CAMBRIDGESHIRE GARDENS TRUST

NEWSLETTER No. 26 MAY 2009

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

At last we seem to have succeeded in the arrangements for our Annual General Meeting. Last summer Judith Christie booked her new village hall in Fen Drayton for our AGM and the committee decided that, as our funds had grown to a reasonable depth, we could offer a free lunch to all members who could attend. This would be followed by our usual short AGM business and then by two illustrated talks. Fen Drayton was chosen because of the ease of access, being central to all members in the county, and ample free parking.

As the year progress we booked both David Adshead (National Trust) and Jane Sills (Treasurer of the Ramsey Abbey Walled Garden Project) and sent out feelers to a local caterer to provide a buffet type lunch. Then offers of help started to arrive. Jean Kearney our new Treasurer suggested she would make jam if a suitable source could be found. Margaret Helme knew of an old orchard where there were some plum trees still laden down with fruit. One thing led to another and after the end of our AGM numerous members left clutching a bottle of plum jam. We hope to arrange a similar AGM this year at the same venue.

During the last few months members have been helping to sell copies of our Wood & Ingram book, and I would like to thank Mr Christopher and Lady Linda Vane Percy for letting me sell copies of the book at their annual Christmas Party. Several members have found the book an excellent present for their friends and with that in mind my following explanation and thoughts upon writing the book will perhaps encourage other members to embark upon in-depth studies which could result in a further publication by the Trust.

I must record my thanks to all the members of your committee, especially Alan Brown who has now taken on the arranging of visits for this year. Our first visit to Copped Hall in Essex on a windy and wet March afternoon attracted 17 members who braved the weather and were rewarded by a 'rivetting afternoon'. At a recent committee meeting it was decided that our new Treasurer Miss Jean Kearney should be sent all payments for membership to avoid loss of cheques in the post. Mrs Alison Gould will continue to distribute our Newsletters. Mrs Beth Davis and Mr Charles Malyon will soon be reporting on an exciting educational venture which the Trust hopes will bring more awareness to children in the county about the importance of gardens. I must also thank Mrs Daphne Pearce who continues to issue tickets for visits so efficiently, having set up her original system of issuing tickets at the very start of the Trust. To these and all who have helped the Trust during the last year my grateful thanks.

John Drake
Chairman.

BACKGROUND AND RESULTS FOLLOWING RESEARCH FOR MY WOOD & INGRAM BOOK

I thought it would be of interest to members who were contemplating carrying out research to show that both the process and end result can be very rewarding indeed. So below I have listed various events and cul-de-sacs that made the lengthy time taken up in writing the book so interesting. Therefore in no particular order the following notes will shed further light on how the book materialised.

I must begin by thanking Jill Cremer who has been so supportive throughout the whole time the book was considered. Her attention to detail and her depth of knowledge regarding historic families in the country has been invaluable. It was so exciting for her to discover that her Great, Great, Great, Great Grandfather had met John Bartram when he was entertained by the Governor of North Carolina when travelling in America. Progress meetings were held fortnightly, similar to university supervisions, when I produced my homework which was discussed, improved or required further checking and deeper research. At times the progress was slow especially when typing out a whole chapter only to agree after lengthy discussion that a complete reappraisal of the contents was required – there being so much to include and the choice of what to include often led to long debates. There were changes to the order of the chapters suggested by Jane Brown which required complete rewriting of the opening paragraph. I well remember, at a rather late point in time, that it was decided that the whole book should be written in the past tense which kept me busy for several evenings!

A telephone call from Philip Whaites, the Head Gardener of Wimpole Hall, resulted in a drive over to Wimpole and a meeting with David Adshead of the National Trust who was finalising his book about the Grounds of Wimpole. Over lunch in the restaurant, we quickly established a working relationship as I had information about the grounds to show David who had until then not realised this information existed. He in return provided access and permission to reproduce maps associated with the improvements to the landscape proposed by Lancelot Brown. He also advised that we should consult the Hertfordshire Record Office in which early records of Wimpole are deposited. With Alan Brown, Jill Cremer and myself we ploughed though Estate Ledgers noting how much the Earl of Hardwicke paid for pictures and garden equipment in an inventory dated 1779.

David Adshead showed me the large plan of the north park by Lancelot Brown for which The Earl of Hardwicke ordered some 6,000 trees from Wood & Ingram. I queried how he knew the drawing was by Brown as it was not signed. Apparently other plans by Brown, in a similar manner and scholarship, had helped to identify this plan. Amongst a pile of other drawings along one wall of a small bedroom was a small coloured plan showing the north park before and after Brown's lake had been laid out. Its date matches the larger Brown drawing and may have been a coloured presentation drawing for the Earl, encouraging him to start on this large project.

Other members of the Trust gave supportive advice. Jane Brown, who with Christopher Taylor generously suggested at the beginning how such a book could be constructed, advised that I look at American plant introductions in more depth and establish a connection between plant importers and landed gentry who were interested in such plants. They might be closely connected to James Wood, a local nurseryman, who would propagate them. This avenue of research proved successful by discovering an article about the Duke of Manchester, who accompanied the Duke of Richmond on the Grand Tour, in the Sussex Archaeological Collections Papers. Gradually other connections started to fall into place which establish James Wood once and for all as a leading nurseryman of the 18th century.

Jane Brown recalls:

'As John has pointed out in his opening lines of *Wood & Ingram* our sheer amazement and size of the archive made it easy to overlook the rather scrappy list of May 22nd 1748 with odd spellings – virginey, pistachia, and caragtoy.

And yet this list, as he continues to explain, placed James Wood in the first category of plantsmen of his day, one of a select group who had access to plants newly coming from the American colonies.

Several coincidences had sharpened my antennae for the 'Americans' including a visit to Oxford to gaze upon Mark Catesby's *Hortus Britannico-Americanus 1763,* researches for my rhododendron book, *Tales of the Rose Tree*, which led me to the aimiable Dr Fothergill's in West Ham Park – what remains of his garden where I walked my dog when visiting my son – and William 'Billy the Flower–hunter' Bartram's riveting records of his travels in the Carolinas, Georgias and Florida (in Cambridge University Library). William travelled through the little political hiatus of 1776 which stopped trading in plants and diverted botanists to the other side of the world, the east.

Hence the heady 1730s–40s, when Billy's father John Bartram was sending regular boxes of seeds and plants to England for distribution to a select few, had been long overlooked. Except that is, for Mark Laird's *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden* 1999, prompted by his searches for the original plants for Painshill Park, which he tracked down to the contents of Bartram's boxes; like Charles Hamilton at Painshill and Lord Petre at Thorndon in Essex, the recipients tended to be rich gentlemen, so it adds even more to James Wood's reputation to find him in this company.

