LRGT

Travel Edition

Surrey Gardens

2nd-6th June 2010

The now obligatory ‘group photo’ taken at Parham House, Sussex

Inside this issue

SURREY HOLIDAY 2010

We went to Surrey by default. I had thought that, for the 2010 holiday, we would go to Suffolk or Shropshire, but, following our visit to the Jellicoe garden at Shute in 2009, which was so impressive, it seemed logical to follow that with a visit to Sutton Place in Surrey, one of his most important gardens, so Surrey it was. Travel Editions went ahead with arrangements and had several conversations with Sutton Place over a period of three months or so, but eventually, they said no. It belongs to a Russian Oligarch and no longer has any public access. Other visits had by this time been arranged, so an alternative garden had to be found and we chose Parham which is actually in Sussex.

It all turned out for the best. Surrey, contrary to my northern preconceptions, is not just one big commuter suburb of 30s semis and stockbroker Tudor, but is, among other things, the most wooded county in the country, has attractive villages, rolling countryside, pleasant small towns such as Godalming, (which I could never pronounce) and a host of historic houses and gardens. We managed to visit eight of these, plus two small gardens which had associations with Gertrude Jekyll and were not usually open to the public. These covered a variety of garden styles and architecture from Elizabethan Parham to 21st century Kim Wilkie at Great Fosters.


Painshill

The warm June weather and light complemented the gardens and architecture, so all looked their very best. There was not one which could not be admired, but the one that really impressed me was Painshill It reflects the evolution of 18th century landscaping ideas and was just fantastic, with its grotto, Gothic tower etc. The vista from the Turkish tent was like seeing a live 18th century landscape painting. What added to the appreciation was the fact that this landscape could have been lost had it not been for the local people and eventual purchase by the local authority. The restoration must be one of the best of its kind. I do strongly urge that you visit if you have not already done so. Stephen's short presentation the evening before was a great help in understanding this landscape

The hotel was a bit old fashioned and according to someone in the group lacked a woman's touch, but it was comfortable, the food was fine and its situation in the village of Bookham was ideal. It was quiet and opposite a Common, which was just the job for early morning and after dinner strolls. I can imagine that its heyday was the thirties and that it was used by touring motorists and cyclists.

Three people were largely responsible for the success of the trip and deserve our thanks: Jo Blair at Travel Editions, who arranged all the visits, transport and accommodation, ensured that all went smoothly. Jane Balfour arranged the Jekyll day and enabled us to visit two gardens not usually open to the public and John, the coach driver was as helpful as ever - always on time, always finding the most interesting route and negotiating Surrey lanes and narrow streets with skill and aplomb. A trip like this could be a disaster without an empathetic driver.

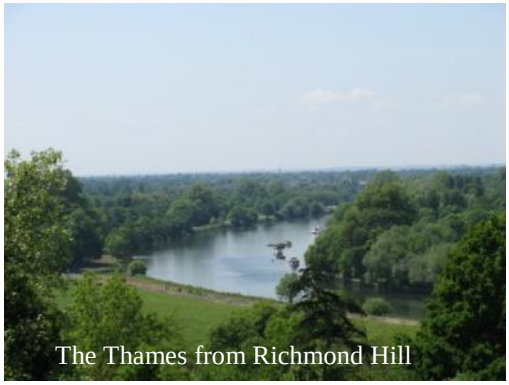
The holiday finished up at Great Fosters Hotel to see the Kim Wilkie land sculpture and the surprise of a lovely Arts and Crafts garden thrown in. After our walk in the garden we had a beautifully served lunch in the hotel of coffee and sandwiches. A fitting end to a stimulating and most enjoyable holiday.

Travel Editions are pricing Southern Ireland and Holland /Belgium as possibilities for next year, if all that fails, then we are looking at Herefordshire and Shropshire.

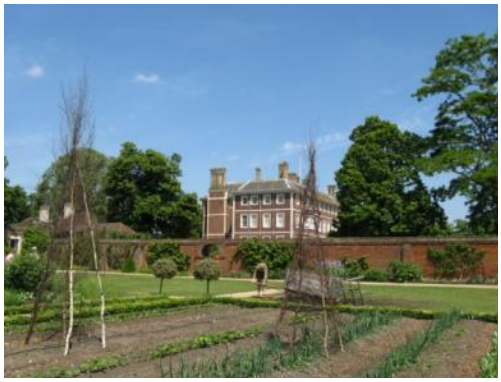
Elizabeth Bacon

HAM HOUSE

Ham House, so called after the adjacent village of Ham, itself reflecting perhaps in its name its siting in the sharp bend of the River Thames. Twickenham, the Wembley of Rugby Union is similarly named, possibly after a man called Twicca, so maybe the abbreviation familiar to all Union aficionados has its roots in Early English nomenclature. I digress. As we made our way to Ham House we saluted the ground as we passed but I expect most of us were more focussed on Richmond Hill, where a brief stop was made, before we reached the subject of this appraisal.


