



# Kent Gardens Trust Newsletter

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## CELEBRATIONS

The Victorian Medal of Honour is the Royal Horticultural Society's most prestigious award for outstanding contributions to horticulture. We were delighted that the VMH has been conferred on Maurice Foster whose remarkable garden we visited last summer and which we will be revisiting in April to see the magnolias. Maurice has been recognised as one of Britain's most distinguished plantsmen and as a world authority on many hardy plants. He is also a trustee of the Tree Register and has undertaken numerous trips abroad in search of garden-worthy plants. Everyone who toured the garden at White House Farm will have appreciated Maurice's extraordinary knowledge of and love for plants and will want to congratulate him wholeheartedly for this most well deserved award.

**Congratulations** are also due to Susan Pittman who was recently awarded her PhD by Canterbury Christ Church University. Susan has most kindly presented Kent Gardens Trust with a copy of her doctoral thesis on Elizabethan and Jacobean Deer Parks in Kent.

This is a remarkable piece of research which draws on wide and varied documents from estate and family papers to depositions used in cases heard at the Kent Quarter Sessions. She has identified more than 150 parks in the county and discusses how they were managed, their social significance, ownership and the incidence of poaching.

Susan is a longstanding member of KGT and members will recall her most interesting talk in 2004 on deer parks followed by a tour of the park at Lullingstone. We hope to persuade her to give another talk next year.



*Map of Canterbury park mid C16.  
by kind permission of Canterbury Cathedral Archives*

Susan wishes to thank members of KGT who helped her in her research. She continues to be interested in deer parks in Kent and would welcome any information about additional sites.

## WELCOME

We are delighted to welcome Lynn Phillips as the new Treasurer of the Trust. She takes over from Roly Franks who has done so much to support the Trust over the last 15 years.

Lynn has a degree in Accountancy and Economics and has wide experience in financial management with a variety of organisations including commercial companies, a City Livery Company and a GP practice. We are so pleased that Lynn has volunteered to offer the Trust her services and are confident that she will keep our finances on a properly straight and narrow path.

## GARDEN PARTY AT THE PRIORY, LAMBERHURST

The garden at The Priory was looking spectacular when more than 100 members and friends of KGT gathered there to celebrate the work of the Trust. It was an opportunity for the trustees to thank our members for their support over the years. We

were immensely grateful to Kenneth and Patricia McAlpine for allowing us to have our party in their garden and for so very generously sponsoring the event by providing the marquee. The evening was an immense success, hugely enjoyed by all our guests.



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We presented the McAlpines with a yellow flowered magnolia to thank them for their kindness and generosity.



*The Chairman presenting Mrs McAlpine with a Magnolia*

The party was an ideal opportunity to present a prize to the Hadlow student who had produced the best design and planting plan for a small garden to be installed in the College grounds. The winner was Bruce Lowrie with his plan for a garden which he called 'Serenity'. Sally Walker, Chairman of the Association of Gardens Trusts presented Bruce with his prize, a copy of 'The Management of Historic Gardens' by John Watkins and Tom Wright on behalf of KGT.



*Sally Walker presents Bruce Lowrie with his prize*

Bruce was also awarded a bursary to support him in his second year at Hadlow College in recognition of his exceptional abilities. Bruce explains the thinking behind his prize winning design on page 7.

## A DAY AT GREAT DIXTER

33 Kent Gardens Trust members and their guests met at Great Dixter on 8th April – a beautiful sunny day. We started with coffee in the garden and moved into the Great Hall, via a wonderful porchful of sweet smelling spring flowers, where John Watkins, former Chairman of the Great

Dixter Charitable Trust and now head of Gardens and Landscape at English Heritage, gave a short introduction on his involvement at Great Dixter over many years. He then introduced Fergus Garrett, Head Gardener and friend of Christopher Lloyd. Fergus outlined his career as a young gardener and his gradual progression from municipal gardening to private estates in England and Europe. During this time he spent many weekends helping at Great Dixter and was inspired by the style and individual spirit of its design - a true plantsman's garden.

