

LRGT

Travel Edition

Shropshire Gardens

6th-9th June 2011



Keeping a space for the bus

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Shropshire 2011

When we realised that a short break in Holland had attracted little interest we had to go to our next option, which was Shropshire. Within the day of Friends receiving the flyer, all 23 places had been booked. Suggestions of gardens to add to our list came in from Friends, and particularly, and most helpfully, from Fiona Grant of the Walled Garden Forum. She lives in Shropshire, and was therefore able to suggest some places, such as the marvellous Walled Garden at Attingham and the delightful Glansevern. She dissuaded us from including others which she felt would be disappointing.

The hotel in Shrewsbury, The Lion was an easy choice for Travel Editions as they had used it before for other groups. It proved to be a popular choice, central to the town for morning and evening strolls and hurried shopping trips. The food was good and there were plenty of single rooms. So, all was in order until a week before we were due to go, when the Administration at Powis Castle asked Travel Editions to change the itinerary. This left us with a gap at the end, which meant finishing the trip with two hours in Shrewsbury, finding another garden or coming home a little earlier. By happy chance, Irene spotted Bryan's Ground in Presteigne, which was featured in The Daily Telegraph on the following Saturday. This is the garden of David Wheeler, editor of Hortus; it looked intriguing and gave us our last and perhaps most controversial garden.

In my usual slightly pessimistic way I thought, well, this is a second choice and perhaps it might be difficult to maintain previous standards. I could not have been more mistaken. All the gardens were of contrasting dates and styles and their owners, when we met them, utterly charming and welcoming. Katherine Swift at Morville for example, with her large garden to maintain, not only made her own biscuits but invited twenty three strangers into her sitting room to enjoy them with our coffee. I do not know which garden was my favourite, as they all had particular merits: the setting at Morville and the planting at Wollerton to name but two. However, at the idiosyncratic Bryan's Ground, I did not want to leave the lake near the river, in the late afternoon light, it was very peaceful with just the sound of a gentle breeze in the trees and occasional bird call.

I have mentioned the gardens and hotel but there is one person who acts as a lynchpin to the whole trip and that is of course John Hales, our driver. His attention to detail ensures our continuing comfort and convenience; many thanks are due to him and of course, as ever to Jo Blair at Travel Editions who does all the planning on which the success of the trip depends.

So it was alright on the night and plans are now in hand for next year. We are going to Suffolk, the week beginning June 11th. We have a very reliable contact there who will advise us on interesting and unusual visits.

Elizabeth Bacon

The Walled Kitchen Garden at Attingham

Although wealthy landowners of the 18th and 19th centuries were proud of their kitchen gardens they did not want the gardeners to be seen from the grand house, so they were situated well out of sight and guests would be invited to be shown the garden by the proud owner. When Humphrey Repton was at Attingham he redirected the approach to a grand entrance opposite an equally grand peach house, very impressive.

Kitchen gardens were busy productive spaces with gardeners weeding, watering, sowing harvesting and planning for the next year. Attingham's walled garden covers 2.5 acres; each acre was expected to produce food for twelve people with two to three gardeners to each acre.

The Head Gardener and his staff were expected to supply the house with fruit, vegetables and cut flowers. He would live on the estate whilst the young unmarried would live in bothies attached to the walled garden, enabling them to attend the boilers which were needed to maintain temperatures for the exotic fruit production. After the Second World War social structures changed and maintenance of large houses and estates became impossible. Attingham was no exception; it became an Adult Education College and the walled garden was a football pitch. When The National Trust took it over, Christmas Trees were planted as



a cash crop. This is a rare example of a Georgian kitchen garden which had the luck not to be tampered with in Victorian times or demolished in the nineteen fifties or sixties.

Restoration of the garden began in 2008 when certain criteria were laid down. The Georgian garden was to be brought to life with its original purpose restored, produce and cut flowers were to be used in the house café and shop, no change was to be made to existing structures and a lovely space created for visitors. It was to be evolution not revolution.



Kate Nicoll is the Head Gardener and she took us on our guided tour. We started by entering through the Repton entrance on the lawn south of the garden where there is a Regency Bee House designed by either John Nash or Repton himself. It is one of only two in the country and they were placed in the garden to aid pollination.