And *Cragana arborescens*? The yellow Siberian cragana – it has to be remembered that in plant time, if not ours, Asia and Alaska were joined and the two continents have many plants of common origin.

Hatfield house, with its wonderful Tradescant archive, is also a valuable resource; Jennifer Potter's *Strange Blooms, the Curious Lives and Adventures of the John Tradescants*, 2006 is wonderfully revelatory and describes the journeys to Virginia and to Archangel.'

I remember my meeting with Jane and Christopher well, as Christopher stated that I had enough information to write at least three books having looked at the various ledgers I showed him!

During the time I spent researching the book *Wood & Ingram*, several letters were written to horticulturalists and

garden owners who had ordered plants from the nursery firm over its 200 years of existence. I reprint two of them here as an indication of the interest caused by my embarking on such a wide project. The first is from the late Lord Pym whom I met and showed copies of James Wood's orders in the late 18th century for the grounds at Hazells Hall (his family's home) near Sandy:

Everton Park
Sandy
Bedfordshire
SG19 2DE
10th March 2004

Dear John

Thank you very much indeed for sending the copies of the Hazells Hall orders for fruit trees in 1771. Unfortunately my book on family history is finished now and cannot include any reference to this order. But I will keep it with my records.

I do appreciate the trouble you have taken over this.

With best wishes
Yours sincerely

Signed Francis Pym

This letter arrived together with a signed copy of Lord Pym's book *'Sentimental Journey', Tracing the Outline of Family History,* Francis Pym. Privately printed 1998. See *Wood & Ingram* pages 39, 40.

Later the same year I had written to the late Dame Miriam Rothschild DBE FRS, asking her if she could throw any light on an extensive order of roses from Wood & Ingram for her father's garden at Ashton Wold:

Ashton Wold
Peterborough
PE8 5LZ
1st July 2004

Dear Mr Drake,

It is an extraordinary coincidence that your letter arrived today. Only this week I have been discussing with my daughter, a keen gardener, how we could get the name of the Rambler roses which my mother and father ordered at the time of their marriage in 1907.

My father was, as you probably know, apart from his chairmanship of Rothschild Bank, also a keen gardener and naturalist. My Hungarian mother was keenly interested in the genus Rosa. Up to last year there were at Ashton, a good variety of roses, bought at the time of my parents' marriage, which could no longer be obtained, including varieties known as Hiawatha (a red rambler) and Irish Fine Flame, but unfortunately all the documentation was lost in the War. The estate office at Tring Park kept all the correspondence as they managed the estate here for my father, who was the ultimate owner of Tring, as the 1st Lord Rothschild's eldest son was a bachelor and had no personal family.

At the present moment, I am keenly anxious to name a particularly successful white bush rose, which I have managed to propagate from cuttings, which were introduced by my mother.

The large order you refer to was made about a year before my parents married, because it was at this time that my father decided to live at Ashton Wold, which was one of his grandfather's numerous purchases of land in the U.K.

I, myself, was his eldest child, born at Ashton in 1908. I have lived here ever since. I have received the much coveted Gold Medal of the Royal Horticultural Society. Unfortunately, quite recently, there was a theft at Ashton of the quarter mile plantation of roses, and 90 valuable plants from my mother's collection were dug up and purloined.

If you are a grower yourself, apart from a writer, I will be only too pleased to send you a cutting of the white bush rose from my mother's garden, which has done remarkably well here this year, and which has a singularly long flowering season.

Yours sincerely

Signed Miriam Rothschild DBE FRS

Sadly my reply to her hoping to be sent this rose was never answered. She died soon after this correspondence. See *Wood & Ingram* pages 179, 180.

Following the publication of the book the following reviews and letters have been received:

The first review of the *Wood & Ingram* appeared in The Garden History Society News 82 Winter 2008 in their Book Review section:

'Drawing on the records of a nursery that enjoyed pre-eminence in the English horticultural trade for two centuries, John Drake has put flesh on what might, in less skilful hands, have been very dry bones indeed. *Wood & Ingram* is the history not only of business, or of horticultural trends over decades in intense botanical activity, but of changes brought about by social upheaval, the expansion of empire, new technology, and war.

The nursery supplied not only ornamental plants, but vegetable seeds in agricultural and amateur quantities. Wars and difficult economic downturns, like today's, always shift the focus to food production. It is fascinating to see not only what was sold, but the prices charged. It is only after the First World War that inflation in the price of plants took off, a result of the loss of men who had formerly worked for low wages in an extremely labour-intensive industry. Despite being short-handed, however, the firm wrote to one prospective employee on 29th August 1918: "We are in receipt of your letter of the 25th, and in reply to same would say that we do not employ lady gardeners in our nurseries". The roll-call of employees on the books when the business was finally sold in 1950 suggests that that position never changed.

Wood & Ingram played a part in so much British cultural and social life during the centuries of their existence. They furnished thousands of trees to local aristocrats whose properties were designed by Capability Brown in the eighteenth century, and individual wreaths for local boys killed in the trenches in the twentieth.

This is a book that should be on the shelves of everyone interested in garden history. It can be obtained from . . . . . .

Patt Huff, Editor.

A review of the *Wood & Ingram* also appeared in Plant Heritage NCCPG Volume 16 No 1 Spring 2009:

'Reading a book about a local nursery which finished trading sixty year ago would perhaps not have much block-buster potential, but such is the skill of the author, that I found it a fascinating read. John Drake has woven a narrative around the surviving ledgers, diaries, correspondence and catalogues of *Wood & Ingram*. He has widened the scope of the book by including reports from local newspapers, as well as recording the reminiscences of past employees and a member of the family. This is one of those special books, which gain in reputation as its date of publication recedes into the past; it is a real legacy for future generations. In a hundred years time there will be few records of any nursery or garden centre extant, with material either on computer or email, certainly no daily ledgers of what the staff did, (as here) or of the struggle of continuing during two world wars.

When James Wood began his nursery in 1742, there could have been no better time to begin a new venture. Creating gardens, alerting landscapes, growing newly introduced plants were all part of the *raison d'être* of eighteenth century society. At the time Britain horticulturally was obsessed with the flora emanating from the eastern seaboard of North America as well as that from South Africa. There was Capability Brown (1716–1783) who appeared to be landscaping the whole of the English Countryside, and the Gardener's Dictionary written by Philip Millar had recently been published. Perhaps most importantly of all, Linnaeus (1707–1778) had published Systema Naturae in 1735. With Species Plantarum in 1753, it was the time for classifying and naming plants

After over a hundred and fifty years of trading the nursery was bought by a fellow nurseryman John Perkins in 1903, although it traded (sensibly) under the more familiar name of Wood & Ingram. During all this time, until it closed in 1950, the nursery reflected both current trends and fashion in gardening, being renowned for its huge collection of roses particularly dwarf roses.

Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust is to be congratulated on producing a work of scholarship. Meticulous research of a subject is always to be congratulated, but to make the reader feel involved and interested in the subject is quite different. John Drake has succeeded on both counts.

Maggie Campbell-Culver.

Comments received include the following:

'I've just dipped into the book and found it fascinating. It's so interesting to see what the new plants were in the 18th Century. I love the details too about the employees and the cost of the apprentices' clothes. Well done you – a fabulous piece of research'

Anna Pavord

'Your book is a scholarly work. Congratulations. I've already delved into it like a child with sweets. I love it. Thank you for sending it to me – it will make good reading over Christmas'

Peter Beales

'Warmest congratulations on the publication of '*Wood & Ingram*'. As Christopher Taylor has written – 'a book full of interest'. This is especially true for members of the Huntingdonshire Local history Society and would have been much appreciated by our benefactor and former member Phyllis Goodliff'

David Cozens

'What a marvellous piece of scholarship. I concentrated on the early 18th century and mid 19th century to see how much had not changed between. Nice to see the little gem about John Codrington, something I will share with Anne Palmer who was very fond of him. What's your next project?'

Donald Hearn

'What a lovely surprise when I picked up the post a few minutes ago – there was your book on Wood & Ingram nursery. I well remember the day in Northampton when we went to find out things about John Perkins in the libraries. A tremendous achievement for you'

Jenny Burt

'Just to say how much I admire the great book – *Wood & Ingram* is fascinating, I just cannot put it down! Many congratulations'

Peter Inskip

'I opened your book on a cold railway platform on Canary Wharf and was immediately transported to James Wood and the estates of Huntingdonshire. It is excellent how you are able to turn lists and shillings into an image of a growing and budding landscape in the reader's mind. I studied C18th landscape design at University and we learned about Brown without learning the name of a single plant,, so I have particularly enjoyed that section'.

Christopher Woodward Director The Garden Museum

'I have only had a quick glance at your book this morning but am looking forward to reading it in more detail this evening. You must be pleased to see all that hard work so beautifully produced'

Lesley Akeroyd Senior Archivist CCC

'I had time yesterday to look more carefully at Wood & Ingram. Not to read it right through – yet – but to remind myself of what is in it.

It really is very good. It has just the right balance between the details from the research and your comments and explanations. I hope that you are proud of it. I would be'

Christopher Taylor

John Drake

Copies of 'Wood & Ingram' can be obtained from the Trust by members for £10.00 + £2.00 post and package, and for non-members £12.00 + £2.00 post and package. From The River Lane Nursery, Brampton and from Ramsey Rural Museum for £12.00.

BIGGIN ABBEY, FEN DITTON

On Sunday 24th May 2009 the Bishop of Ely will be joining the parishes of Fen Ditton, Horningsea and Teversham to celebrate the importance of Biggin Abbey in the history of the Diocese as part of the 900 years of the Diocese. The following is gleaned from the *Victorian History of the Counties of England, The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments – North East Cambridgeshire* and an article by D. V. M. Chadwick published by the *Cambridgeshire Antiquarian Society* in their Proceedings Volume 1954. Mr Chadwick's article is based on *The History of Fen Ditton* written in 1775 by Dr William Cole who was the rector of Milton. In 1939 the Rev F. E. Stanbury, formerly rector of the parish of Fen Ditton, took the precaution of depositing this history on loan in the Cambridge University Library. The Royal Commission and The Cambridge Antiquarian Society have generously given me permission to quote from their publications.

Biggin, sometimes known as Biggin Abbey, stands on a formerly moated site on the edge of the River Cam flood plain in the north corner of the parish of Fen Ditton, opposite Bait's Lock. The Abbey itself is situated in the N.E. corner of a former moated site occupying almost a square mile of about 5 acres with a ditch up to 30 feet wide. The ditch has recently been almost entirely destroyed and now only the W. side exists as a 3ft W facing scarp, together with traces of the N.E. corner. It is shown as complete on the Enclosure Map of 1807. Moated sites are common in Cambridgeshire especially around manor houses. These moats were constructed to indicate the wealth of the owners not for defensive reasons, although after the thawing snow in mid-February this year this site was almost surrounded by flood-water from the River Cam.

The Biggin had been the property of the bishops of Ely since the 12th century. It is first mentioned by name in c1260, providing a residence close to Cambridge. In 1276 Bishop Balsham was granted a licence to enclose and crenellate his mansion of Ditton. Between 1220s and 1320s kings of England passing through Fen Ditton on their way to Ely and East Anglia may sometimes have stayed at the bishop's mansion, as Henry III did in 1238, when he spent three days in Fen Ditton. Edward II was there for three weeks in 1315. Bishops of Ely continued to visit Fen Ditton at times in the mid and late 14th century.

William Cole's drawing of the Biggin in 1768

The house, which was rebuilt in the late 14th Century, consisted of a residential range of two storeys, the more important room being on the first floor and an additional building on the south side, possibly containing butteries. In 1478 Biggin was occupied by the Bishop of Ely's physician.

The mansion, built of clunch, for the Bishop of Ely at Biggin, illustrates the type of building required for a secondary residence of a 14th century dignitary. The Abbey was remodelled in the 17th century to include an internal chimney stack and a winding stone staircase. The butteries had been removed by the 17th century, at the latest.

Today the two-storey residential range survives; a well-windowed ground floor room was entered from a side wall perhaps by way of an internal porch: the upper floor appears to have been divided, the larger area possibly being the principal chamber. Only the lower room was provided with a fire place. A wing on the south, possibly containing a chapel, had vanished by the 18th century diarist's (the Rev William Cole's) time.

Its history has recently been written by D. V. M. Chadwick Esq. from which I have referred in the following:

There is now little about it to suggest palatial rank that it has been able to claim sheltered the King of England with his attendant court.

