

THE GATEWAY GARDENS TRUST

The Gateway Gardens Trust creates and pays for special tailor-made visits to historic parks and gardens in Wales and the West Midlands for a diverse range of community groups, schoolchildren and Lifelong Learners, particularly those living in Communities First areas.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit today.

If you would like more information about the Bittersweet Project or The Gateway Gardens Trust, please contact:

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THE
GATEWAY GARDENS TRUST

Helping People Discover Gardens

www.gatewaygardenstrust.org

BITTERSWEET



The 'Hear Here' Group
Visits
Aberglasney Gardens
on
Friday 5th October 2007
For
An Outdoor Workshop

2007 commemorates the 200th anniversary of the **1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act**. This Act outlawed the slave trade throughout the British Empire and made it illegal for British ships to be involved in the trade, marking the beginning of the end for the transatlantic traffic in human beings. Our Bittersweet Project will look at the links between the slave trade and historic gardens, their makers, what they planted and the wider links with the local community in Wales.

What does this have to do with **Aberglasney**, you and Wales, you may ask? Surprisingly more than many of us imagine. Historic Welsh gardens used sugar and spices from slave plantations to preserve home-grown produce and make jam and bottled fruits. Many gardens and



grand houses were built from wealth linked to slavery, whether from building ships used in the trade or buying slaves using Welsh produced copper pans as currency. People would have drunk rum, tea, coffee and chocolate sweetened by sugar, or smoked



plantation tobacco. Your ancestors may even have supported the abolitionists and signed petitions and avoided using sugar grown on the plantations in west India. By 1808 Thomas Clarkson, the anti-slavery campaigner, was able to assert that 250,000 people had 'left off Sugar and Rum'.



Below is an Anti-slavery sugar bowl from the 1800s. It reads, East India sugar not made by slaves, by six families using East India, instead of West India sugar, one slave less is required. This informed the user that by not buying sugar produced by slaves they were helping the campaign.



In 1807 Aberglasney mansion was empty, but it would have been a busy estate. The house was being improved for the new owner **Thomas Phillips** a 'nabob' who had bought the property in 1803, when he retired from his post as chief surgeon with the **East India Company**. He had amassed a large fortune abroad.

The word **Nabob** acquired a specific meaning in the late seventeenth century, that of commoners of high social status and wealth. Often, in Britain, the term was applied to those recently returned from the colonies. Men from the East India Company like Thomas Phillips frequently made vast fortunes; and resentment tended to build up against Company men returning to purchase estates traditionally the preserve of the established aristocracy. **Middleton Hall**, now the site of **The National Botanic Garden of Wales** was also bought by a 'nabob'; **William Paxton** who took up residence there in 1785 after spending a fortune on the estate.



Thomas Phillips had a brother John, a lawyer from Llandeilo, who acted on his behalf in the purchase of Aberglasney. Bills show how the place was put in order for Thomas's arrival in 1808. He died childless in 1824, but was not forgotten. His heirs benefited from his fortune, and his friendly ghost is said to have appeared to a number of household

staff and gardeners. He left Aberglasney to his sister's son **John Walters**, who tacked on the surname **Philipps** (choosing the more aristocratic spelling). He made further improvements including a painted-glass window with his coat of arms – a copy of which you can see today. For more information on the window, also the history of Aberglasney and its owners, look at the website: www.aberglasney.org. For Welsh connections with the slave trade check out: www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/slavery.