The Thames from Richmond Hill

The house, a 17th century pile, now in the trusteeship of the National Trust, faces the River Thames - but is some distance from it. Once the prospect would have been perhaps idyllic but now it is sadly less than attractive with a rather grotty boat yard and its accoutrements. It is as well that the grounds fronting the house have an area of 'meadow' distancing them from the water.

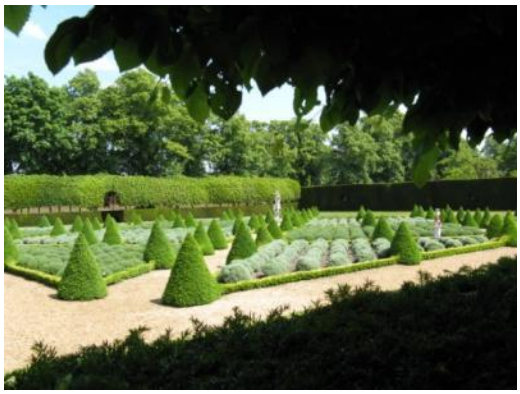


The Jacobean house was inherited by the Countess of Dysart and, notwithstanding the improvements made by her father in 1637-9, following her second marriage improvements were made some 30 or so years later. Inevitably, over a period of time measured in centuries, alterations have taken place and the Trust has undertaken restoration which demonstrates this, including an 18th century furnishing scheme in part of the building.

The National Trust has relaxed its rules on photography inside its properties. No flash, but with a well specified digital camera, this is not an impediment except in those rooms barely lit at all. What particularly struck me, if my photographs are anything to go by, are the Long Gallery with its rich dark panelling, and the staircase balustrade, of a similarly dark timber, and with impressive carvings of a military nature. I might have preferred a less aggressive subject but there we are.

Interesting though the building was, our main focus was, or at least should have been, the gardens. Here, the Trust has recreated the 17th century gardens. To the south of the house are the main gardens. A large lawn, beyond a broad terrace, is divided into eight square 'plats' and beyond that is the 'wilderness'. From the house it might look like a small wood but closer investigation shows it to be a series of walks lined with hedges radiating from a central clearing. These form enclosures filled with trees, shrubs and other plants. Sadly, we were a little to early to get the full benefit from the flowering plants but nonetheless the geometry was clear and, with the summer houses, on hot summer days the walks would have provided

untold pleasure. And given the seclusion pleasures, or shenanigans, perhaps we would better not think about!



For me, the most interesting feature was the knot garden. Delineated by the ubiquitous box hedging it had cones of box standing guard over the planting of lavenders. The whole was surrounded by tree-lined walkways allowing cool perambulations under the heat of the summer sun.

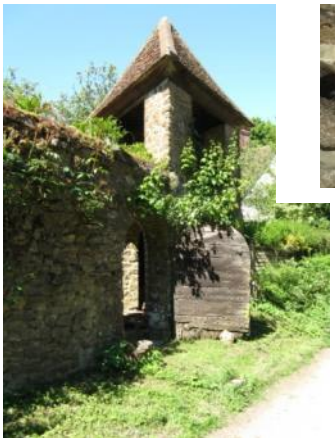
As a 'disciple' of Robinson, at least as far as the idea of natural looking planting goes, the gardens are not for me, not even the knot garden. Of course it is important as an example of Jacobean design, albeit restored, and I therefore view it in the context of its time, and the uses the elements would be put to, rather than deciding how many stars to give it. For that reason I'm glad that I had the opportunity to see the gardens, and indeed the house. I shan't want to go back, but for those who haven't been before, do go. The house alone is worth it and who knows, maybe you will find the gardens more inviting than I did.

John Oakley

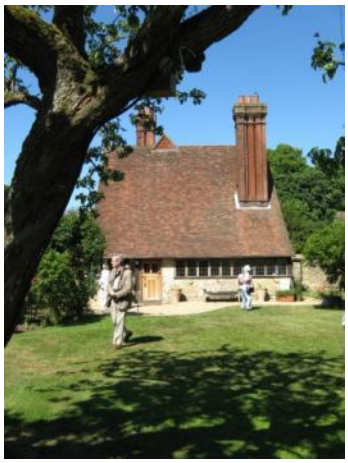
MUNSTEAD WOOD

With Jane Balfour to lead and guide us through our first day, we set off with eager hearts. In bright sunshine, we gazed from the high coach window at hanging tiled roofs, pretty summer gardens and deciduous woods in dappled shade. A magnificent view across to the South Downs added to our pleasure.