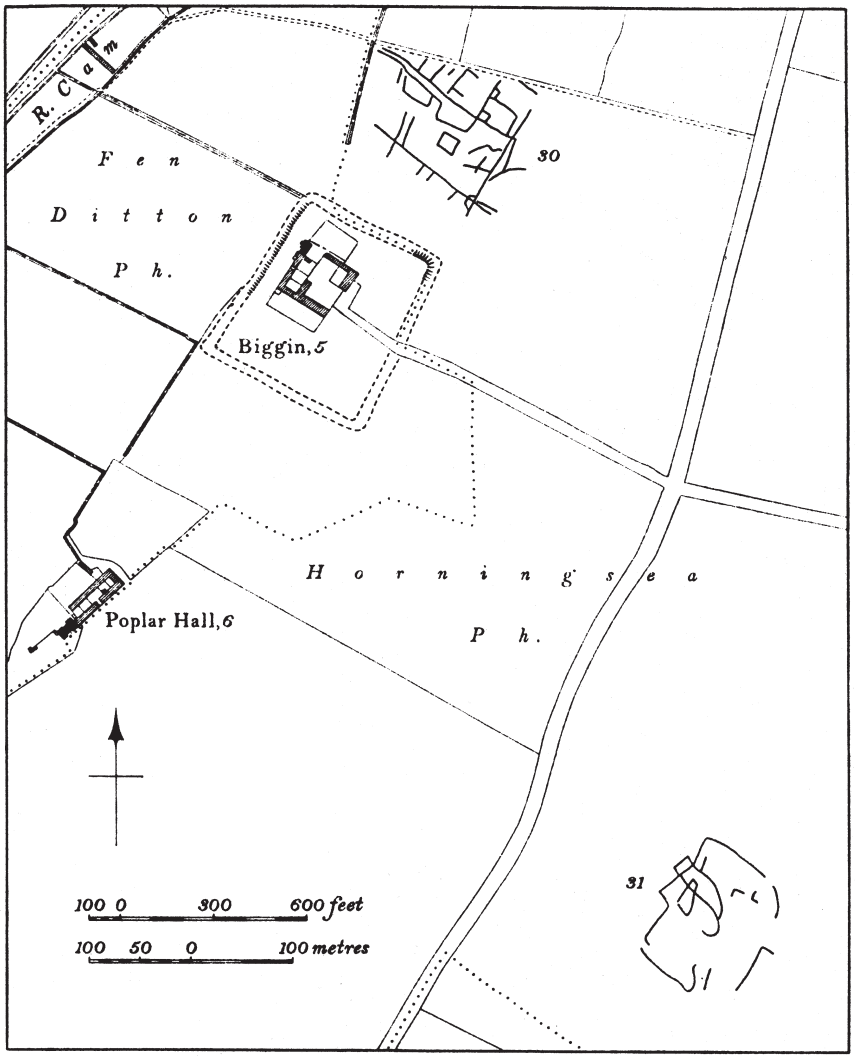
In the days when Byrhtnoth the Saxon made history at the battle of Maldon, Ely already possessed a famous and flourishing monastery, greatly enriched by this hero of the Saxon Chronicle. He was laid to rest in its walls, and his devotion to its welfare was continued by his family. Later, in the reign of Canute, the monks obtained from Byrhtnoth's grand-daughter, Leofwaru, and her husband, Lustwine, confirmation of a bequest made by Leofwaru's great-aunt, AEthelfaed, of the estate at Ditton which that lady had inherited from her father, AEflgar. In Miss D. Whitelock's *Anglo Saxon Wills* can be found the Will of AElfgar, in which he grants to his daughter AEthelflaed the estate at Ditton 'on condition that she be the more zealous for the welfare of my soul, etc'. He desires that AEthelflaed shall grant this estate to 'whatever holy foundation seems to her most desirable, for the sake of our ancestors' souls'.

Upon the estate at Ditton was laid the charge of finding a fortnight's provisions for the monks once in every year and, when in 1109 the See of Ely was founded, this manor was made over to the Bishop. Hervey, first Bishop of Ely, made a

grant of land, together with three *mansiones*, to Aluric, his chief agent or bailiff at Ditton, in recognition of which Aluric was to pay a yearly tribute of a mark of silver to the Bishop and send three horseloads of meal for the use of the monastery, one at the festival of St Ethelreda on 23rd June, and two on the festival of the same saint held on 17th October.

It is not known whether Hugh de Northwold, the great builder Bishop of Ely, restored and enlarged one of the *mansiones* already standing or whether the palace he raised at Fen Ditton was an entirely new foundation, but there can be little doubt that some of his handiwork survives at Biggin. He had achieved a mansion fit to accommodate him in princely style by the year 1252, when he received a grant of hunting rights (then a jealously guarded royal prerogative), but he may have done so very much earlier.

From the Patent Rolls we find that King Henry III stayed at Ditton for three days in 1238 and, during that time, attended to a variety of business, including a dispute with Norwich Priory, the settlement of the estates of the Earl of Chester, a writ to the tenants of the honour of Taunton, mandates to deliver Taunton and Farnham castles and the manor house at Wolvesey (all these possessions of Winchester having fallen into the King's hand while that See was vacant through the death of the warlike bishop Peter of Roches) and an order concerning the walling of the town of Hereford.



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Some have speculated why this low-lying, exposed and, at the time, marshy spot should have appeared a desirable residential site in the eyes of the Bishop of Ely, but it provided him with an invaluable base from which to overlook the activities of the rising town of Cambridge with its already numerous student population, to guard the rights he possessed there and to annex others as opportunity arose. Nor was Ditton itself an inconsiderable trading port. This fact appears in the stormy history of the Muschett family. The Muschetts held a small manor under Biggin for at least three hundred years, and were so enterprising in many different directions that their activities at times constituted a serious nuisance to neighbours, who were not slow to retaliate. The Record Office calendars supply details of a series of affrays in which the Muschetts were concerned, but they continued to prosper; they were acting as money-lenders to the Abbey of Eynsham in 1346, and in 1339 William Muschett of Fen Ditton was one of the two merchants in England who were concerned in a £1,000 deal in wool bought in Antwerp for the King's use.

Other Ditton merchants were at this time employed in royal and episcopal transactions. In1318 John de Hotham, Bishop of Ely, Chancellor of the Exchequer and later Lord Chancellor, sent William Jour of Ditton to convey corn and victuals to the north for his sustenance and that of the clerks of the Chancery. Jour's ship, the *Annot* seems to have made a safe voyage, and Bishop Hotham, after taking part in the battle of Myton-upon-Swale, arranged a truce with the Scots. But six years later disaster fell upon the *Annot*, for, by the King's command, she was laden with 3,000 stockfish, 1,000 cod and two barrels of sturgeon to be delivered to London for his use; somewhere unspecified between Lynn and Deptford pirates attacked her, killed the mariners and conveyed the vessel and its cargo to the port of 'Sheford' (Seaford) in Sussex, and warrants were issued for the arrest of several persons who fell under suspicion of having been concerned in this outrage.

King Henry III paid several visits to Fen Ditton, and Edward I came at least once when he was heir to the throne, and three times after his accession. In 1284 when he had subdued the followers of Llewelyn and bestowed the title of Prince of Wales upon his own infant son, he made a slow and meandering journey back to London and claimed the hospitality of the Bishop of Ely at Ditton during its course. He was here again in the autumn of 1289 shortly after his return from campaigning in France, and in 1298, when he had overthrown the power of Wallace at the battle of Falkirk, the 'hammer of the Scots' rested in Ditton on his way back to London.

