

Friends of Tredegar House Newsletter



MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN

Mrs Judith Rice

Firstly, I am delighted to report once again to members on recent events. We had two very interesting talks during September one by Ron Jones on "The Auschwitz Goalkeeper" and 100 years of theatres around Newport by Graham Jarvis. A lot of time and effort goes into arranging these talks to suit everyone so please come along and support us. Our membership continues to thrive and I am pleased to confirm since our last Newsletter we have gained a further two members. Numbers for the year now stands at sixteen may it continue.



*The Chairman and Executive
Committee of the Friends wish
all our members a Merry
Christmas and a healthy
and prosperous
2018.*

As you are all aware the Portrait of Jane Colchester has been away from Tredegar House for approximately 18 months having restoration work carried out. Emily Price has informed me that the paint from the Portrait has finally been sampled. It is great news, it will be interesting to see what can be gleaned from this sample, about how the paint itself was made up and applied. When the house knows more they will advise us and inform Phillip Mould Gallery as well. The frame that Jane was originally in is too modern and a very plain wood. It does not suit the painting at all. But I'm pleased to advise they do have a more suitable frame in house which needs conserving, which the frame conservator will commence in the next few weeks. So our lovely Portrait should be back at Tredegar House for the opening of next season (February 2018) will keep you all posted.

Final touches to the roof repairs are being completed over the next few weeks and the scaffolding has started to come down. The scaffolding contractors and the building contractors are working alongside one another to get the final bits completed in order that all scaffolding will be removed in time for re-opening the House for their Christmas events. I have included on this page pictures showing your Chairman at the top of the House admiring the work also one picture of state of roof at beginning and another showing what the roof looks like now. I think you will all agree it looks superb.

Finally, you are all aware we had a trip in October to The Royal Mint and St. Fagans Castle. Due to a lack of interest from members the coach was reduced in size from a 53 to a 35 seater but still not full. As you must appreciate a great deal of time and effort on my part goes into finding a place of interest to suit you all please confirm if you wish another trip in the summer next year. We have also had to cancel the play on 8th November due again to lack of ticket sales. Newport Playgoers New Generation very disappointed that we cancelled told us they worked hard to put this play on.



ARTICLE BY MONTY DART ON - PRINCESS OLGA DOLGORUKY



Princess Olga Dolgoruky was the second wife of Viscount Tredegar – Evan Morgan. She was the daughter of Prince Sergei Alexandrovich Dolgoruky (1872-1933) and his wife Irina Vassilievna Naryshkin (1879-1917).

Princess Olga's father was a first cousin of Prince Vassili Alexandrovich Dolgoruky (1868-1918). Her mother Princess Irina Vassilievna Naryshkin committed suicide after finding out that her husband was having an affair. Princess Olga

Dolgorouky (1915-1998) was born in St Petersburg, Russia, a member of the Russian Imperial family at a time when Russia was in turmoil.

In 1919 H M S Marlborough was sent to the Balkans by King George V to evacuate the Dowager Empress Marie, sister of Queen Alexandra, and other members of the Russian Imperial Family – the Dolgorouky's saw this as their chance to escape.

Olga was just 4 when she left Russia and spent most of her younger life in France. She lived with her father, siblings and other Russian exiles in Paris. Her first marriage was to Polish aristocrat M. Trotsky-Seniutovich though she was later divorced. Olga, a glamorous Russian princess was photographed in *The Tatler* magazine and was a popular guest at High Society parties.

Lois, Evan Morgan's first wife had died suddenly in September 1937. In December of that year gossip columnist Godfrey Winn writing in the *Daily Mirror* mentions that Olga was at a Tredegar House weekend party. In March 1939 Olga and Evan were married in Singapore – she was 24 he was 46. There were some worries by the Home Office that Olga was 'A Red under the Bed' and possibly worming her way into British society in order to discover secrets (whatever they might be). An investigation by the Home Office (documents at National Archives, Kew) show that there was no evidence to corroborate this. She proved to be a very popular member of the Morgan dynasty – as an auxiliary nurse at the Royal Gwent Hospital, leader of the Girl Scouts and loved by the Estate workers. She used to ride around the estate on a bicycle.

Did she love Evan? What did she hope were her future prospects with him? She certainly loved being Lady Tredegar and Evan, in his turn was pleased to be seen at parties and out and about with a beautiful woman. However, the marriage was never consummated and she divorced Evan in 1943 for

'incapacity', a humiliation, for whilst Evan didn't hide his sexuality to those who knew him, it must have been a blow to see articles in the newspapers about his failed marriage.

In the years that followed Olga (who received a settlement from the Tredegar Estate after Evan's death) lived in London and finally became a part of a small group of upper class British expatriates in Guernsey.