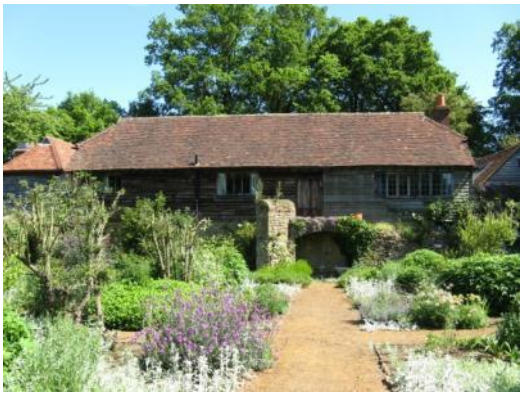
Today was Gertrude Jekyll Day. Her 15-acre garden at Munstead Wood is now privately owned, divided between three keen gardeners. Jane had gained access for us to all three.



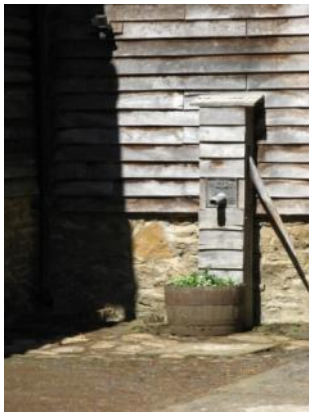
First, we were welcomed by Gordon and Karen Banks, at the Gardener's Cottage, which had been built in 1894 for the Head Gardener. We passed by the Thunder House, where Gertrude Jekyll viewed spectacular storms. Close by was a lovely herbaceous border, with wisteria, orange poppies and blue irises in full flower. Nearby grows a fig, of unidentified variety. The figs taste of honey and were never given away by their first owner.



The house, with its impressive cat's slide roof, is set off by a lawn hedged with geraniums, peonies, foxgloves and many shrub roses, such as "Lady Waterlow". The thriving little box hedges are from cuttings taken from two original bushes.

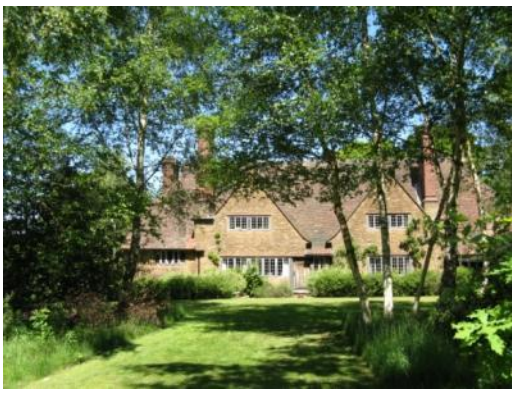


The garden of the Quadrangle has been faithfully and imaginatively restored in the past decade by Gail Lawton. The "Loft and Stables" is the oldest building of 1891, with the old barn store added at a right angle. This was the working part of the garden. The pony and the donkey lived here. Visitors' carriages came in this way. Gertrude Jekyll was ahead of her time in collecting as much rainwater as possible. All the water that drained into the yard was kept and the ancient garden pump still stands. The mulberry and bay tree by the gate are original plantings.



The one acre garden consists of 3 areas. The Square Garden is stocked with grey, white and pink plants, which include "The Garland", a mass of little white roses. Some blue echinops, and yuccas provide structure. The Cross Border contrasted it with its stretch of hot colours. A hedge proved to have a base of red currants over which a guelder rose hung. The latter was identified by our experts as viburnum opulis. Catmint and honesty added to the effect. The June Garden, of which there is an early Country Life photograph, was filled with lupins, irises, tree lupins and mainly cream, mauve and yellow blooms. This was the basis of Gertrude Jekyll's seed store, vital to her important commercial enterprise.

Finally we entered Munstead Wood through a gateway in an old sand-stone wall which provides the backing to the classic and much loved long herbaceous border. We were met by the Head Gardener who only has one other to help him. Astonishing! He revealed some basic rules to be always observed such as never mixing blue and purple. The cool colours at either end of the border shade towards the hot colours at the centre. The effect makes the border look longer. Annuals form part of the colour scheme, such as African marigolds and cannas. As we walked down the nut walk the blackbirds gave full voice.