Since the King was apt to bring with him all the chief officers of state and a large company of attendants besides,

the drain on the resources of the surrounding countryside was extensive and owners looked forward to the departure of the King rather than his arrival and stay. Not quite the same enthusiasm that royal visits receive today. Harassed suitors were forced to follow their Sovereign from place to place until space could be spared for them to present their petitions. Many matters, which later were delegated to Judges, were in the 13th and 14th centuries dealt with by the King himself.

King Edward II was at Biggin for three weeks in 1315 and, during his stay, transacted a series of business ranging from an enquiry respecting alleged usurpations of the lands of Queen Margaret, his step-mother, in Surrey and some necessary repairs to the sea defences between Ipswich and Dunwich, down to a small matter of theft at Trumpington.

From that time Biggin seems to have lost favour with the English monarchs and was less regarded by the Bishops of Ely, there being no record of improvements or modernisation of the property – indeed the crenellation carried out by Bishop Hugh de Balsham c 1276 appears to be the last work recorded on the building. By 1478 the manor had declined to the humbler, but still useful function for providing a handsome pension for Dr Walter Lempster, a former Fellow of King's College, who became one of the most fashionable physicians of his day and was held in high esteem by the then Bishop of Ely, the valetudinarian William Gray, whom he constantly attended. The Ditton manor was yielded up, along with other plums of the See, to the first Queen Elizabeth by Bishop Heton and henceforth the importance of Biggin sank to the standing of a farmhouse.

In 1775 the Reverend William Cole, correspondent of Horace Walpole and local antiquary, was living at Milton and, in fulfilment of a promise made to his friend, Dr Gooch, then rector of Fen Ditton, he wrote a very comprehensive and carefully documented history of the Parish of Fen Ditton in 1775. It has been possible to obtain from the source a good deal of the material on which this account is based. Included in Cole's history is his line drawing of Biggin in 1768. Cole states in his manuscript, 'Having a desire to see an House in which the ancient Bishops often resided with great Hospitality, and from whence many of their Instruments in their Registers are dated, I went July 29 1768 , with Dr Gooch, and minuted down the following particulars, and took the rough sketch of the Remains, which I see every day from my garden at Milton'. Beneath his drawing Cole records 'There is a Mote round the house, Dr Gooch'. That there was a chapel in this house, where Mass was celebrated is evident from the Document, p 14 at the end of this book,.

Since Cole's time the main portion of the house has been encased in cement and apart from the remaining window frames and buttresses, shows little exterior trace of its great antiquity. But the twisting stone stair down which the feet of Kings, Chancellors and Bishops must so often have passed is still to be seen and a great brick chimney stands isolated in the centre of one of the bedrooms. Cole records that there was, in his time, no painted glass in any of the windows, nor could he discover any arms on the stonework which was then fast decaying. The arch shown in his drawing, at the north end below the gable, can still be made out between the rafters and the present roof and a curious structure, traditionally known as the 'Monk's Prison', may conceivably have been the chapel mentioned in the manuscript.

A copy of Cole's drawing of Biggin which appears in his 1775 history is included in this short article.

John Drake

THE WELLS FAMILY AT HOLMEWOOD

There exists in the Record Office at Huntingdon a very beautiful map in good condition of the Manor of Glatton and Holme made by John Hausted in 1616 and the accompanying survey of all the fields which constituted the Manor with names of the copy holders and lease holders farming the land. The 'contents of all the Manor of Glatton' amounted to 2125 acres. This maps the origin of the area from which the Holmewood estate was later to emerge. A fascinating pattern of agriculture on the medieval pattern is documented. Small strips of land were cultivated near the village of Glatton – Holme itself does not appear to have emerged yet – surrounded by larger fields, common land and drove ways, each farmed by named farmers, some of whom (including one, coincidentally in view of the later owners of the estate, named Michael Wells) farmed a comparatively large, if dispersed, acreage – a pattern of ownership (though with somewhat larger fields) still common in the fens until recently with the advent of large agribusinesses such as the 12,000 acres farmed by the Shropshires.

At the time the survey was made the estate belonged to Sir Robert Cotton who had been granted the manor by King James I in 1612 and it remained in the Cotton family for many years probably until about 1726. By the 1750s, however, the strip fields had gone and the Wells family entered the picture. By 1786 William Wells Esq was established as Lord of the Manor of Glatton and Holme owning land in the area and eight boatgates and fishing rights on Whittlesey Mere. (1)

The Wells family were very successful shipbuilders in Kent, building both for commerce and the Admiralty but were, confusingly, addicted to naming their male offspring William. However, the one who concerns us here and who was establishing himself in the area by the middle of the eighteenth century was born in 1729, was a driving force in the ship-building business and a close friend of the 4th Earl of Sandwich whose country seat was at Hinchingbrook. According to the Dictionary of National Biography, William inherited lands at Holme and Glatton on the death of his father in 1755. Another, unverified, source suggests that the

land was bought from Sir Richard Neave whose sister Wells married, although, since this purchase is dated 1752 and the purchaser simply a Mr Wells, it is possible that it was bought by Abraham before his death. However, what is certain is that the Wells family were purchasing land and establishing an estate at Holme from the mid eighteenth century and were to remain there until the death of another William in 1889 when the estate was bought by Lord Ramsey. It later came into the possession of Fielden another long term resident of Holmewood (see previous Newsletter).

The major owners of Holmewood, the Wells family and Feilden, were wealthy men whose money derived from commercial activities in other, relatively distant, parts of the country. They were not from aristocratic nor even country families: their interest in gardening per se seems to have been minimal and their desire to own land aspirational rather than traditional. There are therefore, no archaeological signs of garden activity and no plans of projects which may or not have been realised. This is not to suggest that their country seats were unpleasant , simply that this was a land unvisited by Brown or Repton, though broad views from the house, stands of trees, a ha-ha however unpretentious and flower borders near the house suggest a passing reference to both. The Wells family were not insensitive to fashion. Just as Fielden was interested in the estate as a provider of good shooting, they had interests initially elsewhere and latterly in the development of agriculture. The last William Wells to live there was described in the DNB as 'agriculturalist and politician'. Walled vegetable gardens, grassy terraces and rose beds were all very nice – and they existed here – but in the real world you grew crops for profit.

John Drake has made a comprehensive survey of the trees in the park and garden as they are at present and this survey suggests an interest in trees as an adornment to the landscape dating back to the first Wells. In the grassy area to the south and west of the house can be found a very large English oak, an equally splendid ash and a cedar of Lebanon, obviously planted as specimens to stand alone. More cedars, a Wellingtonia and a weeping ash can be found at the opposite part of the garden near to the road and elsewhere, amidst a splendid variety of trees, can be found that love of late Victorian and Edwardian gardeners, even those with small suburban gardens, the Monkey Puzzle, though the one here may be a replacement of an earlier planting. Willow, yew, pine and sycamore have been widely planted but among the most interesting would be the Huntingdon elm and, the finest tree in the garden, the great plane tree opposite the entrance to the house in what is now, unfortunately, the car park. John dates this to at least Georgian times and possibly earlier. Another interesting planting, though of a more recent date, is what John thinks is a Dawn Redwood. This must be relatively recent planting – certainly post Fielden.

