Islamic faith, and the word 'paradise' originates from Old Persian, specifically the term "pairi-daeza" which means "walled enclosure" or "enclosed park". This concept of a walled, idyllic space eventually evolved to represent a heavenly or ideal place.

The Physic Garden is, I feel, a small piece of paradise in the centre of Cowbridge – it fits this Old Persian description admirably as it is both walled, and an enclosed area available for anyone who wishes to enjoy this tranquil, green space full of birdsong and beautiful plants. The Physic Garden provides spiritual sustenance for many of us, and now that we have had some rain, the assorted plants really are sparkling with vigour and new life after their winter slumber.

On Friday June 20th we hope to see you at our Annual Summer Party in the Garden.

Let us hope that the sun has his hat on, and that there is no need for an umbrella.

Garden Images



Cercis, Judas Tree



Replacing the Lavendar



Meet the Volunteer

David Boulton

Whilst most people will appreciate having the Physic Garden in Cowbridge, I suspect not many actually sit and think what they, and people in general, get out of it.

There is no doubt at all that the way the garden has been prepared and laid out, and the background to the selection and positioning of the various beds and borders is both extremely interesting and absorbing in itself. The knowledge, commitment, care, time and effort by the Volunteers in the provision, maintenance and upkeep is exceptional, and the results are there for all to see.

Is that what the Physic Garden is? A collection of interesting and scientifically selected plants, beautifully laid out and presented?

That does it an injustice, as whilst all of that is important, it is far more than that.

It is a place of quiet, a place to reflect and be totally absorbed by the peace and tranquillity. At almost any time on a fine day, there are people in there just enjoying the space, either in company or alone. It is a place to enjoy a quiet friendly chat, a coffee, read the paper, or just sit and reflect. In this current day and age, life can be challenging and stressful, and Cowbridge is extremely lucky to have such a wonderful place to act almost as a sanctuary.

That is what the Physic Garden means to me.

Social Media Pages



We now have over 2200 'followers' on Instagram enjoying the visual delights the Physic Garden. Search for Cowbridge Physic Garden on Facebook and follow [@cowbridgephysicgarden](https://www.instagram.com/cowbridgephysicgarden) on Instagram. You can send us your favourite photos of the garden and show everyone how much you love it by tagging them [#cowbridgephysicgarden](https://www.instagram.com/cowbridgephysicgarden) or send content to matt@cowbridgephysicgarden.org

Visit us at: www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org





AGM 2025

On 12th March 2005, the trustees of the Physic Garden presented to members and friends the accounts, marketing, maintenance (not forgetting the chairman's report!) In this Jo told members that we were notified last year by Buckingham Palace that – sadly – our Patron, HRH The Queen, has had to relinquish this role due to the pressure of work, particularly since the Coronation of His Majesty. This is quite understandable, and we thank her most sincerely for the honour she gave to us of being our Patron for fifteen years. We are not going to replace her!

Jo also paid tribute to Bryan and Penny Bird, who ran The Bay Tree for 54 years and have now moved to a unit on Penllyn Estate. Ever since the Physic Garden was opened they have been incredibly loyal and supportive in selling our products and this totalled over the years to £9000 worth! Thank you dear Penny and Bryan



It was a particularly well-attended AGM – not least because after the AGM proceedings, we were treated to a talk by Christina Shand of Dyffryn Fernant Gardens, near Fishguard. Christina was recently featured on Monty Don's TV programme "Great Britain's Gardens". She gave a super talk, with many pictures of her garden, nestled into the Preseli Mountains.

Plant Fair



This year we were blessed with balmy weather and members and non-members turned out in droves. The nursery owners, who 'rent' tables from us, were very pleased with the sales, as were the volunteers who manned their own stall, stocked with plants donated by themselves and supporters.

Particularly popular this year was the stall of willow products donated by Deb Hill – not just plant supports, but bird feeders, and other ornaments for the garden. The stall was soon sold out, and we are very grateful for the sales money which Deb donated to the Garden.

Throughout proceedings some volunteers plied stall holders with tea, coffee and cakes – I think that is why they come back every year.