On entering, remains of white wash, nails and now demolished buildings can be seen on the walls. There is a well and dipping pond in the centre. Water was taken from the well and

emptied into the dipping pond to raise its temperature by the sun.

To date, about half the garden is under cultivation and in accordance with the restoration plan, supplying the house and café with cut flowers and vegetables. Organic manure is used as fertiliser and crops are grown on a strict system of rotation. There is a variety of vegetables grown, beans, peas, onions etc as well as cut flower beds and step-over fruit trees.

Abutting the garden is a frame yard, now used as a children's play area and for growing soft fruit. The back sheds are part of the restoration and it is hoped to excavate the Peach House. One of the bothies acts as a mess and there is a wonderfully preserved winter vegetable store, I think I liked this area best of all. Beyond this north wall is an orchard with apples, pears, damsons, plums and walnuts, all of which are being carefully tended. We ended our visit with a glass of



their delicious freshly produced apple juice. This garden really is a tribute to the National Trust for taking on such a project, the Walled Garden Forum for their research and input, but particularly to Kate Nicoll, the head gardener, one of the many splendid such people we have met on our visits and for whom I have great admiration for their dedication and hard work.

Elizabeth Bacon

Hawkstone Park and Historic Follies

Hawkstone Park is an 18th Century romantic garden. The Grade 1 listed historic park attracts around 60,000 visitors a year. Sir Rowland Hill, Lord Mayor of London, purchased Hawkstone in 1556. Eventually the land passed to another Sir Rowland Hill and during the 18th Century the gardens began in earnest.

The park is set among four natural limestone crags jutting out of the Shropshire plain. It is a part-natural and part man-made landscape which has attracted visitors for more than 200 years. Hawkstone Park is a fantasy land of cliffs, crags, caves, follies, ravines, tree capped hills, tunnels, mature woodland, designed to be breath- taking and inspire awe and wonder in the visitors as they walked along the precipitous cliff edge walks and marvelled at the views over the Shropshire and Cheshire plains, Cannock Chase and the Welsh mountains.



The Hill family made major changes to the park and had a taste for landscape gardening on a grand scale. Woodland walks were laid out over the four limestone crags and a resident hermit was installed in the hermitage. Sir Richard Hill decided that a river and lake should be built after Dr Samuel Johnson remarked that the park needed water. A 'ruined' Gothic arch on Grotto Hill, an urn and the 100 foot high monument, with an internal staircase, topped by a statue of the original Sir Rowland Hill were constructed. The Swiss Bridge was constructed, as improvements continued over the decades.

After generations of gradually building and improving the park, the fourth baronet, yet another Sir Rowland Hill, inherited a large fortune and managed to spend

every penny and the estate began to fall apart. In 1875 his son inherited the estate and he went bankrupt within 20 years.

In 1906 the estate was split up and by then the walks and follies had been neglected for about 50 years, the decay of the follies continued when parts of the park were used as a prisoner of war camp during the 2 World War.

Hawkstone Park was purchased in 1990 in a very poor state after years of neglect. The walks were overgrown, the monument had lost its statue and suffered from weather erosion, the White Tower and the Red Castle were in a state of disrepair.



In 1993 the owners, Principal Hayley, started to restore the parkland at a cost of £4.5 million. Restoration continues and Hawkstone Park has been saved from the neglect it had suffered from over many decades.



The walk up the woodland paths to the Urn, the Red Castle and the Monument were well worth the climb up the steps. It was disappointing to find we were unable to gain access to the Monument which had been cordoned off by the police as some vandals had tried to break in during the previous night. There were plenty of delightful views to be seen and it was fun trying to identify exactly where we were in the park as we walked through Fox's Knob, The Squeeze, and finished back in the Grand Valley.



Sensible shoes are a must for anyone walking in the park.

Sarah Bailey

The Dower House: Morville Hall

Some of us, like me, had already read Katherine Swift's lovely book "The Morville House" before our visit to her garden, and others bought a copy at her house and have read it since. It tells us so vividly of the character, tastes, and background of the person who designed and made this garden, and then, on seeing the garden, our appreciation of her book is increased.