When Tredegar House was bought by Newport Council in 1973, Olga assisted the Curators David Beevers and David Freeman in the restoration of the House to its former glory. She described the layout and colours of the rooms, contributing to the way visitors see the House today. As for Evan – these are her words '..... my husband, who was an eccentric, used to have great flights of fancy at times and I never knew what was fact or fiction'

'I wish I knew more of the historical facts about the family, but I was very young at the time and not, I must confess, terribly interested.'

Olga died peacefully in 1998 at the age of 83 – she was 'Lady Tredegar' until the end, never relinquishing her title.



RON JONES - "THE AUSCHWITZ GOALKEEPER" -
a Prisoner of War's true story By Anne Hodder



Members and friends attended the additional meeting in September, when Ron Jones, aged 100, former prisoner of War, spoke on his wartime experiences. He stood for the whole time, did not need to use the microphone, and was so clear in all that he told us.

Married to Gwladys just before the outbreak of War, Ron worked for Guest Keen as a wire drawer. Through an administrative mix-up, he received call-up papers, along with his twin brothers. He learned to drill with the Scots Guards in London, returning to join his regiment, South Wales Borderers, in Brecon.

He told us of their Platoon's existence in the Middle East, living in the desert, the flies, illnesses, and much more. Arriving in Benghazi in December 1941, they very quickly, knew trouble was coming, and in less than two months, Ron, with a small section of the platoon, was taken prisoner. Handed over to the Italians, the treatment was appalling, with lack of food, no compassion, and very much in breach of the Geneva Convention. In August 1943, Ron and his fellow prisoners were delivered into German hands, arriving at Camp Stalag, Dresden, starving and ill, after a horrible journey in a cattle truck.

Thinking they were being sent on a working party where they would probably get some food, Ron and his fellow prisoners agreed to go. However, it was the start of the journey to Auschwitz, - where behind the barbed wire fences, were the men in pyjamas Jews. Ron showed us a ring which we were privileged to hold, which had been given to him by Joseph, one of those men the Jewish prisoners, learning only a few days later, that he had gone to the Gas Chamber.

Amongst all the hard labour, lack of food, horridness of those in charge, there were times when it appeared there was an air of normality, - when the prisoners played basketball and football. The Germans wanted to maintain their "slaves" fitness, and set up a football pitch, to give a good impression to the Red Cross on their Inspection Visits, and reports home. Ron's and the other players' home-made badges are clearly on show in the photograph he so proudly sent round the audience.

In 1944/45, the Long March began - Ron's "log" was stolen before he got home, but he told us of the many long, excruciating and gruelling days and miles they had to walk, times of real starvation, and much suffering, before - on the 28th April, 1945 - the German captors "legged it", and the prisoners walked or crawled into the nearest Village, where the Americans had been billeted and food had been left. One of their Sherman Tanks then came into view, with the Commander asking if everyone was alright. They all shouted and cheered - "We are now!" - Free at last!!

Coming home to Gwladys helped Ron to his recovery - to the man he is today, able to give a true account of his experiences, and the truly terrible times experienced by the Prisoners during the Second World War.

This is something I have known very little about, so I am grateful to Ron for sharing his story with us, and for his book, which I am now reading, and which I will pass on to the younger members of my family to digest.

In the words of Winston Churchill, "A nation that forgets its past, has no future."

"Thank you, Ron".

Ron is to receive the BEM shortly - and this will be presented to him locally.

THE SUNKEN GARDEN AT TREDEGAR HOUSE - BY SUE POWELL

The Garden was established in 1920 when Courtenay was Lord Tredegar.



It was surrounded on three sides by hedging with the fourth consisting of a lawn at normal level with stone steps leading down to the garden. In the centre top of the lawn was a stone building variously called a gazebo, tempietta or rotunda. It had stone seats and a wrought iron roof which supported climbing plants.

At normal ground level there were narrow beds, with herbs, flowering shrubs and mixed flowers. The sunken area consisted of four rose gardens edged with low box hedging. The pathways surrounding and separating each rose garden were of flagstones. In the centre of the garden was a large font-like planter. At the lakeside end of the garden was an entrance made up of stone steps leading through a gap in the hedging.

The garden remained unchanged until the 1970's when the Sisters of St. Joseph sold the house to Newport Council. It was probably during the gap between the sisters leaving the house and Newport Council taking it over that the garden became neglected. In 1974, it was just a field of primroses and the little box hedges needed cutting.

The garden remained like this until the 1980's until the spring issue of the "Friends" stated "Work has begun in earnest on the restoration of the Sunken Garden" Apart from repairing the stone walls and flagstones, flowers and plants were needed. "Friends" contributed towards buying old fashioned scented roses for the central beds. The restored garden looked beautiful and was very popular with visitors especially the children.

The garden remained like this for many years but vandalism and ease of management caused the central beds to be turned over to grass. In early 2000 the tempietta was severely vandalised and the broken parts were removed from the garden and the central planter was removed for its own safety.

At present, this once beautiful and unusual garden is in ruins. Hopefully perhaps with the help of "Friends" the National Trust will be able to restore the garden once more.