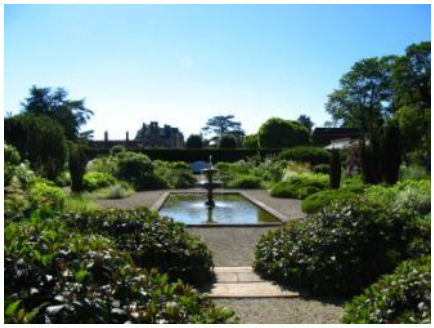


The October garden is full of sedums, pinks, stachys and asters. The Judas Tree, at least 25 feet high, was in full flower.

We were shown round the house, designed by Edwin Lutyens for its tiny owner and noted that all the doorways were of an appropriate scale. The talented Miss Jekyll had crafted all the intricate inlay work on a cupboard door. The house was spacious and still a home. We marvelled at the kindness of the owners in allowing 23 people to tramp through every room and our guide, Lady Clark pointed out many things of interest.

We concluded our visit in the wood that gave the house its name. There were many lovely deciduous trees but the rhododendrons and azaleas were in full flower and their oranges, golds and pinks left us dazzled.

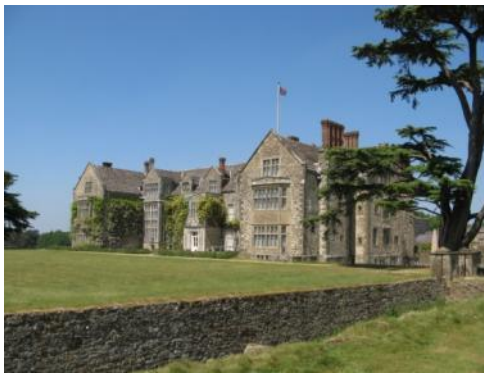
After lunch in Godalming, we visited the Museum to see many documents relating to Gertrude Jekyll. Most of her papers are in the U.S.A. However a book by her brother Frank gave a lot of information about his sister and the family. There were several manuscripts in Gertrude's neat handwriting listing clients, her garden designs and planting layouts. A brief visit to Loseley House ended our day with a cup of tea and more delightful gardens. The Elizabethan House had 5 gardens within a walled garden based on a design by Gertrude Jekyll. These were the award winning Rose Garden, the vine walk, the herb garden, the moat garden and the white garden. Others acknowledged the need to visit at another time to give this lovely spot the attention it deserved. In all a wonderful day!



Irene Jones

PARHAM HOUSE AND GARDEN

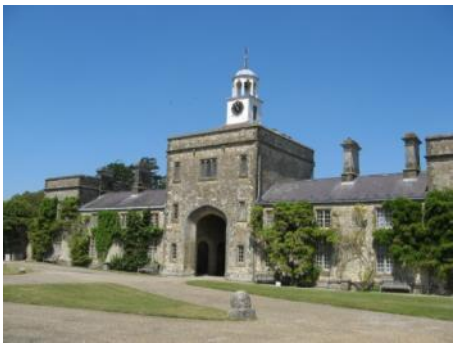
We knew that Friday's visit to Parham in Sussex would be a slight aberration in a "Tour of Surrey Gardens, but it is only in the next county. John devised a beautiful route, twiddly country roads through little hills, little woods, little fields of Surrey, which almost imperceptibly widened out and took on a spacious feel as we entered Sussex. But, in early June, in whatever county, each of the millions of leaves, each of the quadri-million blades of grass, are in fresh green perfection.



Parham Park, as we approached the house, is an undulating green parkland with clumps of ancient trees, all grand and tranquil, a fitting background to the large, gabled, grey stone house in the centre.

We entered through a wide courtyard, the old stables with a big arch and clock tower on one side, the entrance to the grand house opposite, a fountain playing in a round pond between, all calm, spacious and welcoming, with a wisteria on the wall still dripping with blossom.

As members of a Garden Society, we must be expected to come to see the gardens that lie around many Stately Homes, but at Parham the gardens and the house and contents are such a perfect unity that one must comment on the house as well.



We went into the Great Hall with its high mullioned windows reaching to the ceiling, where hung 17th Century portraits of English royalty, statesmen, aristocrats and their wives – so many English faces, rather prim mouths, rather wary eyes, their rather wooden fingers protruding from sleeves heavy with encrusted jewels and embroidery on stiff silk. As Virginia Woolf described them "unwashed limbs thrust into splendid garments."

Up in the Long Gallery – a very long one, is the surprising vaulted ceiling. Along its whole length are green vine leaves and tendrils painted by Oliver Messel, a famous stage-designer

of the 20th Century. It was doubtless a risky act to decorate a gallery filled with furniture, portraits, ceramics, records, etc. with this 20th Century ceiling but I think we all found it charming and appropriate.

