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## BODFAN GRUFFYDD: A LIFE IN LANDSCAPE

*We are publishing in this issue another extract of Bodfan Gruffydd's planned autobiography dating from c1995 but never appearing in print (for a transcript of his early years see Landscape Issues vol 17 2018 p55). The extract herewith (p31) describes his philosophy of landscape architecture and is essentially the result of his many years' experience in the profession. In it he has analysed the fundamental ideas which guided the broad concepts of his landscape teaching and practice. His was a pragmatic approach to landscape design, based on respect for the genius loci and the art of the possible; it postulates that landscape architecture is an all-embracing profession, whose principles apply to every kind of job, whether it be a national park, a city space, a town park or a small garden. Once those principles are mastered a landscape graduate, he argues, is competent to tackle and solve every type of associated problem, any one of which in itself becomes a matter of detailed application, so guided by fundamentals to assured success. Today's undergraduates may well be interested to read about the concepts underlying their curriculum first developed many decades ago by the founder of the Cheltenham course. Indeed, it may be salutary to speculate whether the same principles obtain in the 21st century.*

*Searching for Bodfan Gruffydd in Wikipedia takes you to a single page of limited information and in general there is not much written about him. Having at my disposal much material of Bodfan's writings and projects, a collection of letters, reports and drawings previously in the possession of John Simpson, a former partner to Bodfan's practice and on the landscape teaching staff at Cheltenham, it is my intention to catalogue and ultimately donate it to the Landscape Institute archive and library at the Museum of Rural Britain in Reading. But as an interim and somewhat abbreviated biography of his life and works I have assembled the following.*

John St Bodfan Gruffydd was born on 5th April 1910 in Caernarfonshire, North Wales, and educated at Friars School, Bangor, Uppingham School, Rutland, and at the University College of North Wales in Bangor (where he undertook a three year course in agriculture).

Training in landscape design was as an articled pupil with the firm of Thomas H Manson & Sons in Lancaster, then in horticulture at the RHS Gardens at Wisley in 1928 and for one year at the Agricultural College of Sweden, Uppsala, doing soil research. For two years he was assistant to the Director of Town Planning for the Government of New Zealand in Wellington and during this time attended courses in economics, sociology



*Bodfan on site at Llanberis, Snowdonia, 1973*



***Visualisation studies for the Llanberis pump storage project.***

*Bodfan devised the ingenious technique of tethering meteorological balloons at surveyed points along the line of the proposed dam. Strategic photographs were taken then overlaid with drawn montages to show accurately and to scale the actual location of the dam when built [from notes accompanying the report, dated 3rd May 1973].*

and statistical method as well as in library cataloguing at the Library of the House of Representatives. Altogether he spent four years in the antipodes.

Experience in landscape design began in private practice in 1946 in Wales with a memorial garden to Dame Margaret Lloyd George at Coed Morg, Abersoch, and then later many other Welsh gardens, housing estates (with Colwyn Foulkes, which won bronze medals, and Clough Williams-Ellis) and industrial premises, including land reclamation.

Subsequently in 1953 Bodfan was employed as landscape architect to the development corporations in the new towns of Harlow and Crawley, for four years, before resuming private practice in the late 1950s.

During his work in the new towns he recalled he had first to fight to establish an atmosphere in which the landscape architect's work could be useful and effective. This involved recognition by engineers, contractors and even architects of the value of expert landscape advice through all the stages of design and construction. This led to the formulation of a Code of Practice for the guidance of architects and engineers in the course of their own designs. Later, as living densities were increased, use and wear of the landscape by the public increased. This imposed problems peculiar to horticulture and arboriculture in towns and led to very relevant investigations into human behaviour and the allowance that must be made for it at the design stage if the resultant landscape scheme is to 'work' and last.

Following an invitation to teach 'landscape' to architectural students at the Gloucestershire College of Art in Cheltenham in 1960, he and the head of architecture, Stuart Sutcliffe, developed ideas for a full-time course in landscape architecture. Working with the architecture course (situated in the Pittville Park Pump Room) and the Pershore College of Horticulture, the four-year course started in 1961 and quickly gained exemption from the intermediate examination of the Institute of Landscape Architects (and later in 1972, the full written examination).

With an initial intake of 14 students, the first year consisted of joint studies with the architectural students. The second year was to be spent at Pershore integrating horticultural aspects into the design projects; the third year would be more projects collaborating with the architects and the final year would comprise the development of professional skills and a thesis. A course had been conceived that had a uniqueness that grew from Cheltenham's surroundings and local resources: the art college, the technical college, local skills and offices, and most of all the local environment of the Cotswolds.

