

LLANHARAN HOUSE

A pocket of 18th century elegance



LLANHARAN HOUSE, situated on a beautifully landscaped, sloping site backed by trees and hundred acres of land, is an unexpected pocket of 18th century elegance among more industrialised parts of the Border Vale of Glamorgan, complete with grazing livestock and banks of azalea and rhododendron in season.

From the gate there is an uninterrupted view of a rather severe house in ashlar stone three storeys high in the centre, with pedimented wings and front door. The inside is much more lavish but with typical Georgian restraint and good proportions in fireplaces, doors, panelling and plasterwork. At the back of the roomy entrance hall is a cantilevered stone staircase, sweeping in a spectacular spiral up through three floors and topped with a glass cupola, a dramatic feature of the house.

The owner of Llanharan House is Owain Williams, who was born there in 1955, attending the local primary school before going on to a prep school and then Eton.

He had an adventurous time driving to Bombay via Iran and the Khyber Pass — not a trip that could be contemplated today. His two terms teaching in a government school in Kenya was an adventure of a different sort!

After returning to Britain, Mr Williams joined land agents Knight, Frank & Rutley, at their office in Hanover Square, London. Since 1981 he has been back at Llanharan, running the house and 1,000-acre estate, mostly forestry and associated uses, in various parts of the Glamorgans, as well as

having business interests in the leisure industry.

The 40-roomed house is itself made to work. The rear wing is let as three flats. Conferences, exhibitions and wedding receptions can be held there, its several stately rooms adding a natural grace to such occasions. The house was opened to the public on an experimental basis four years ago but only group visits are possible now, by arrangement.

Owain Williams was married in 1983 to Bethan Watkins, whose family at that time were from nearby Mwyndy House. Bethan was born in 1962, educated at Mayfield Convent, and then studied librarianship at Aberystwyth. Her particular interest now is interior design.

Mr and Mrs Williams, with the indispensable daily help of Mrs Rose Beach, regularly have charity functions in the house, like the National Art Collection fund; WI flower festivals and the Order of St John, of which Mr Williams is Vice-Chancellor for Wales.

In 1985, Owain Williams was Sheriff of Mid Glamorgan, surely one of the youngest Sheriffs ever. His father was Sheriff before him, in 1966, at the time of the old Glamorgan. George Mervyn Williams, Vice Lord Lieutenant of Mid Glamorgan since 1986 and Deputy Lieutenant from 1967, bought Llanharan House in 1954.

George Williams served in the Royal Fusiliers during World War II, became a Major and was awarded the Military Cross in 1944. A CBE followed in 1977. Mr Williams's professional life was as managing director and later chairman of the Christie-Tyler furniture company from 1950 until its takeover in 1985. He has also been a director and

chairman of the South Wales Board of Lloyds Bank.

Both Mr Williams and his wife, whom he married in 1950, are committed to the work of the Order of St John, being Commander and Dame of the Order respectively. They have a house, Craig y Bwla, near Crickhowell, but spend much time at Llanharan.

Several members of the family have been Sheriff, from William ap Jenkins in 1566, whose sombre portrait hangs in the dining room at Llanharan House, to the great traveller William Williams in 1830, and the antiquary Morgan Stuart Williams, who bought St Donat's Castle in 1901, carrying out some important restoration. St Donat's is now Atlantic College of course, but Aberpergwm is owned by Idris Williams, although he lives in Jersey.

Llanharan House was built — at least partly — before 1750 by Rees Powell, a man who obtained by deceit many thousands of pounds which should have gone to a poor family under the terms of a will.

The man who laid this charge against him was David Nicholas, who became the poet at Aberpergwm. The Rev Gervase Powell was the next, just as hard-headed, it seems, though there is some suggestion that his wife was likeable, possibly being the inspiration for Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's *The Rivals*.

Richard Hoare Jenkins bought the estate in 1806 and became a much-respected squire during his half-century there. He founded the Llanharan Hunt, thereby making the house a mecca for hunting folk. He was Sheriff in 1831.

The estate passed to his niece and then to her son, John Blandy-Jenkins,

who was Sheriff and Deputy Lieutenant of Berkshire. He became heavily involved in public affairs in Glamorgan, in particular being county council chairman for 20 years until 1915. His second wife, Elizabeth Nora, lived at the house until 1953, but it was sold to the Williams family in 1954.

The house has been altered several times in its history. The large dining room which has the most decorated ceiling, was once a ballroom, and until recently was used as a chapel. It contains a decorative urn by Graham Rust. Above it is the fine drawing room, strikingly painted in yellow and white. The oak room contains the Blandy-Jenkins cockerel on the fireplace, while the fire dogs contain the Williams coat of arms and their motto:

'Y ddiodde fws y orfu'

— *'He who suffers, conquers'* □

