

MORGAN, ELIZABETH (1705 - 1773), gardener

Name: Elizabeth Morgan
Date of birth: 1705
Date of death: 1773
Spouse: Henry Morgan
Child: Dulcibella Morgan
Parent: John Davies
Parent: Honora Davies (née Sneyd)
Gender: Female
Occupation: gardener
Area of activity: Nature and Agriculture

Elizabeth Morgan was born in Shrewsbury where she was christened at St. Chad's church on 5 November 1705. She was the second eldest of five children and only daughter of John Davies (1668/9–1732), a minister, and his wife Honora (née Sneyd, 1668-1714). Her father was a son of [Mutton Davies](#) of Gwysanau, Flintshire and Llannerch, Denbighshire. Her mother Honora was the daughter of Ralph and Frances Sneyd of Keele Hall, Staffordshire.

The eldest of Elizabeth's siblings was John who died in 1735 at the age of 31 years. Of her younger brothers the best-known was the poet Sneyd Davies, 1709-1769. Thomas, born in Shrewsbury in 1711 was buried in Kingsland, Herefordshire in 1712 indicating that the family moved there during this time when her father took on the living at Kingsland.

From the age of six years Elizabeth spent her childhood in the rectory at Kingsland where the house is known to have had extensive gardens within a fertile glebe. Undoubtedly the roots of Elizabeth's horticultural interests began here. Her skills in meticulous record keeping would likely have been cultivated within the household of her scholarly family.

Elizabeth married Henry Morgan (1704-1780), the heir to Henblas, a 3,000 acre estate on the Isle of Anglesey, on 3 August 1732 at Kingsland church. Close ecclesiastical ties had long existed between the dioceses of Bangor and Hereford. Henry was the son of a Chancellor of Bangor and the grandson of [Robert Morgan](#), Bishop of Bangor. Elizabeth's £2,000 marital settlement would have injected much needed funds to fulfil their combined aspirations for enhancing the estate of Henblas. A magnificent threshing barn was built displaying both their initials with the date 1733 and an eye catching circular lodge was added near the entrance to the driveway.

Improvements to the garden followed. Written daily records in Elizabeth's garden diary of 1754-1772, which is kept at Bangor University Archives (it is thought an earlier diary has been lost), reference a new garden with a red brick wall, stone steps and alcoves. During the time of its construction her only child, Dulcibella, died. No doubt solace was sought in her garden.

Chinese railings and gates, serpentine paths and fine seats set within the walks leading to the plantation came later. It is clear that Elizabeth was interested in the latest ideas in garden design. She was a serious 'hands on' gardener with high expectations of herself and others but was quick to express her displeasure when circumstances did not meet her exacting standards. She consulted Phillip Miller's *Gardeners Dictionary*, the horticultural bible of the day, and sought out the unusual and exotic to add to her collection of plants. The excitement is evident in her writing when, for example, she studies the gradual opening of her Guernsey lilies.

We know from her diary that Elizabeth gardened until her hands were sore. In this respect the diary is significant as an example of the considerable contribution made by women gardeners in previous centuries, a neglected area of study in Wales. Her detailed records give valuable information on the exuberance of colour edging the walks to the woodland at Henblas. Clumps of flowering plants, bulbs, fragrant shrubs, nut trees, fruit bushes, vegetables and herbs jostled together in borders lining the paths.

Plants came from a variety of sources. In 1759 Elizabeth 'planted a double sweet briar and a winter cherry from the garden at Llannerch', where her grandfather, Mutton Davies, had created a magnificent Italianate garden in the seventeenth century. Many plants were obtained from other relatives, neighbours and local growers but seeds, plants, trees and shrubs also came from as far as Dublin, Chester and London. Vegetables, too, were grown in vast quantities to feed the household on the estate. Elizabeth kept a separate vegetable diary at the rear of her garden diary.

She was skilful in pruning and grafting techniques, knowledgeable in the art of compost making using sea sand from the shores of the island and propagation methods of seeds, cuttings and layering. Tender plants such as lemon trees in pots were moved to her 'new room' for the winter. Her treasured auriculas were protected within an auricula frame.

The physical toil over the years took its toll on her health. She expressed her frustrations at the 'carelessness of the garden people being unable to go to the garden myself.' Elizabeth's last garden entry was on 20 August 1772. The following year she died and was buried beside her daughter, Dulcibella, at Llangristiolus church on 9 August, 1773.

Author

Mary Gwynedd Jones

Sources

Archives & Special Collections, Bangor University, Henblas Manuscripts: A13 Garden diary of Elizabeth Morgan

Flintshire Record Office, Genealogical History of the House of Gwysaney

Herefordshire Archives and Records Centre, Kingsland Church register

Shropshire Archives, St. Chad's Church register

Further reading

Stephen Bending, *Green retreats: women, gardens, and eighteenth-century culture* (Cambridge 2013)

Mary Gwynedd Jones, *Elizabeth Morgan: Eighteenth century Anglesey gardener* (Welsh Historic Gardens Trust 2019)

Mark Laird, *The flowering of the landscape garden: English pleasure grounds, 1720-1800* (Philadelphia 1999)

Elisabeth Whittle, *The historic gardens of Wales: an introduction to parks and gardens in the history of Wales* (Cardiff 1992)

Published date: 2023-02-15

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/> 

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

