

DAY TRIP THURSDAY, 11TH JUNE 2015

BY PAM NETHERWAY



On a sunny June day we set out on our Summer Day Trip for Montecute House, Somerset – a masterpiece of Elizabethan Renaissance architecture and design dating from the early 17th century built for Sir Edward Phelips by the master mason, William Arnold. Montecute proved to be a stunning building of hamstone, with fabulous extensive rooms and a long gallery which is the largest of its kind in England. Montecute House stood in for Greenwich Palace, Henry VIII's main London home during the BBC's lavish production of "Wolf Hall", which tells the life story of Henry VIII's court.

The house itself was an absolute delight, visitors could take their time exploring the many rooms appraising the portraits, panels, and even some historic graffiti made by a naughty 18th century child. Morning coffee and later lunch were enjoyed in the pretty courtyard restaurant, later we could join an instructive tour of the grounds and gardens or stroll at our leisure delighting in the summer flowers.

Plants grown at Montecute could be purchased and a perusal of the National Trust shop proved a delight. At 4:30 we rejoined our coach, all agreeing our Summer Day Out would bring happy and truly memorable memories.

CHECK YOUR DEEDS – BY SUE POWELL

Recently I was given an out of date set of deeds for building land in Sapphire, Splotlands Cardiff. It was leased by Charles Morgan Robinson Morgan to John Johns and Benjamin Williams. Not only were the documents interesting to read but they also included the signature and wax seal of Lord Tredegar, together with a Victorian, grey stamp. The deeds were signed in 1874, one year before Charles Morgan died. Incidentally, the rent for the land was £5.00 a year!

Although I have never been interested in collecting autographs I was rather pleased to have a signature from the Morgan family and decided to look at the deeds of my house / land in order to see if they were signed by one of the Tredegars. I discovered that my deeds, dated 1932, contained the same seal but the signature was that of Courtney Morgan.

So check your deeds and you may be fortunate enough to discover you have a signature of one of the Morgan family.

CHILDREN'S PARTY – 1ST DECEMBER (SERVANTS HALL)



We like to send the children home with a little bag containing fruit, and some sweets, as a gift from the "Friends" given by Santa of course. Your help is needed could you please donate a small bar of chocolate or a packet of sweets. Please bring your sweets along to our talk in November or evening event, your donation will be much appreciated.



Katharine - Lady Tredegar

Monty Dart, historian and co-biographer with Will Cross about the Morgan family writes - much has been said about Katharine, Lady Tredegar building bird's nests large enough to sit in. This 'fact', as real as the plastic food on the dining room table in the Brown Room at Tredegar House, is based on a colossal exaggeration and throwaway remark by her son Evan Morgan. Olga Dolgorouky – Evan's second wife confirmed that 'he was such a liar, I didn't know which tales were true or which were fantasy, and whilst many authors have written about Katharine and her nests, (and from our researches there have been dozens) no one ever admits to having seen one. No one ever took a photograph of one of these colossal nests. Why? Because they didn't exist.

Think about it logically, could you make a bird's nest large enough to sit in? Where were they constructed – certainly not at 'Tredegar Castle' as Truman Capote confidently wrote. Augustus John was one of those in Evan's close range of friends who helped perpetrate the legend of Evan's mother, Katharine as 'the bird woman'. John says; 'Lady Tredegar, with her strange gift for climbing into trees and arranging nests.' Did he ever say he saw her in a tree? No.

The Duke of Bedford, in his book 'Silver-plated Spoon' said "She (referring to Evan's mother in her house in Grosvenor Square) poor thing thought she was a bird. She used to flit round the house with sticks and straws in her mouth making birds' nests, and then sit on eggs herself and try to hatch them." Does he say he witnessed her doing this? No.

The only authenticated account, by someone who witnessed Katharine's interest in birds comes from writer, Cecil Roberts, in 'The Bright Twenties', his third volume of autobiography. Roberts had been dining with Evan Morgan at 48, Grosvenor Street, the Morgan's London home.

'After dinner, when coffee had been served in the drawing-room, a footman opened a trestle near Lady Tredegar and put on it a large tray with an assortment of wools, straw, hair, cotton, twigs, moss and leaves. "You must think it peculiar," she said. "Some women like to do petit-point and needlework- it tries my eyes too much. This is more amusing. We inquired about the types of nests she made. Large ones and small ones, some rough and some lined, for different birds. I've had all sorts of tenants!" she replied. "I plant the nests out in the bushes and hidden places. Then I watch. It's better than fishing - getting bird tenants!" She laughed and demonstrated her work. Her fingers were very nimble. She achieved an astonishing verisimilitude.'