There are two different experiences here. We approach and find a wide semi-circle of smooth grass, a ha-ha along the circle's diameter, at the apex a three storey grey stone Georgian house, (actually hiding an Elizabethan interior), curved walls round the semi-circle to two grey stone buildings each side, originally stables, with white wooden clock towers on each, (why did the horses need to know the time?) and the



church between trees a little way beyond. The whole of this against a backdrop of a smooth green hill topped with a swathe of woods against the sky. It is all very spacious, tranquil and ancient.

Through a small door in the curved wall and along an ivied path we find ourselves at the back of the big house and at the front door of Katherine Swift's house, with her formal gardens laid out in front, sheltered, private and detailed, a great contrast to the other front.



I once knew a man whose job was planning campaigns for London Transport's publicity. He told me when starting a new job he remembered what the Dancing Teacher at his primary school had said at the start of a lesson, "Now, children, listen to the music quietly, then let yourself go!" (Good advice in many situations). I think Katherine Swift followed this advice in making her garden. For her, the music was her great knowledge of history and literature, of plants and flowers, and she let herself go with her ambitious planting, all within the discipline of her knowledge, imagination and experience.

Within a firm frame-work of clipped yew hedges in accurately formal positions, within the precise shapes of beds and arches, her roses ramp exuberantly, beds overflow with abundant pinks and columbines and the result is all as Katherine Swift devised. I have a feeling, partly induced by reading her book, that the usual passing of time does not apply at Morville. It is in abeyance, or it co-exists with the present. Her knott garden, for example, is not a reconstruction of a 16th century one, but co-exists, and the blowsy pink roses, pouring out petals on the grass and scenting the air continue to do what they have always done, season after season, for ever. And the swallows and martins which skim the water and swoop



up to their nests with a beakful of insects are doing what they have done perpetually ever since the last ice-age melted and left the Shropshire soil flattened and fertile for the slow cultivation by migrant peasants – those who tamed cows and sheep, who planted corn and apple trees, who dug out rocks and trimmed them square to build walls, who cast iron into bells to ring out in the evening air to mark the passing hours, which passed and were yet the same.

Among all Katherine Swift's gardens we surely all have our favourites. Outstanding in my memory are the pale blue planters with citrus trees in them along the stone edging of the long pond in the 17th century garden with a great old pear tree, with bark like crocodile leather,

hanging over it, and beds each side with clumps of white foxgloves – or the Victorian rose garden with more white foxgloves mixed with pinks (? Sops-in-wine) and huge whitey-green



serrated leaves of the artichokes mixed with the neat purple-red of a smoke-bush – or was it a berberis? Then there is the Nuttery and Wild Garden, hazels and wild roses intertwined, narrow paths mown guiding us through meadows of tall grass, buttercups, sorrel and daisies, and old fruit trees, one completely hidden by a smothering mountain of pink roses, unprunably large.

If it is difficult to find a favourite area in Katherine Swift's garden, so it is difficult to find a favourite in all the gardens Elizabeth Bacon found for us on this tour, but I think "A Short Stroll through History at Morville" is my favourite, and in early June, it was at its most exquisite.

As 8-year old Marjory Fleming wrote in her diary (before her governess corrected her spelling) in 1810, commenting on a garden she had visited, "I enjoyed rurel filisity to perfection".

Ann Baer



Contrasts: Jessamine Cottage Gardens and Preen Manor

We visited these two gardens on the same afternoon, and despite their relative proximity and settings, they presented something of a contrast.

Both had the advantage of being on sloping ground, with views into valleys, and then up towards not too distant hills. But whereas Jessamine was a bit like reading a collection of rather uneven short stories by a miscellaneous collection of writers; Preen has the completeness of a novel with chapters offering differing insights into the character of the place.



Jessamine is the more recent of the two, having been begun more or less with the new millennium. The owners, the Wheelers, had spent many years in New Zealand, and, starting from scratch, wanted to import aspects of what they had experienced there into the Shropshire landscape. The result is a series of experiences, rather than anything coherent; some wonderful individual moments, and some frankly jarring ones.