We would like to think all the members who supported us again this year.

Val Caple



Encounter with the Bushmen in South Africa

On a recent trip to South Africa we returned to !Kwa ttu (don't ask me to pronounce it!), a Heritage Centre dedicated to the San (Bushman).

The San are among the world's last living hunter-gatherers and the largest population that remain are in semi-desert areas of South Africa, Namibia and Botswana – the Kalahari.

They have a treasure of knowledge of the environment they live in, as the environment is their pantry, pharmacy, tool shed, shelter, grocery store etc. Plants provide food, medicine, shelter, dyes, fuel, glue, cosmetics and may other important functions in their culture.

Some of the plants they use have unusual names like Beer Root, Kraalbos, Khadi Root, Seaside Stork's Bill as well as many that we are familiar with.

Within a few decades most surviving San had been forced out from the southern reaches of the west coast but there remains a rich body of traditional knowledge alive within modern descendants.

Interestingly, when there was a serious drought in the Cape a few years ago, these people said 'if only the government asked us where the water was, we could tell them!' A simple life but rich in knowledge.

Melanie Hurst



Borage, Borago Officinalis, Tafod y Fuwch

I think of borage as a pretty blue flower but in 2024 I found this white one in the Nerve bed, which got me thinking about the medical uses of the plant, summer and Pimms!.

The plant was once believed to have been introduced by the Romans, but now it is thought to be a native plant. It was given to men leaving to fight in the Crusades to give them courage and to keep them going day and night. Gerard wrote that 'Floures in salads to exhilarate and make the minde glad.' The Romans called it 'the plant that cheers'.

In the Physic Garden it is found in many of the beds.

Bones: Used for rheumatism and rheumatoid arthritis.

Childbirth: Taken medicinally to stimulate mother's milk and regulate the hormonal system.

Eyes: Brings relief to sore eyes.

Heart and blood: Taken to reduce swellings and bruises and to slow heart rates and lower blood pressure.

Kidneys: Used to clear urinary problems.

Lungs: Taken to relieve lung and respiratory infections.

Muscles and glands: Stimulates adrenaline glands and regulates the hormonal system.

Nerves: Mild sedative and anti-depressant.

Skin, nails and hair: Soothes irritated and damaged tissues and can be used as an alternative to Evening Primrose oil for dry skin and bruises.

The leaves have a slight taste of cucumber and are used in salads while the flowers are used for decoration, especially in a 'Pimm's'. Pimm's was a gin-based liqueur created by James Pimm, a farmer's son who owned an oyster bar in 19th-century London, who offered to his guests this secret mix of gin, quinine, and a spice blend as a tonic to aid digestion. Today Pimm's No. 1 is 25% alcohol by volume, 50 proof.

To make a classic Pimm's Fruit Cup, mix 1 part Pimm's No. 1 with 2 parts lemonade. Add ice and a variety of fruit and garnish with Borage flowers for a refreshing summer drink – AND IT DOES YOU GOOD! Val Caple



Goodbye The Bay Tree, hello Happy Days

As Bryan Bird of the Bay Tree is no longer in the High Street (thank you Bryan for all the support you have given to the Physic Garden over the years), items for sale (cards, tea towels, books, etc) are now available at Happy Days Vintage Home Store, just by the till. We are very grateful to Cath Jones for her support.

The latest Iris and the Magnolia tea towels, based on an original watercolour by acclaimed artist and garden volunteer Gillian Griffiths, are available. Also a range of notelets together with the book 'Cowbridge Physic Garden: Celebrating Ten Years of Spadework'. They are also available online at cowbridgephysicgarden.org and the book is available at the Cowbridge Bookshop.

You can also buy plants and the above items on Thursday mornings in the garden – just ask one of the volunteers.



Dates for your Diary

Members' Garden Party.

Friday 20th June 2025 at 6.30pm in the Cowbridge Physic Garden, £10 per person.

Please book using the enclosed form or contact Val Caple on **01446 393352** or **val.t.caple@care4free.net** to enjoy this popular annual event.

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