But we had come to see the gardens, which, unlike the house and its contents which were actually used and enjoyed centuries ago, are necessarily mostly of the 21st Century, even when it follows ancient designs and uses the same plants as grew here 3 or 4 hundred years ago.

We were fortunate in being taken round by the head gardener, who had only been working there for a few months. I have often been impressed in recent years by the knowledge, the articulate speech, the wise attitudes of the young people who work, and who direct work, in such gardens. They are ambitious in aim, but the aims are controlled by possibilities, modest in assessing their achievements and always so willing to answer questions and share experiences. Their devotion and enthusiasm for their gardens is so apparent and contagious.

We were taken along a walk of bright gold and deep purple foliage plants, to another of perennials (for a constant supply of cut flowers for each room in the house), then to a vegetable garden of raised beds with chillis, courgettes and many others, then on to the small yew-hedged enclosures, one of lavender, another of irises, another of blue-mauve flowers, the air was scented with the first roses and with the low, sun-baked box edging. Eventually we came to the Pleasure Garden, (but they were all pleasure gardens to us, as well as having many other attributes).

As we passed from one to another, our Gardener-Guide described how, a few years ago, whole beds of perennials would be dug up, and dug deeply to remove bindweed and ground elder before replanting and how they had kept hens over these areas to scratch up and eat the hated roots – which they obligingly did. He told us how in other areas they kept pigs, which ate the weeds and manured the earth they had loosened up in their search for roots. All this is self-sustaining gardening, using the animals' instincts and needs to serve the gardeners' aims.

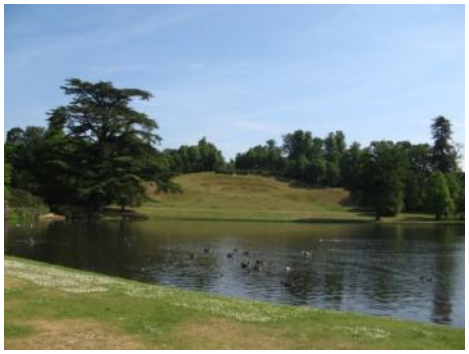
It was a memorable day, enhanced throughout by faultless weather, a clear blue sky, warm sunlight, a light breeze – a perfect June day.

Ann Baer

CLAREMONT LANDSCAPE GARDEN

This 18th century landscape garden was revealed in a series of vistas that appeared as we were led around by our guide, Dorothy. Our first stop was by the lake where we looked across to see the amphitheatre, a grassy bank with semi-circular terraces. On the lake were many water birds including a pair of black swans. When we stopped for a second time several birds and

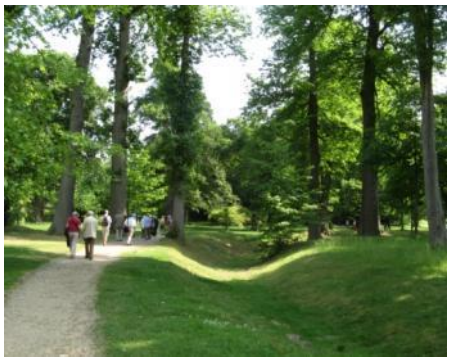
their young circled round our feet in the vain hope of food. The lake itself looked beautiful with perfect reflections of yellow iris and purple rhododendrons on the far side.



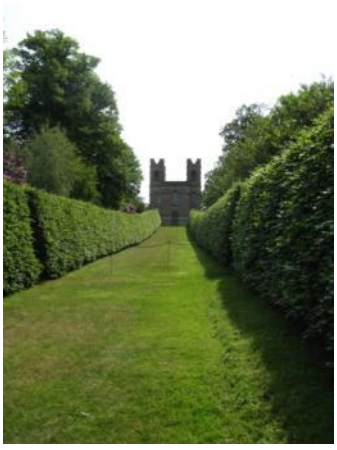
As we continued round the lake we saw a 'kissing seat' under a lime tree, an island with a pavilion (only open to the birds now) and the remains of a grotto. Pieces of the felspar used in the original grotto were taken as souvenirs by members of the public in the 1880's.

While we admired the views, Dorothy described the history of the gardens. The land was first bought and developed by Sir John Vanburgh in 1709, and subsequent owners include: the Duke of Newcastle who gave Claremont its name, Clive of India and Princess Charlotte and Prince Leopold, later to be King of the Belgians. Queen Victoria was a regular visitor to the gardens and they can be seen as a forerunner to other royal retreats such as Osborne House and Balmoral. A succession of the greatest names in British landscape design all left their imprint on the garden, each modifying and expanding rather than destroying what had come before: Vanbrugh himself, then Bridgman, followed by Kent, and finally 'Capability' Brown.