The emphasis is on the informal, and the informality worked best when least 'exotic'; such as the marshy area, well wooded and reached via some very low pollarded willows. The predominant brown and green colours appeared lit by primulas, brightly coloured but not excessive in this context.

Another more 'natural' area was the pond; delightfully planted with flags and waterlilies, as well as reeds, and a plant which

none of us had come across before, *Gillenia Trifolita*. About eighteen inches to two feet in height, with delicate foliage and delightful white flowers it could well be the new 'must have' for LRGT members!

The more strident parts of the garden, the large island beds stuffed with a variety plants; bright red potentilla, viburnum, Japanese maple, black elder....and beds with brightly coloured but non-scented roses looked oddly out of place in such a rural setting and, saddest of all, almost obscuring the lovely landscape, a beautiful pale cornus *Contraversa Variagata*; like a ghost come to spoil the party.



The delightful lime walk and meadow area, and the little parterre, while charming in their own right, added to the feeling of the parts not really making a whole.

After our wander, we were all treated to a very nice (and welcome) cup of tea, with some delicious cake to go with it. As we sat enjoying this treat there was a brief, but dramatic hailstorm: perfectly timed for us to watch from the safety of the timber tea room.

Whilst Jessamine seems almost willfully to ignore its natural advantages in terms of its setting, **Preen**, with as many contrasting areas of garden, never forgets it. Whilst the Manor itself is not very old, the site must have been inhabited since pre-medieval times as near the house is (what claims to be) Europe's oldest tree, a yew dating from 457AD. The garden in its present form is just over thirty years old, though, along with the most ancient yew, there are some magnificent 19th century yews, cedars and laurels. As with Jessamine, the site slopes down to a valley, with a view to Wenlock edge beyond. But as a garden it follows the more traditional structure of having the more formal aspects nearer the house, and becoming wilder and less obviously cultivated as one progressed downhill.

Each part of the garden, although self-contained, appears perfectly placed and logical; the little canal with its symmetry, the topiary near the parterre, which echoes and mimics the wall with its little turret-shaped chimneys, the delightful parterre just above, filled with temptations (I resisted trying the gooseberries)...nothing jarred or felt out of place.



But whilst the formal areas were lovely, for me the best parts were those which seemed to revel in their setting. The view from one of the terraces, framed by a truly magnificent cedar, is almost worth a visit by itself. And further down, as the ground becomes damper and more uneven, you reach the strangest part of the garden. A series of laurels tangled and tall, far



removed from their suburban image, left, it would seem to their own devices so that their roots protrude snake-like, and sinister; a place to spook an imaginative child. Furthermore, there are the remains of an old stone wall, the remains of the medieval Cluniac monastery



which must have followed the pre-Christian settlement suggested by the ancient yew. This is, as it were, the bottom left corner of the garden. Still relatively wild, but less 'gothic' is the right hand corner, looking into the valley and with a little notice naming, and pointing towards all the world's most famous gardens, Preen included!

From there back towards the house, a lovely stand of birch, a delightful meadow, and then the more formal aspects again. Looking at the

house from slightly below, and the little chapel next to it, the stone set off by climbing roses (or is it the other way round?), the garden appears to fit both house and landscape perfectly. Drinking yet more tea, but too full of Jessamine cake to appreciate the biscuits on offer, we could sit and look at the odd and enormous chimneys, only bits of the Norman Shaw house left after the whole was demolished. One would like to think that the garden, though more recent, would survive somewhat longer.

Sue Wragg

Powis Castle

The famous hanging gardens of Powis Castle rise to four hundred and fifty feet and were blasted from the massive outcrop of rock around 1700. By 1705 a water garden in the Dutch style was completed at the base of the terraces. A perspective view of Powis Castle dated 1742 shows the terraced garden built for the 1st and 2nd Marquesses. The regimented planting and symmetry of the architectural features and obelisk-shaped yew trees can be seen clearly.



Over the subsequent three hundred years fashion changes have dictated changes within the garden. By 1771 William Eames was engaged to landscape the Park which involved new planting on the wilderness ridge opposite the Castle and removal of a public road on the north side. During the late eighteenth century the gardens were neglected and it was left to Lord Clive (the son of the conqueror of India) to carry out repairs. Part of these works saw the replacement of the baroque water garden by the Great Lawn. The lead statuary originally within

the Water Garden was distributed to new sites about the Castle. The early twentieth century saw Lady Violet, wife of the fourth Earl, convert the kitchen garden which was too visible from the Castle, into formal gardens.