I believe it is about time we paid respect to Katharine, an honourable lady from the aristocratic Scottish Southesk family, relative of the current Duke of Fife. Instead of mythical tales of nests, let us feature the good things she did – she championed many causes including giving her London home over to wounded soldiers in WW1. She was also a great fund raiser for the Welsh Regiments and an instigator of the Christmas Pudding Fund in the Daily Mirror, to ensure that every poor child had a nourishing meal on Christmas day. She was a patron of the Arts, ballet and painting.

So – a bit of advice to volunteers working for the National Trust at Tredegar House. One day you might unknowingly be speaking to one of Katharine's relatives on a visit. If you insist telling the myth of Katharine and her bird's nests, ensure the tale can be authentically sourced. As historians of wonderful buildings like Tredegar House, we have a duty to those whose names are associated with it.

The author of this article is interested in anything that truly authenticates the 'Bird Woman' tale.



The Chairman and Executive Committee of the Friends wish all our members good health and a prosperous 2016.

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN – MRS JUDITH RICE

It is hard to believe that this is my second message to the "Friends" doesn't time fly. I hope you have all had a pleasant summer even though the weather has not been very kind but feel fully refreshed for the long winter months ahead.

I am particularly keen that we should try to increase our membership; in any way we can by winning back previous members who have not renewed also, by recruiting younger ones to ensure our Society continues for many years to come.

Tredegar House has a new General Manager Linda Wigley who joined the team on the 3rd August. Linda has a museum/curator background and has spent the last 13 years as a manager/director in a range of museum and heritage organisations. Having briefly met her on Friday 14th August I feel Tredegar House is in good hands. Linda was very interested to learn more about the "Friends" and what we have done for Tredegar House over many years.

Finally, we have a very interesting talk in November – subject – Branwen, Midwife, wise woman, healer also we are holding two social events in November and December. Please read through your Social Events Programme for further information. I look forward to meeting many of you at our forthcoming events. Thank you once again for your continued support.

CHRISTMAS WISHES FROM VISCOUNT GODFREY MORGAN



**FRIENDS ARCHIVES – NEWSLETTER APRIL 2003
"THE TREDEGAR SALT"**



Newer members have been asking for more information about the Tredegar Salt, which is displayed in a security cabinet on a small table in the Dining Room. This particular piece of tableware was original to the house in the 17th Century and is of a design and type now extremely rare and much valued.

The one held by Evan Morgan was sold off along with everything else after his death in 1949 but miraculously came to light again about 12 years ago at auction. Such was the historic value because it was original to the House, it would have been a great pity not to try to bring the Salt back home. Clearly, at £158,000 this price was hopelessly out of bounds. David Freeman, the curator at the time, applied for Lottery Funding. The Fund was impressed and agreed to advance over 90% of the price, the balance to be made up by Newport Council distributing £4,000 and The Friends of Tredegar House £3,000.

It was all touch and go, but that's how this rare piece of Elizabethan handiwork came back. In spite of the high cost, most of us are very glad that the effort was successful. Now you can see why this special object is so well guarded!

The Tredegar Salt is a typical late Elizabethan bell salt and is one of few to survive. It is one of the few identifiable pieces of silver from the collection of Charles Octavius Swinnerton Morgan (1803-89), who pioneered the study of hallmarks on British Plate in a lecture given to the Society of Antiquaries on June 1852.

The salt stands on three hollow ball feet and is composed of three separate sections. The middle and lower sections are spool shaped, with moulded rims and are fitted at the top with a shallow well for salt; the cover (used as a pepper or spice sprinkler) is domed, and surmounted by a threaded sleeve to which screws a pierced ball with an acorn finial; the lower and middle sections are engraved with a central band of leafage between lappets, the feet with claws, and the top with a band of hit and miss engraving; the rims, balls, finial and engraved ornament gilded.

Height 20.4cms (8ins), diam at base 10.2cm (4in). Fully marked (maker's marks two crescents) on the lower and middle sections, maker's mark only on the underside of the cover.

The salt was sold by Lord Tredegar in 1957, (Sotherby's 24 January 1954, lot 135, bought by How of Edinburgh £1,600). The silver owned by his ancestors, the Morgans of Tredegar is documented in a number of late 17th Century inventories. This salt is one of a number of pieces of historic plate bequeathed to the heirs of his family by Charles Octavius Swinnerton Morgan a younger brother of the 1st Lord Tredegar. The salt passed on his death to his nephew Godfrey Morgan.

COULD YOU WRITE AN ARTICLE FOR THE NEWSLETTER?

Hello and thank you for being a Friends. We welcome contributions from all. What would you like to see in your Newsletter? Do you have any Morgan memorabilia or any other interesting stories you would like to share? All photographs can be scanned in your own home. Please contact the Newsletter Editorial Team with any information you have.