While Bodfan was content to have a general overview of the new curriculum, he recommended Gordon Patterson then employed as landscape architect at Stevenage New Town to head the day-to-day running of the landscape course, but with Graham Powell managing an all-embracing faculty of environmental studies to which a town planning course would subsequently



join. Later John Ingleby, a landscape architect in private practice near Bristol, was appointed to strengthen the design teaching.

In 1963 Bodfan was invited to and accepted Junior and Senior Harvard Fellowships in landscape design at Dumbarton Oaks, USA. When he took this sabbatical year, he gave lectures and travelled extensively across the continent studying in depth the American landscapes and the various institutions teaching landscape and urban design. This pioneering evidence reinforced his awareness of the need for a structured educational programme in landscape architecture back in Britain. His report on these experiences sadly was never published but it is clear he benefitted greatly from his voyage of discovery to most of the 50 states, an acquaintance which informed his nascent thinking of the importance of natural beauty, *genius loci*, wildernesses and national parks, subjects which continued to be at the forefront of his thinking for the rest of his life. Possibly because of his grand tour of America he saw the importance of travelling and first-hand observation in the education of landscape architects and quickly introduced foreign field trips to the Cheltenham course, the first being a visit to the Vienna International Garden Festival in 1964, led by Gordon Patterson, Tom Wright (ex Pershore and Wye Colleges) and Bodfan himself.

From the 1960s on, Bodfan maintained his private practice with an office in London and a 'practice office' attached to the college course (initially in Malvern Hill House, Cheltenham, later at the Oxstalls campus in Gloucester) to which students were directed for observation and experience of professional working conditions. (The office was later replaced by Cheltenham Landscape Design, part of FCH Consultants, a college business initiative using in-house expertise to better develop the new campus landscapes as well as other landscape commissions. It also figured in course publicity by inviting prospective students to "learn in a practice environment".)

From 1965 he undertook three years of research into landscape architecture for new hospitals sponsored by the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London; it embraced the problems of rural and urban landscape and also involved Cheltenham landscape students who helped with the baseline surveys of the hospital sites throughout the capital.

At the end of the decade Bodfan was honoured by becoming the president of the Institute of Landscape Architects (1969-71). His work commissions continued apace (see examples following) and additionally he was often called to public enquiries and the House of Lords to give evidence as an expert witness. Examples of the former include proposals concerning the Green Belt around Bristol and a visual impact assessment of the Llanberis pumped storage hydro-electric scheme (see accompanying photographs).

Later Bodfan completed studies for a long term landscape development plan for the Esso Refinery on Southampton Water, and a Leverhulme Research

Study on Protecting Historic Landscapes. His consultancy involved a variety of commissions including country park proposals at Sandringham, Beaulieu and Stratfield Saye among others, a new computer centre for the Department of the Environment at Swansea, a campus landscape at Robinson College, Cambridge, urban and out-of-town shopping centres, biological corridors for London, flood relief schemes for the Rivers Mole and Wey and a number of housing and garden projects large and small.

For many years he served as independent member on the Secretary of State for Transport's Landscape Advisory Committee for Motorways and Trunk Roads and as the representative of the Landscape Institute on the Council of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA). He was the Institute representative on the Council of the National Trust.

Then came the post of landscape consultant to the Ebbw Vale Council for the development of their Civic Centre (on top of a coal tip, he amusingly recalls) and for the Fort George development in Guernsey.

Regarding publications, he was responsible (over a number of years) for the Landscape Section of the Specification published annually by the Architectural Press, and the following research reports: Landscape Architecture for New Hospitals, 1967; Dawley and Telford Landscape Reports, 1965/66; Esso, Fawley, Landscape Report, 1970; there were also two books, *Protecting Historic Landscapes*, the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust, 1977, and *Tree Form, Size and Colour – a design guide*, E & F N Spon, 1987.

While he took on fewer projects in the 1990s he was still very active helping local groups fight what he believed as insensitive proposals often by developers and planners. Indeed I saw him speak learnedly and passionately at a public enquiry when well into his 80s. He continued to read the landscape and garden literature, particularly when confined to his house due to illness at the turn of the millennium, and when I visited him he invariably interrogated me about the 'design abilities' of the current students on the course. He clearly still felt a close affinity to what he had created some 40 years earlier, particularly regarding what he perceived as the centrality of art and design in the profession.

He died on 25th November 2004.

Robert Moore