After some years of persuasion Fergus finally accepted Christopher's invitation to become his Head Gardener. Together they developed the garden to its present layout and since Christopher's death Fergus's aim is to keep the original spirit, managing to resist many kind suggestions – hanging baskets along the front of the house etc. - while generating enough income to ensure the future of the gardens. This has resulted in a flourishing school of gardening, a well known plant nursery and gift shop.

Fergus's talk demonstrated his tremendous gift for teaching, his great depth of knowledge and his infectious enthusiasm, perfectly setting the scene for our afternoon conducted walk in the gardens with John Watkins.

*John Watkins with KGT members at Great Dixter*



*The long border*

Before this we were given a delicious and elegantly served lunch at long tables in the medieval Great Hall – frequently visited and examined by a very inquisitive dachshund.

We had a most interesting tour of the gardens with John who outlined the development and alteration of Great Dixter house and gardens. The scents of spring were all around – fruit trees in blossom, late narcissi, fritillaries and a wonderful bluebell wood. The palms in the old rose garden still had their protective winter coats on and the wild flower meadow was in bud. The celebrated long border, full of tulips and densely planted for year long effect, showed great promise. Strategically placed flower pots added splashes of additional colour.

Our tour ended at the horse pond, where Christopher sometimes took his after lunch nap under a shady tree to avoid the many garden visitors.

A vote of thanks was given by a KGT member, John Yerburch.

**Bridget Mure.**





# VISIT TO HOLE PARK

On a beautiful day in May KGT members were privileged to have a private visit to Hole Park. Dr Barbara Simms, the garden historian who wrote up the descriptions for our Tunbridge Wells research project, and who is an expert on early C20 gardens gave a talk on the history of Hole Park and the possible influences on Col. Arthur Barham when he laid out the garden. When Col. Arthur Barham bought Hole Park in 1911 the garden was unremarkable.

He transformed it over the next 30 years creating a valley garden and a series of garden rooms enclosed by yew hedges which have now grown to majestic proportions. The influences on Col. Barham when he laid out his garden are unknown but Dr. Simms described the contemporary trends in garden design and the fashionable garden designers of the time which he would most probably have been aware of. She also told us about some gardens in the county which were being created or redesigned at this time and many of which have some features in common with the garden at Hole Park.

The Arts and Crafts movement emphasized the unity of house and garden, garden enclosures, using existing trees and providing places for relaxation. A number of typical Arts and Crafts features can be seen at Hole Park. The architect/designer Reginald Blomfield remodelled the



*Yew hedges at Hole Park*

garden at Godinton a few years earlier with hedged enclosures, more formal but not unlike the hedges at Hole Park. Thomas Mawson whose book, *The Art and Craft of Garden Design*, had considerable influence on gardens early in the C20, worked on several sites in Kent including Lees Court near Faversham and Kearsney Court near Dover. Lutyens designed the formal gardens at Great Maytham Hall nearby in Rolvenden in 1909 and also worked at Great Dixter just over the county boundary in both places using topiary and yew hedges. It is tempting to speculate that Col. Barham brought some of these ideas to Hole Park.

The present owner, Edward Barham, then described how he and his wife Clare run the gardens now and after an excellent lunch we toured the garden with Edward and his father David Barham. What follows is a summary of Edward's talk.

**Elizabeth Cairns**

*Edward Barham with KGT members in the garden at Hole Park*



## HOLE PARK

### *Edward Barham describes how the gardens at Hole Park are managed*

Clare and I came to Hole Park in 2003 and amidst the excitement of moving in to the family home of 100 years this year, we never really stopped to consider the gardens.