Our tour continued on a path away from the lake through tall trees, copper beech, cedars and sweet chestnuts. On our right was an extensive ha-ha that bordered the wild area and was constructed to control the movement of animals introduced by the Duke of Newcastle. In a clearing we came upon a little thatched house and pond area, now dry. In Victorian times tools were kept in the house, and the gardeners would have met there each morning for prayers.



We then walked upwards to the Camellia Terrace. This was built for Princess Charlotte, and originally comprised a glasshouse for the Camellias and a terrace from which to admire the view. One of the remaining Camellias is called Princess Charlotte and has both white and pink flowers.



The Belvedere was a tall, thin building that appeared suddenly at the top of a slope on our right after we had left the terrace. Apparently it was not built as a folly because it was an extra bit of living space where the men could play cards etc. On our left, opposite the Belvedere, was the bowling green and croquet lawn. From here we walked up to the site of the Ninepin Alley, at the end of which there was once a Turkish tent. Here the ladies could watch ninepins on one side and admire the view on the other.

Finally we came to the highest point of our tour. Foundations had been laid here for a teahouse for Princess Charlotte, but she sadly died giving birth to her

first child and it became her Mausoleum. From this site we could look down over the amphitheatre and across to the lake and island beyond.

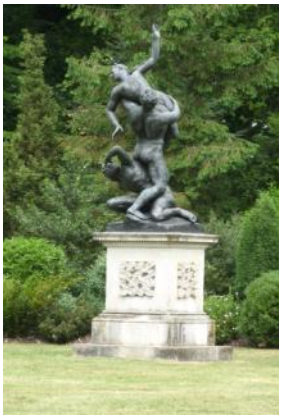
The garden we saw is only a fraction of its original size, but the harmonious blending of landscape styles and the wonderful range of green foliage colour, accentuated by the glorious June sunshine, made for a highly enjoyable visit.

Gill Knight

PAINSHILL

Due to my various infirmities, I had an unusual view of Painshill. Elizabeth had arranged a buggy tour for me and my seat was rear-facing. The lack of seat belts meant hanging on for dear life on steep inclines but we were able to travel almost the entire length and breadth of the masterly, natural and picturesque landscape garden, missing very few of the major features or the magnificent trees.

One might almost say that Henry VIII began the good work by cutting through to create his great deer chase but it is Charles Hamilton in the 18th century to whom my heart warms. After Oxford, he undertook two Grand Tours, bringing back an imposing statue of Bacchus from the second. Over the following thirty years he began to acquire land and to develop it as a romantic landscape. His innovations influenced the later designs of both Stowe and Stourhead.



Our informative driver spoke about all we saw and willingly stopped for us to enter the various follies. The first pause at the Bastion allowed enjoyment of the expansive vista and a surprise glimpse through the hedge of the vineyard. Situated nearby in the amphitheatre we came to my favourite statue of the afternoon, the lovely, waxed-bronze Sabine Women. There also stood a venerable cork oak, (Quercus suber) a staggering survivor of 200 years and more. The endless hours of effort needed to shape hundreds of rounded box bushes, seem well worthwhile as the hedge provides a fascinating border to the wooded area.

Having viewed the lovely coloured wooden roof of the Gothic Temple from within, the great sweep round the lake revealed the Turkish Tent placed as a gazebo where one could again see the Gothic Temple and its reflection deep down in the water, resulting in an equally charming effect. Today's reconstruction of the tent has replaced the disintegrated plaster and sailcloth with resin and fibreglass but it appears as exotic as ever.

Refreshed on this hot day by a cooling updraft of air from the precipice by the site of the Temple of Bacchus, we felt able to stroll along the Elysian Plains among the islands of colourful plantings, meeting the buggy at the far end. Thankfully the driver's invitation to climb the Gothic Tower at the garden's furthest reach could be declined as time was running on, so bypassing the Hermitage and Waterwheel, we instead returned to the Grotto where we walked over the floor of various sized brick ordered according to Hamilton's whim. Its ceiling is now a bossed wooden framework awaiting a cladding of crystal shards to simulate stalactites. This may take some time to complete

as we heard how David Attenborough had needed five hours to embed crystals covering just one tiny part. I must admit that the whole thing did fill me with wonder as I imagined its mineral decor would once have been a breathtaking sight when lit by lanterns for Hamilton's picnics, especially having entered through the mass of water-worn rocks at the lakeside.

From only 1981, Painshill Park Trust has done a wonderful job of rescuing the Estate from dereliction, restoring its delights and saving, among other trees, the renowned massive cedar of Lebanon and two towering pyramids of the swamp cypress (Taxodium distichum).