Our visit coincided with the NGS Open Day so we were able to have a conducted tour of the terraces by a final-year student whose training was paid for by the NGS. At the time of our visit the planting on the Top Terrace had just been renewed for the coming season and was still to develop its jungle-like form. The plants used here are only a fraction of the six thousand that are produced annually within nearby glasshouses. On the Top Terrace tender plants are dug up and overwintered in greenhouses whilst others like Banana plants are well wrapped for protection. The recent very severe winters have caused additional problems.

At the eastern end of this terrace, framing a lead statue of Hercules, is a famous feature of Powis Castle, a three hundred year old, fantastic cloud-shaped yew hedge, thirty feet high. The yews planted along the Top Terrace wall have expanded over the years, so escaping their original obelisk shape. Two replacement yews on the terrace edge were far less visually appealing. No doubt time will improve them. Until a few years ago the yew hedge



was trimmed using ladders, planks and scythes. Now a crane is used to lift a cherry-picker onto a platform at the back of the hedge. However, it still takes four gardeners eight weeks to cut it and the terrace yews. At present these gardens are kept in superb condition by six full-time and two part-time gardeners with help from two seasonal workers. I particularly liked the pediment niches in the wall of this terrace which held decorated planters containing Rhodochitons and Fuchias.

We then moved down a level to the Aviary Terrace where the supposed Aviary of this terrace now



housed tender plants, mostly scented Rhododendrons such as Lady Alice Fitzwilliam. The balustrade outside was adorned with lead urns and figures of shepherds and shepherdesses. Down another level and we were on the Orangery Terrace. The Orangery housed mostly Clivias with the potted Seville orange trees outside. The Orange trees looked somewhat bare and it was hoped that funds would be made available to replace them. Standing in front of the Orangery the Grand Vista takes ones eye across the Great Lawn and woodland to the beautiful landscape beyond and at this point the conducted tour ended. We wandered along the Hot Border (still to reach its peak) but huge red poppies of the Goliath Group (Beauty of Livermere) were blooming now. Descending the Box Walk we came to the impressive

formal gardens. Here we first visited the Bothy and Croquet Lawn garden with its four differing but equally splendid borders. My favourite border contained delphiniums, scabious and geraniums while the wall was draped with pastel roses in white, cream, yellow and pink. The main Formal Garden was sloped, contained fruit trees and a vine walk. One end had pillars decorated with wonderful climbing roses and at the other end the pillars were smothered with honeysuckles. Then into the Fountain Garden with its impressive iron gate, sundial and yet more attractive flower borders. It was quite restful to move into the green of the Yew Walk, Great Lawn and Woodland Garden with only the pink of wild campion and purple of rhododendrons adding a splash of colour beneath the many varied species of trees and shrubs. Standing directly opposite the Orangery we had a magnificent view back to the terraces. At the end of the woodland path we came to the Stable Pond with photographic reflections of trees and sky.



History and climate have changed this garden for the better from stark formality to an impressive united whole that blends beautifully with its surroundings. The original big bang at Powis has left a truly stunning garden with a plethora of plants, a surfeit of statues and structures, and fantastic views towards the Clee Hills and Long Mountain, far too much to assimilate on a first visit of two and a half hours.

Hazel and Ron Cooper

Wollerton Old Hall

The curved gravel drive with its grassed borders was not very encouraging after Chris Beardshaw's quote "*Possibly the most beautiful personal garden to have been created in the last 25 years*". However, the ochre coloured, half-timbered house (1530) at the end showed more promise. To our surprise the extension to the right was only 9 years old; it blended in perfectly.