The planting and cultivation of forest trees would appear to be Wells's major contribution to the garden and even today when the estate is much diminished they make a very splendid sight and continue to be of interest to the present owners. Other features of a garden attached to the house and estate such as this were carefully listed at the time of the sale and are described fully in the previous article.

The last William Wells might not have been a revolutionary in the garden but he was involved in projects which drastically altered the landscape and the life of local people – the coming of the railway and the draining of Whittlesey Mere.

The London and York Railway Act of 1846 paved the way for the building of the rail link from London to the north and eventually to Edinburgh which became the Great Northern Railway. By 1850 the stretch from London to Peterborough was operating , cutting through the estate. Initially developed for the transport of coal and commercial goods, the benefit of fast passenger travel became obvious and Holme was from an early time linked, via a small station or halt, to an important communication network bringing some new jobs and a little prosperity into the area.

Wells was much more directly involved in the draining of the Mere, being a prime mover in the project as the Mere was now part of the Well's estate. This was the last remaining of several inland lakes which had been a feature of the fenland and had been formed about 2,000 years ago by a fall in sea levels which had prevented the water draining back into the sea.It stretched two and a half miles from east to west and one and three quarter miles from north to south and had been a popular place for picnics, banquets and boating parties, notably that of the 3rd Earl of Oxford who sailed on it in 1777 with a 'fleet' of nine ships! However, the danger of banks breaking and flooding the surrounding farms became increasingly obvious as drainage in the rest of the fens improved and there was very little opposition to the plan. Work started in 1851 helped by a new innovation – the centrifugal Appolo pump first shown at the Great Exhibition earlier in the year and used by Wells for the first time for land drainage. By 1853 the land was under cultivation with crops of coleseed and Italian rye grass, clay having been spread on the bed of the Mere to prevent the dry peat from blowing away. Wells gave an account of these operations to the Royal Agricultural Society in 1860 and he remained interested in the agricultural use of steam power, offering prizes at the Peterborough Agricultural Society, becoming its president in 1880. There have been suggestions that this operation bankrupted Wells but, although we have been unable to ascertain the cost of drainage, we think this can hardly have been the case since the average annual value of crops after drainage was £12,350 compared with £1,160 from sedge and reed cutting (2). Furthermore, at his death Wells left a fortune of £96,681.12s.5d – noted to the last penny (3).

While for the farmer and for agriculture the drainage had obviously been a good thing, for many local people who relied on the Mere for fishing and wild-fowling it must have been close to disaster. With the water disappeared a wide range of flora and fauna and a whole way of life, of work and leisure, peculiar to fenland. All was not bad however, for with the water also disappeared the mosquito, carrier of that mild form of malaria known as fen ague.

To see the post taken from the great Exhibition and driven into Denton Fen just west of Holm Fen in 1851 so that its top was level with the ground and now standing 14 feet above it, the ground having shrunk so much, or to stand by the East Lodge of Holmewood on a day when a wind from the steppes blows horizontal rain across the perfectly flat acres

which were once Whittelsey Mere is to recognize the truly extraordinary nature of this countryside and the extraordinary determination of the men driven to drain and 'tame it'.

Nature may, however, be about to return.

(1) See footnote to Bodger's map of the Mere, HRO shop – copies for sale.

(2) A full and interesting account of the drainage is given by Enid Porter in '*Life*' May 1970 from which these figures are taken. HRO Misc 22.

(3) A brief biography of William Wells and the various related Williams can be found in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

An account of the voyage of the Earl of Sandwich with comments by HJK Jenkins is a Cambridgeshire Libraries Publication.

Maureen Hawes

ROUSHAM HOUSE

Visit on 28th September 2008

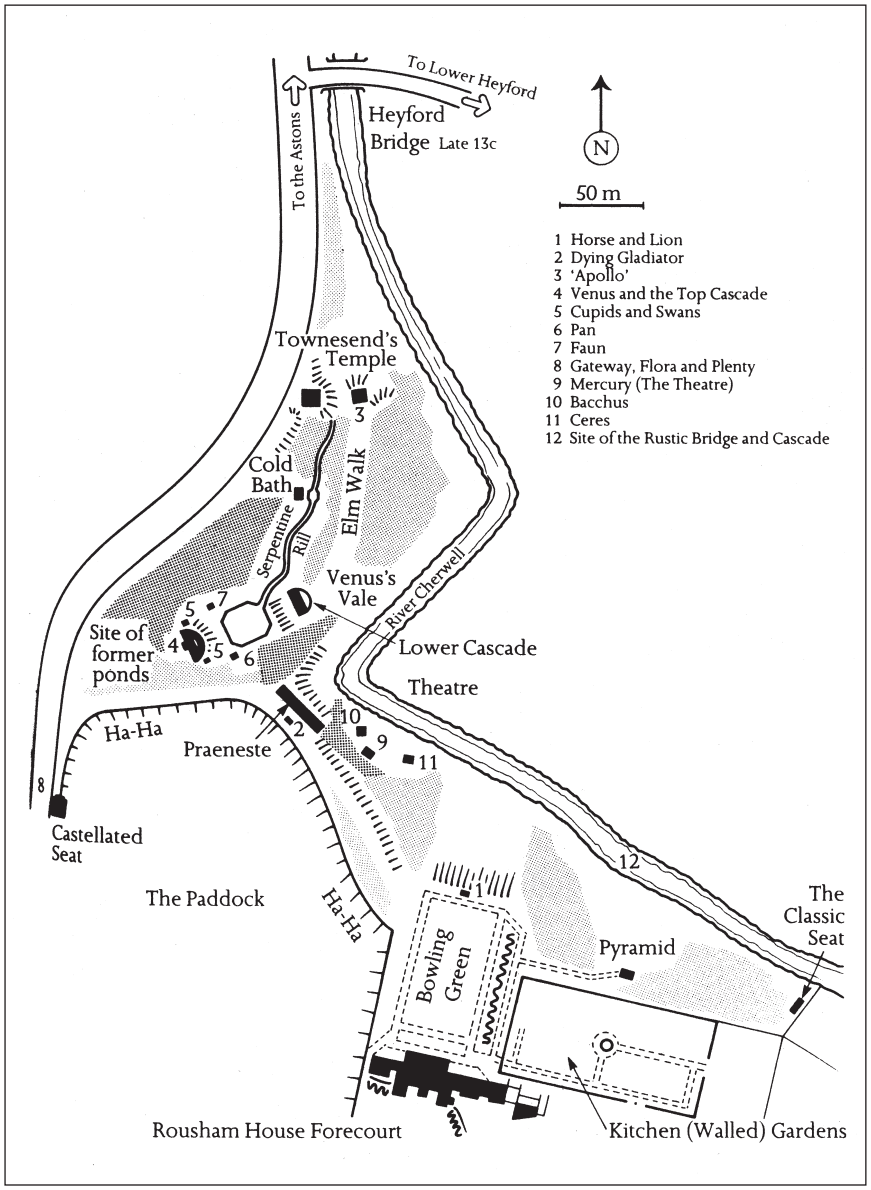
There is a new taste in gardening just arisen . . . a general alteration of some of the most considerable gardens in the kingdom is begun, after Mr Kent's notion, viz to lay them out and work without level or line . . . This method of gardening is the more agreeable as, when finished, it has the appearance of beautiful nature (Sir Thomas Robinson, 1734).

