

## LAYERS OF HISTORY

The house at Glenarn was built in 1849 as a summer residence by Andrew MacGeorge, a lawyer from Glasgow. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map shows that by 1860 he had laid out the grounds with a network of paths that we walk on today. This was not so much a garden, more a miniature estate of 12 acres, a little piece of Scotland, mainly planted with indigenous trees and a few exotics from abroad.

Glenarn remained in the MacGeorge family until 1921 when it was acquired by Mr Smith of Maryhill in Glasgow, an engineer about whom we know little. In 1927 the property was sold to James Bogle Gibson of Portencross in Ayrshire. He died before the transaction was completed and Glenarn was made over to his eldest son Archie who, like his younger brother Sandy, was training to be an accountant.

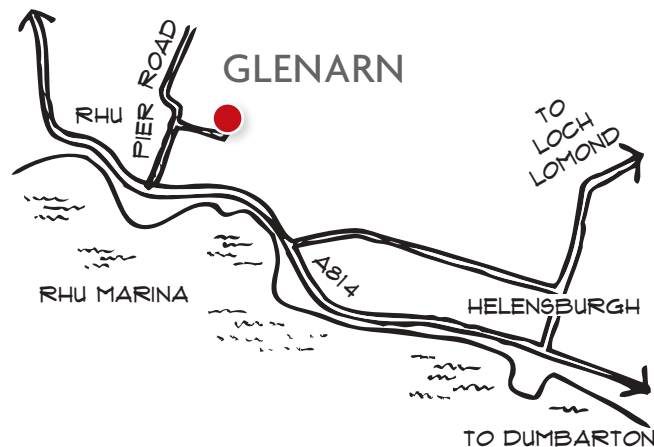
The story is told of a storm in February 1928 blowing over 60 trees at Glenarn. The two brothers cleared the wreckage and, in the space created, planted rhododendrons. The reality is more complex. John Holms of Formakin, an acquaintance from Ayrshire days, took the two young men under his wing and introduced them to major land owners in Scotland, such as Lord Stair at Lochinch and the Balfour family at Dawyck, who were subscribing to the plant hunting expeditions of George Forrest in China. The brothers would go off at weekends, talk about rhododendrons with their hosts and return with a trailer load of plants for the garden.

From these beginnings, and using the underlying Victorian structure, the Gibsons created a West Coast garden, with rhododendrons but also magnolias and maples, as well as southern hemisphere plants such as embothriums and crinodendrons, and also eucryphias that provide so much interest later in the season. By 1939 they had laid out a rock garden in the quarry (which originally had provided the building stone for the house) and maintained a large vegetable patch, overseen by their gardener.

When we saw Glenarn in 1983 Sandy Gibson had died the previous year, pre-deceased by his brother in 1975. The house was run down and the garden fabulously overgrown. We reduced the house to a more manageable size and over the years gradually rebuilt the garden structures. We set about restoring the garden, conserving, and propagating, expanding and recording its collections of plants, work that continues every day.

Glenarn is said to have received plants from Joseph Hooker's 1849-50 Sikkim expedition, notably *Rhododendron falconeri* at the side of the house. From the 1920s a huge range of plants came to the garden from the plant hunting expeditions of Kingdon Ward and Ludlow and Sherriff and also from forays by the Gibson brothers to other major gardens in Scotland.

In 1983 the Thornley family moved to Glenarn to start to restore what was by this time a beautiful but overgrown garden and to maintain and extend its exceptional collection of rhododendrons, magnolias and other interesting plants.



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**gardens-of-argyll.co.uk** for garden information

**portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/GDL00193**  
for the history and significance of the garden.

**glenarn.com** for website



*Rhododendron falconeri* ssp. *eximium*

# GLENARN

RHU  
HELENSBURGH

# MAP OF GLENARN

## GRANNY'S HENS

Once a hen run; Gibson hybrid large leaved rhododendrons, magnolias, drifts of candelabra primulas in May. *R. lindleyi* 'Geordie Sherriff' from Ludlow and Sherriff 1938 seed

## PATHS FOR PERAMBULATIONS

## ROUND TOWER

Once a larder and toolshed

## CARRIAGE HOUSE AND STABLES

## *Rhododendron falconeri*

Said to be from Hooker's 1849 seed

## THE POND

Re-excavated 1992, reformed and replanted 2013. Iris, primulas, hostas, *Rheum*, *Veratrum*, *Hoheria sexstylosa* and *Eucryphia glutinosa*

## OLD OAK THAT PREDATES THE HOUSE

## GLENARN ROAD PARKING

## ENTRANCE GATE AND DRIVE



## LAYERS OF A GARDEN

All the features shown here appear on the 1862 First Edition Ordnance Survey and provide the underlying structure to the west coast garden that was created from 1927 onwards that the visitor sees

## OLD ORCHARD

Now an orchard of magnolias

## SILENT SPACE

The top bench is our Silent Space: somewhere to find peace, overlooking the garden

## VEGETABLE PATCH

Once the paddock

## ROCK GARDEN

Formerly the quarry that provided stone for the house. Created in 1930s, resurrected 1990s onwards. *Sciadopitis verticillata*, *Eucryphia milliganii* Dwarf rhododendrons, meconopsis, primulas, paeonias and bulbs

## MELROSE

Magnolias at bottom of lawn: *M. campbellii* ssp *mollicomata*, *sargentiana robusta*, *kobus* and *rostrata*

## Tender rhododendrons:

*R. crassum*, *maddennii* and *lindleyi*  
Scented lily-like flowers in May – July