Report of Llandrindod Wells & District U3A January 2017 Lecture Meeting

Gardens of the Edwardian Era

Report by Clive Barrett

Chairman Berwyn Woolnouugh welcomed everyone and wished those present a happy New Year. He mentioned that membership of the local group had now reached 300, and that the U3A Art Exhibition will continue at the local Museum until January 25th .

Berwyn then introduced the speaker Andrew Wyton, whose talk was entitled "An impression of beauty and delight----Gardens of the Edwardian era". The speaker emphasized that rather than the practical side his lecture would concentrate on the history of gardening, reflecting society during the above era, and also the social aspects of gardening. Although strictly speaking the Edwardian period was 1901---1910, when Edward VII was on the throne, the speaker proposed widening the period in question from the late 19th Century to the 1920's. Andrew went on to describe the huge country estates, together with the teams of men needed to run the gardens, particularly the partnership between agriculture and horticulture together with arts and crafts in the formation of large gardens. It was obvious during his enlightening and at times humorous lecture aided by a power point presentation, that the speaker knew his subject well. He mentioned various garden entrepreneurs, their skills and their famous gardens to illustrate his points. Andrew also referred to the thoughts and ideas of the above individuals, what and who they disagreed with in the gardening world, their collaboration with those who designed the houses, and the creation of their gardens.

In the Edwardian age the formal pools which were sometimes circular, small guided streams, oak beams, archways and pergolas were all popular at the time. Together with dry stone walls, balistrades, steps, arrow straight paths, sunken gardens, garden rooms, wilderness areas, woodlands, water gardens, and plants which spill and tumble over the lines of the paths. These were different compared with Victorian times, when there were long plant borders, excellent colour coordinated plants, the arts and crafts of the above era, compared with the architecture of Edwardian times. He mentioned many famous and interesting gardens in England and Wales, where often pergolas are situated. In one of those gardens belonging to the horticultural mentor Harold Peto near Bradford upon Avon, Wiltshire, he copes with a slope by means of steps, which were a thing of beauty, the gardening providing a touch of the flavour of Tuscany. Andrew ended in a nostalgic manner speaking of " gardens of a golden afternoon". The following plants and features were the making of the gardens at the time, hollyhocks, rocks, wistaria blossom and the smell of flowers ... he summarized by saying life in an Edwardian garden before World War I was good.

The speaker then answered various questions on the individual gardens he had mentioned, the sources of water for ponds, what the old garden pioneers would have thought of the modern garden experts e.g. Alan Titmarch. The propagation skills of nursery men, and plant hunters bringing seeds from abroad made a big difference to Edwardian gardens. The gardens where "carpet planting" is used such as Heligen in Cornwall and Chatsworth in Derbyshire were mentioned.

In thanking the speaker Chairman, Berwyn said that the talk had been really enlightening, and the speaker had shown his knowledge, enthusiasm, and love of the subject, and hoped he would return to speak to the local U3A in the future.