Despite its being one of the earliest of the romantic landscape gardens, I found Painshill the most intriguing I have visited; its various follies and trees are cleverly located as a succession of surprises as the garden is toured.

Diana Jinks

POLESDEN LACEY

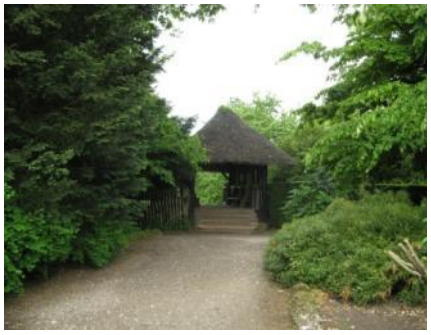
The Polesden Lacey estate, now owned by National Trust, has remained largely intact since the Middle Ages. A new house, built in 1818, forms the core of the house today. In 1906 the Hon. Mr and Mrs Ronald Greville bought the house and Mewes and Davis, designers of the Ritz Hotel in London, were commissioned to make further alterations. For the Grevilles, friends of Edward VII, money was no object and so Margaret Greville transformed the house into an impressive and luxurious country house, fit for royalty and society entertaining, with magnificent views over the Surrey countryside.

Waiting outside the house for our tour of the gardens to begin, it was easy to imagine what a wonderful setting for entertaining this would be and Margaret Greville was undoubtedly a magnificent and influential High Society hostess for nearly 40 years; 'One uses up so many red carpets in a season….' she said. She was resident at weekends between May and January, hosting large house-parties during Ascot week and over Christmas and New Year.

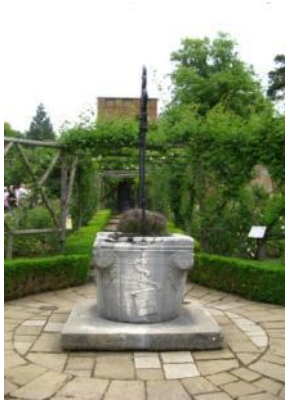
The grounds were also designed to entertain, there being a golf course, tennis courts, croquet lawn and game-bird shooting. Mrs Greville's involvement in the gardens was more one of consolidation and improvement, due to the sudden death of her husband in 1908. Plans for complex change were exchanged for a simpler layout of linked gardens enclosed by walls or hedges, a new rose garden, rockery and an enlarged kitchen garden to provide fruit and vegetables for the table and cut flowers for the house. The soil is thin and not well suited to luxuriant planting, but still with help from her 15 gardeners, persistence and of course large amounts of money, she created one of the great Edwardian gardens. She invited her royal guests to plant a specimen tree at the western end of the lawn in front of the house but sadly these 'royal' trees were lost in the great storm of 1987.

Our tour of the gardens was delightful. From the magnificent views across the sloping south Lawn, a great place to fly a kite, as

Deb remembered from a previous visit, we moved on to the sunken garden surrounded by trees before ascending onto the croquet lawn. Apparently a maharajah liked to have the room overlooking the lawn so he could watch the ladies. Mrs Greville, ever the good hostess, made special arrangements when he stayed for an outside kitchen, so the smell of curry did not pervade the house.



It was easy to get a feel for Mrs Greville's garden as we strolled along the herbaceous border, now only planted on one side, past the substantial Head Gardener's house and through the walled or hedged 'rooms' – the iris garden, lavender garden, peony garden and rose garden. The Edwardian rose garden was created from the 19th century enclosed kitchen garden. It is dominated by a water tower supplied with water pumped from a reservoir at the bottom of the valley and is divided into four by paths passing beneath delicate pergolas. Where they meet in the centre is a 14th century Venetian well head. The new enlarged kitchen garden was across the sunken right of way, and accessed via a thatched bridge. Beyond the rose garden is the pet cemetery and in an enclosure surrounded on three sides by yew hedges, Mrs Greville's own grave.



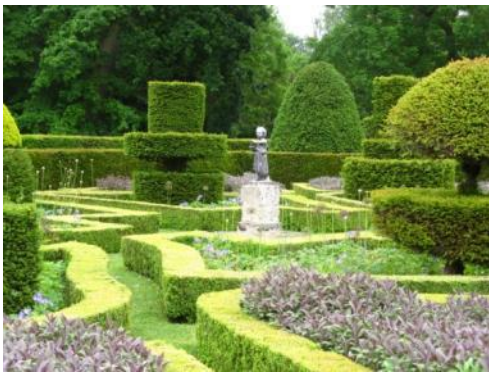
Time again was short, but there was just time for a glimpse of the treasures inside the house. The lavish interior of a bygone age with a wealth of photographs and gifts from her guests really required much longer. The Polesden Lacey visitors book, first signatory Edward VII and the 'Dinner Book' listing all lunch, dinner and weekend guests, often with menu details, are also there. Mrs Greville was certainly 'the hostess with the mostest'!