Andrew, the Head Gardener for 7 years, gave us a brief history and introduction pointing out that Lesley and John Jenkins had bought the house, where Lesley had lived previously as a child. When they moved in 20 years ago the gardens were undeveloped and consisted mainly of fruit trees and piles of rubble. To begin with they replanted her mother's herbaceous border and put in some island beds, fashionable at the time. A few years later, deciding they didn't like these, they planted hedges to supplement the existing walls, making a series of interconnecting rooms and sheltering the garden from the Shropshire winds. Lesley is an artist and with her sense of colour and John's plantsmanship – he favours



clematis of which there are some 150 varieties and salvias, some 80 varieties in the garden, each room creates a distinct atmosphere, some formal, some informal, some with whites and pastels, some vibrant and at the bottom of the garden a wild area leading out to the Shropshire countryside.

Entering the garden from the right hand side of the house, via a narrow path, we came into the first formal courtyard running along the back of the house. The simple arrangements of standard box balls in half barrels underplanted with

white viola were a delight. This cool colour scheme was echoed in front of a bay window of the old house with white geraniums in pots arranged around a beautiful stone urn. Turning away from the house the central axis continues down a path, bordered by pleached portugese laurels, through formal maze like hedging, crossing the pool garden, with pleached limes beyond and offering tantalising views of less formal borders to either side. Wandering off to the right brings you to a summer house and through the side doors, a sea of nepeta backed with pink peonies and roses. WOW!! Wading through the waist high nepeta, buzzing with



bumble bees, released perfumes which almost overwhelmed the senses. The path leads to an octagonal gazebo which offers the chance to sit and contemplate the beauties of the scene.

Passing through the rooms, being lead from one vista to the next, made it impossible to work out exactly where you were. Trying to re-trace your steps, meant you stumbled across even more delights, such as the total informality of the wild Croft Garden, with its deep pool, rustic bridge and stunning white birches, the hot planting



surrounding the Well Garden and the cool green lawns of the Font Garden with its fine topiary obelisks and rills. There was just not enough time to sit on the numerous seats and take in the joys of each of the 14 rooms.

This garden has literally something for everyone to enjoy and we defy anyone to find words to describe it fully. Although not an enormous garden, 2 acres, Lesley and

John have skilfully composed a symphony of colours, shapes and perfumes supported by very clever planting to delight the senses.



Annie Bainbridge and Deborah Martin

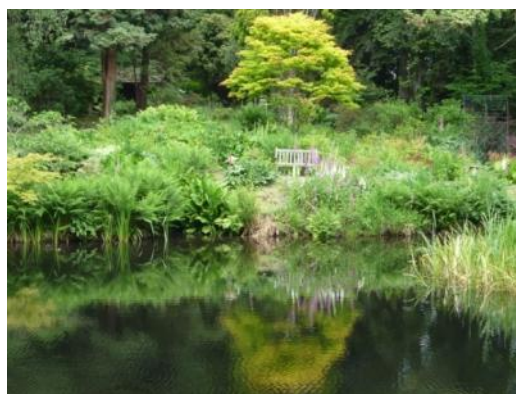
Glansevern Hall

We approached Glansevern along a two-tone avenue of copper beeches and sweet chestnut trees, and wondered how it might compare with the delights of Wollerton Old Hall and Preen Manor. We arrived only seconds before another coach carrying a party from Belgium. Some initial consternation over the logistics of our visit was soon overcome, and we were ushered into a large courtyard. Here we were given a brief history of the garden, and issued with a leaflet that included an illustrated map offering a suggested route around the four main areas: the Lake garden, the Formal garden, the Folly garden and the Walled garden. The courtyard itself boasted a fountain, a central bed divided into four individually planted sections and a less-than-flattering statue of Laura Ashley by Katie Scarlett Howard. On the way out of the courtyard we passed a sign advertising on-site dental services, an unusual opportunity to be found on a garden visit!



Lake Garden

This for me was the most attractive area of the garden. The lake was surrounded by a mixture of mature trees underplanted with a variety of shrubs and flowers. The undergrowth was enhanced by naturalised Turkscap lilies. We followed a green path around the lake, past a beautifully planted damp garden to a gracefully arched bridge. All around we were treated to a series of beautiful views across and down the length of the lake, with stunning reflections of colourful trees and flowers. A central island was surrounded by masses of Water Lilies. There were many unusual trees, some of them listed in the leaflet, but others more difficult to identify.



