



# FACTsheet 18

Dr Francis V. Darbishire

Dr Francis V. Darbishire was born at Pendyffryn in Dwygyfylchi in 1868, after his parents had moved to the area to help run the family's quarrying business in Penmaenmawr.

After completing his PhD in Leipzig University, he went to work as a chemist at a Berlin company's sugar-beet factory in North Germany.

Francis was a fluent German-speaker and translator, and he translated important works of leading German scientists into English. During his career, he developed a technique for partial sterilisation of soils by means of heat and weak antiseptics to reduce soil-borne pests and diseases in the cultivation of plants.

Francis was in Germany when World War I started. He was interned as a civilian prisoner in the Ruhleben internee detention centre. He was there for three years and he used this time to share his knowledge and educate his fellow prisoners.



Penmaenmawr Museum

[www.penmaenmawrmuseum.org.uk](http://www.penmaenmawrmuseum.org.uk)



# Dr Francis V. Darbshire

Francis gave lectures on Botany and Chemistry to the Horticultural Society which had been established by British internees.

The enlightened prison governor was very supportive of the idea and he encouraged the society's activities, including the planting of ornamental gardens around the barracks, the growing of vegetables for prison and staff meals, and flower shows.

These activities were supported by donations of seeds and fertilisers from gardeners in the UK, organised by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS).

The prison Horticultural Society even became a recognised affiliated group of the RHS!

After World War I, Francis worked at the Royal Horticultural Society at Wisley in Surrey as their chief scientist, until his death on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1932. He is buried in St Mary Magdalen churchyard, Ripley, Guildford, Surrey.

The photograph below shows Ruhleben Horticultural Society members outside one of their barracks in 1917.