Rousham, 15 miles north of Oxford, has a good claim to be the first fully realised English landscape garden of the 18th century and therefore a Mecca for all students of garden history. But not just the first: arguably the finest. And what is remarkable is that this, the creation of William Kent (1685–1748), survives today almost entirely as it was designed more than two and a half centuries ago.

Our tour began in the house, with the owner, Mrs Cottrell-Dormer, as our guide. Rousham is Carolean in origin, built in 1635 for Sir Robert Dormer. The family was Royalist and we were shown the lead-lined apertures in the front door through which muskets might be trained against marauding Roundheads. The house contains many family and royal portraits. It was remodelled for General James Dormer (1679–1741) by Kent, who added wings to the east and west and refenestrated the façade. The property was extended to the north in the 19th century. Kent's east-wing parlour with its opulent decorative scheme still extant, is described by Pevsner as 'one of the most exquisite small rooms of 18th century in England'.

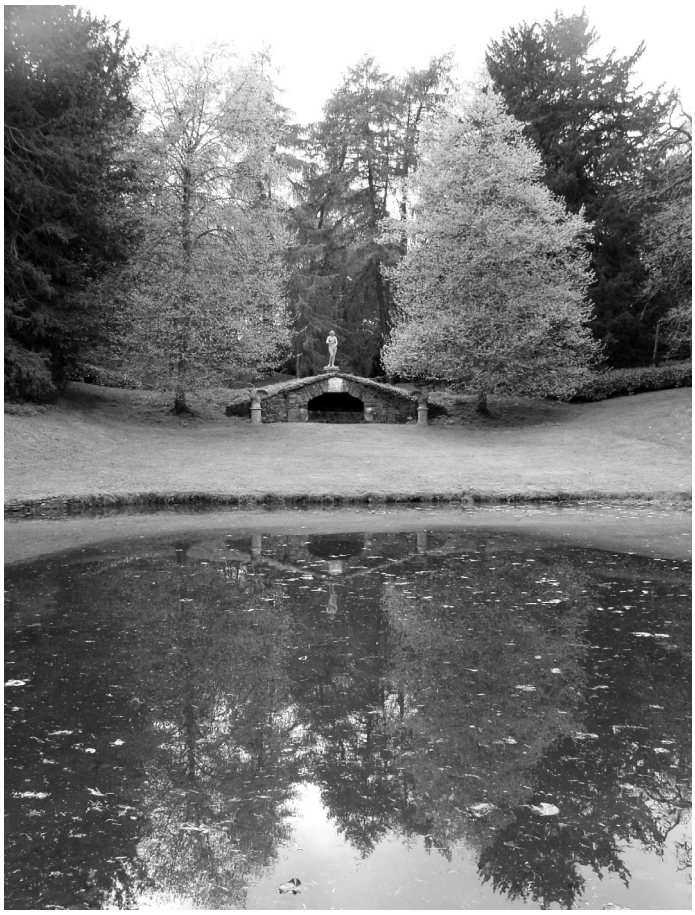
Several things conspired in the early C18 to produce the 'new taste in gardening'. Aestheticians argued that the Line of Beauty in nature was not straight but serpentine.

Politically, the movement was associated with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the nascent Whig Party. The new gardens embodied constitutional liberty; they were uniquely English; French formality was the expression of tyrannical government. This was the age of the Grand Tour and the rediscovery of Antiquity. Progressive aristocrats saw themselves as Augustans, their objectives nothing less than the re-creation of the golden age of Ancient Rome, as their



Plan of Rousham taken from Simon Pugh, Garden-nature-language, Manchester University Press.

vision refracted through the Renaissance architecture of Andrea Palladio (himself a Vitruvian revivalist), and the C17 landscape painting of Claude Lorraine and Gaspard Dughet. Virgil and Horace supplied the literary 'improv'd'; the designer was to discern and express a hidden form and order. Kent's Rousham is, of course, as contrived as Le Notre's Versailles.



Photograph of the Vale of Venus by Dr Jane Sills

Horace Walpole famously credits William Kent as the inventor of this revolution in garden design: 'He leapt the fence and saw that all nature was a garden'. But there were predecessors: Sir William Temple had described the irregularity of Chinese gardens; the essayist Joseph Addison had inveighed against the parterre and topiary; Charles Bridgeman and Stephen Switzer had already introduced informal elements into their plans; Alexander Pope, the poet, had announced that 'all gardening is landscape painting' and was an early exponent of the new style at his garden in Twickenham.

William Kent (*'Il Signor'*) lived in Italy for ten years between 1709 and 1719, based in Rome. He was an undistinguished painter of humble origins whose career as an architect and designer owed much to the patronage of Robert Boyle, Third Earl of Burlington, the great advocate of Palladio. The two collaborated at Chiswick.

Colonel Robert Dormer had engaged Bridgeman to work at Rousham in 1717. When he died in 1737 his younger brother, General James Dormer, inherited and lost no time in appointing Kent, who swept away most of Bridgeman's earlier layout and extended the garden to the west. The site, the precipitous south bank of the River Cherwell, was unsuitable for agriculture; in size, at 25 acres, it was relatively small in comparison with Lord Cobham's Stowe nearby and the later gardens of Brown and Repton. But the entire surrounding landscape is appropriated by Kent: the agricultural land to the south by virtue of a ha-ha (being meticulously rebuilt as we visited), and the country to the north of the river, which did not belong to Dormer's estate, former a series of pictorial compositions in the Claudian manner.

Kent designed the garden at Rousham as a circular walk, encompassing a prescribed sequence of set piece vistas and objects, each hidden from the next by groves of trees. It is on two levels, the lower concealed from the upper, the one providing opportunities for extensive prospects north and south (said to include four counties and ten parish churches), the other with a series of features to be seen from below.