Formal Garden



This was the area immediately to the front and side of the hall. On the South side the path took us through attractive wrought iron gates that led to a long pool flanked by small, clipped, variegated holly trees. The soil under them was top-dressed with slate, but somehow the combination was not pleasing to the eye. However, steps up to the house were nicely softened by creeping Campanula, and a border of Nepeta

provided contrast with the rather stark, grey walls of the house. On the East side there was a Wisteria walk edged with Roses leading to a fountain, and further on an Orangery containing healthy exotic plants. Three island beds planted with Philadelphus and purple-leaved Sambucus provided a pleasant backdrop and led the eye to the countryside beyond.

Folly Garden

This was an area of mature trees centred round a sculpture of two boxing hares beside a round summer house containing historic pictures of house and gardens. A walk across a meadow took us to a bird hide that offered views along the River Severn and River Rhiew - a lovely peaceful setting. Back in the garden we walked on to the Rockery and Grotto. This was a large mound planted with a mediocre collection of rock plants and housing a dark tunnel, the grotto. Not particularly impressive, but probably great fun for children. Once in the light again we entered a lawned area flanked by a high hedge on one side and the walled garden on the other.



Walled Garden

Here order reigned. On entering we found ourselves in a gravelled and paved area with some carefully placed urns from which we could access the more secluded areas. Fruit trees attractively underplanted with deep purple Iris and mauve Scabious were trained along the wall. There was a central path, the Akebia Walk, surrounded by geometric, well-planted beds of predominantly white flowers, edged with low beech hedges. Two pergolas led away from the centre and to the right of one there was a cottage garden complete with a wooden house and wild strawberries. Finally, tucked away in a corner, was a vegetable patch, with a greenhouse against the wall, and some raised beds.



We concluded our visit with a delicious dressed crab salad, very reasonably priced, in the Courtyard café.

Gill & Paul Knight

Bryan's Ground

The approach to this garden is stunning. In front of an ochre walled Arts and Crafts House is a rill. From the entrant's viewpoint, it is initially curving but straightens near the house. On



either side, in a perfect square of wild grasses and tall blue irises, standing as sentinels, are rows of apple trees. It is immensely pleasing to the eye.



Then there is so much more to see. There are many smaller garden rooms. Some are quirky and reveal a gardener with a sense of humour. These include one with a shoe tree and a collection of iron which includes a rusting dashboard and steering wheel. These are not to my taste. However there is so much else to enjoy. The quiet yew edged garden with its canal and statue of a large sitting hound is a place of tranquillity. The Belvedere is a massive



concrete seat with a wonderful view over the Herefordshire countryside. The dovecote, which includes a dining room on the first floor, leads into cleverly planted areas. The loggia, where we had tea and cake, is charmingly presented with fifties tablecloths and china. A collection of Cornish ware on a high shelf is almost concealed, close to the ceiling. Among these pots we spotted a nesting swift and a sparrow family.

The greenhouse had many beautiful geraniums in full flower and in the centre was a Spanish tiled fountain, reminiscent of one at Chelsea Flower Show in recent years. There is an Arboretum, a Lime Walk, an Orchard and a crocus lawn which no doubt is lovely at the right time of year. Peonies, Johnson's Blue cranesbill and

white daisies fill some of the colourful borders. A striking copper beech hedge conceals lovely displays of herbaceous mauves, whites and old pink poppies, possibly Patty's Plum. The borders then lead you to the Sulking House - a Gothic pavilion built by Simon Dorrell which should prove of value in many a garden.



Bryan's Ground covers 30 acres. The unusual name refers to the territory of a twelfth century Lord of the Marches. David Wheeler is editor of the gardening quarterly "Hortus", and his partner Simon Dorrell is the Art Editor. It is only later in the day that we learn from Simon, that he spent two whole days, in the rain planting 1,000 irises which with ten flowers on each plant gives you some idea of the spectacle provided. Simon and David bought the house in 1993, and it is the last house in Herefordshire before you enter Wales. It was built in 1911-13 for Elizabeth and Mary Durning daughters of a Liverpool shipping magnate. Visitors to the house included George Bernard Shaw and David Lloyd George. I think we were very fortunate to have added ourselves to this list!

Irene Jones