Annie Bainbridge-Ayling and Deborah Martin

GREAT FOSTERS HOTEL

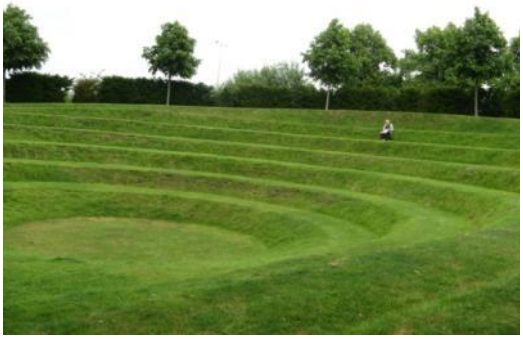
We'd started the holiday with a view over the Thames from Richmond Hill, an area included in the 'Thames Landscape Strategy' done by Kim Wilkie (1991-94), and now our last visit was to see another of his projects in the grounds of Great Fosters, a family owned hotel, since it was purchased in 1930 by Sir Harold Sutcliffe.

Knowing the proximity of the site to the M25, it was surprising how long it took us to arrive after leaving the motorway, but as we turned into the gravel drive, it was clear to see why this house is Grade I listed. Walking in through the porch under the arms of Queen Elizabeth I and the date of 1598, it was like stepping back in time as we went through the beautiful dark panelled interior, more Tudor hunting lodge than hotel, and out into the garden.



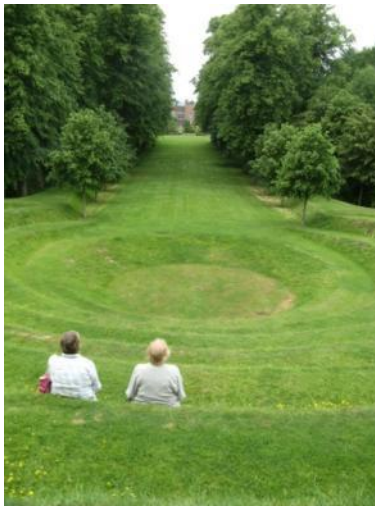
We were uncertain as to what we expected to see, as we walked out, but it certainly wasn't the beautiful formal gardens that greeted us. We'd been asked not to walk through the gardens because of the slippery grass, but walking down

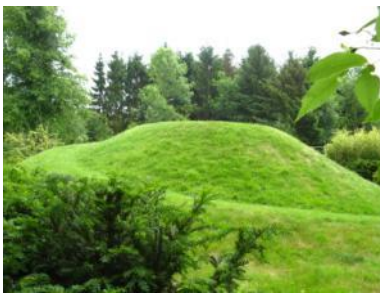
the side of the formal gardens framed on three sides by a Saxon moat, there were tantalising glimpses of the gardens originally designed by W H Romaine and Gilbert Jenkins after the house was purchased by Gerald Montague in 1918. These grade II* listed gardens, restored in the 1990s are among the finest Arts and Crafts gardens in Europe.



We'd come to see Kim Wilkie's turf amphitheatre, (could the 18th century amphitheatre at Claremont have been the inspiration?), and time was limited, so, leaving the formal gardens behind us, we headed down through the double lime avenue towards the M25 and the magnificent amphitheatre. At the top of the amphitheatre the drone of motorway traffic was all too apparent and the blue gantry signs clearly visible just over the fence, but moving down a couple of tiers, and sitting admiring the view, the traffic noise no longer intruded on the peaceful setting.

We could happily have sat there longer, but the formal gardens beckoned. In 2000, Great Fosters had purchased adjacent land, once part of the estate, enabling the formation of a new lake and the formal gardens to be set in a natural wooded setting. No time to do more than walk a short distance along the lake side but it was peaceful and reflections of surrounded trees and rushes added to its beauty – it looked as if it had been there for ever.





As the path entered the formal gardens, a viewing mound, reminiscent of 'The Garden of Cosmic Speculation' on a very small scale, just had to be climbed before entering the sunken rose garden – a profusion of scent and colour and enclosed by a ring of rose covered arches. Then it was back over the arched wooden bridge, swathed in wisteria, for a better view of the parterres making up the knot garden, before lunch.

What a lovely way to end the holiday; only wish we could have had longer here.

Deborah Martin and Annie Bainbridge-Ayling