We begin on the Bowling Green to the rear of the house, with two seats of Kent's design at the northern corners and Scheemakers's Lion and Horse taking centre stage. Beyond is the Great Slope, formerly terraced, and the first view over the river. Passing through a grove to the north-west we arrive at a balustraded terrace with a statue of The Dying Gladiator, and herms of Hercules and Pan. Here, where the garden is at its narrowest, we enjoy a second vista north-eastwards. In the other direction (south-west) we look over the ha-ha noticing in the distance a Palladian gateway, two urns and a castellated lodge. When we arrived at this last we find it provides a seat with a view of the house over the paddock (now stocked with Long-horn cattle).

There is a choice of two routes: one along the western boundary, the other a meandering path which follows a serpentine rill with a plunge pool (the Cold Bath) and bath house halfway. Both walks issue at Townsend's Building, a Doric temple commanding picturesque views of the medieval Heyford Bridge; of the Temple of the Mill, slightly upstream, a water mill gothicised by Kent, and, on the ridge about a mile away, of the Eye Catcher, probably the first sham ruin or folly in English garden history.

We descend to an outsize statue of Apollo, like all the other figures, facing north across the Cherwell. From here we can see obliquely, at the end of the 'Elm Avenue' to the south, part of a classical arcade. We now begin our return journey, either by the river bank or by the avenue, and suddenly discover the Vale of Venus, Kent's *coup de théâtre*, quite invisible hitherto. Here, in a small valley, surrounded by firs and yews, we look up at a series of what we now call water features: at the top there is the Upper Pond and Cascade, then a larger Great Pond and, at the base, the lower Pond and Cascade. To left and right of the Lower Cascade are statues of Pan and a faun; Venus presides over the Upper.

The arcade glimpsed from Apollo, as we draw closer, reveals itself to be the seven arched Praeneste, modelled on the famous ruined Temple of Jupiter at Palestrina, and which is in fact the lower storey of the balustraded terrace we passed over earlier. Next we come to the Theatre, which imitates a classical *exedra*, with statues of Mercury, Ceres and Bacchus; thence along the river bank, beneath the Bowling Green, to find the last of the garden's structures, the Pyramid Building, with extensive tree plantings to either side. Like Townsend's Temple this is another object to admire

from below, but also, once entered, a shelter from which to survey the countryside across the river.

The walled garden is C17 in origin; its exuberant double herbaceous borders, vegetables and fruit could not make a greater contrast to Kent's landscape. Finally and ironically, with the rose parterre between working dovecot and the house, we come full circle to a late C19 revival of formalism.

There is a lot going on at Rousham and much has been read into Kent's creation. One sub-text is the garden as the philosophical retreat of the retired warrior. General Dormer, a bibliophile and a member of the Kit-Kat Club, was at the end of his life: hence the Dying Gladiator and the bas-reliefs of Caesar and Calpurnia in the Pyramid Building (there were reliefs of Marcus Aurelius and Socrates but these no longer survive). There are many layers of meaning here: social, political, even sexual (*'While Venus plays her part in legitimising Rousham, she becomes also a necessary appendage of the ideological structure, the signifier of thraldon and purification that reconciles the sexes by sanctifying the slavery of women.'* Simon Pugh, 1988). But we don't need to know anything about these things to respond to the enchantment and tranquillity of this place. Rousham was hailed as a work of genius before it was ever completed. It remains *Kentissimo*, and one of the most appreciated of gardens today, in the C21, attracting recent plaudits, for example, from Tom Stuart-Smith, Monty Don and Cleve West.

The garden is Daphne in little; the sweetest little groves, streams, porticoes, cascades, and river imaginable; all the scenes are perfectly classic (Horace Walpole, 1760).

It is wonderful that General Dormer's successors have maintained Kent's garden with no significant alterations. Wonderful too that there are no concessions to the visitor; no shop or café; no signage; no guidebook. It is rare these days to be able to enjoy an uninterpreted heritage experience.

Peter Reynolds

VISIT TO TOM STUART-SMITH'S GARDEN

It's always interesting to see what well-known contemporary garden designers do, when creating a private garden for themselves and their family. Are the quirks and flourishes they produce for Chelsea only intended to captivate the judges and generate publicity, or do they believe in their own ideas to the extent that they actually want to live with them?

Tom Stuart-Smith's plot certainly shares elements with the garden he designed for Laurent-Perrier at Chelsea 2008: an aura of calm; form and texture taking precedence over colour; cloud pruning; rectangular metal water tanks. It is sited next to his parents' former farm, and is approached through a carefully- sanitised yard, the aged timbers and faded blue paint of the outbuildings softened further with wisteria and Virginia creeper.

Outside the converted barn where Tom and his family live, is a wonderful suntrap of a sunken garden. There is a mixture of decking and paviours, and the hard geometric shapes are tempered with lush plantings of purple and green euphorbia and sedum, contrasting with spiky grasses and iris. The centrepiece is one of the famous metal troughs.

Then we come to a dreamy, maze-like meandering of grass walkways through perennial borders, arranged in compartments backed by cloud-pruned yew and hornbeam. It is late summer at the time of our visit, and accents of white are provided by astrantia, phlox and eupatorium; yellow by achillea, helenium and rudbeckia; purple by sedum, nepeta and michaelmas daisy. There is the occasional contrast of a deep red sunflower. Now and then a small tree adds some extra height.

It is all very calm and beautiful, but as I wander through, I find myself hoping for a surprise – a glaring stand of kniphofia, perhaps, or an intriguing building or piece of statuary? But no, this part of the garden is all about repetition, and firmly plant-based. I wonder what it will look like in winter – there doesn't seem to be much to provide interest. Maybe the Stuart-Smiths are sensible, and stay indoors during the colder months.

On the boundary of the garden, beyond a grove of poplars, the land falls away steeply across an open field, and there are views to what I assume is St Albans, which looks almost mythical at this distance. A woodland border is enlivened by wild rose hips, and the spires of glistening seedheads of American pokeweed, reminiscent of ripe blackberries.

Lastly, there is the potager, and it is very much a potager as opposed to a plain kitchen garden, as ornamental plants – melianthus, agapanthus, lilies and aeonium in pots, and sweet peas, sunflowers, red orach and cosmos in the raised wooden beds – are as prominent as the vegetables. I get the feeling that the only vegetables allowed are those that are as decorative as they are edible: asparagus, courgettes, sculptured brassicas. I didn't notice any potatoes, for example – do the Stuart – Smiths not eat them, or is their plebeian foliage considered unsuitable? A few hens scratch prettily around, and trailing nasturtiums provide bright spots of colour.

All in all, a lovely, peaceful garden that lends itself to quiet contemplation and belies its location in this busy corner of Hertfordshire.

Miriam Pender

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