The cost of running 16 acres of garden with two gardeners is substantial and the gardens were operating at a huge cost to us. Visitor numbers were about 3,000, mostly for the NGS, with a few coach tours and some determined private visitors, who struggled to find us with no website, limited publicity, and poor facilities when they got here. A good deal of their satisfaction must have been in just finding us!

So, our first important decision was that the garden had to at least pay its own way and we therefore appointed a PR agent with the express instruction of achieving 10,000 visitors to balance the books. This objective was clearly going to take a few years to reach but we achieved it for the first time in 2010.

Our budget for the PR agent has never included anything for advertising. This has been the correct decision for us as a 1/4 page here and an 1/8 page there mount up to really significant sums in quality publications but one down side is that we have people who live in adjacent towns who still know nothing of us, typically after a lifetime in the area.



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*KGT members at Hole Park*

10,000 visitors is quite a significant milestone for us. At that level I can, with some assistance, do the “meet and greet” myself, and Clare runs The Coach House with very limited part-time support, offering lunches and teas. We sell a small range of appropriate Hole Park products, either made on the estate or specifically for us and the administration is handled within the estate office without any dedicated staff.

But what if we were to find ourselves with 15,000 visitors, either in response to a possible requirement to pay for a third gardener or the victim of our own publicity success? I think there is a great danger that it would spoil the family feeling of Hole Park and I am quite sure that there would be precious little extra profit within it. Seasonal full-time catering staff would have to be employed, the café would have to be bigger, the lavatories extended and someone would need

to be on the gate full-time. But worst of all, the patience of our teenage children whose help we appreciate on busy days, in exchange for generous allowances of pocket money, is likely to be pushed to the limit and I fear that they would either not wish to be at home, or more to the point regard Hole Park with horror come the day when we ask one of them to take it on from us.

So, having achieved our 10,000 visitors we now have the task of trying to control that number and that is going to be an interesting problem to watch over the coming years.

The second great landmark was a letter from a lady I did not know from a special interest group that I knew nothing of, asking if she could come and do some research at Hole Park into the history of the garden. This was Elizabeth Cairns and the KGT. Living so close to the scene, I had never stood back to consider how special the gardens are at Hole Park and the long and surprisingly well-documented history that goes with them. To me they had just been a result of three generations of my family’s involvement and I was the fourth absolute amateur and beginner. Elizabeth and her fellow researchers, led by Dr Barbara Simms went on to compile a significant dossier on the history of Hole Park and for the first time I realised what we had here; perhaps not a garden of national significance but one of county importance. One of few that remains with the family that created it and happily one that is not threatened by the great D’s; development, division, dereliction, death duties or disease.

The KGT with TWBC held a training day here for their volunteers and in May this year an extremely successful study day. At both these events the intention has been for visitors to learn about us and whilst that may have been the case, the learning curve at this end was just as steep. I am extremely grateful for the work done by the KGT, not only on the records but it also has brought me to appreciate and share what we have here, to stand back from the garden gate and look from afar. Hole Park now proudly counts itself as one of Kent’s best recorded private gardens, one that looks well set for the second century of my family’s involvement and one that I am proud to be the present owner of. Do please come and share it with us.

**Edward Barham**

## WHITE HOUSE FARM

On 25th June members visited the garden at White House Farm, Ivy Hatch, near Sevenoaks owned by Maurice and Rosemary Foster. He is a member of the RHS Woody Plant Committee and a trustee of the Tree Register and has recently been awarded the Victorian Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society (see page 1).



*Climbing roses at White House Farm*

*Magnolias at Great Dixter*



The garden and arboretum cover almost 14 acres. The 5 acre garden has mainly woody plants and





*Rose at White House Farm*

shrubs underplanted with bulbs and herbaceous ground cover. The arboretum has been developed more recently. The aim is to create colour and interest throughout the year. Most plants are propagated on site by seeds, cuttings or grafting. In the arboretum some 90% of the trees and shrubs are collected from the wild and their provenance recorded.

The morning of our visit was grey and overcast after recent rain. The warm spring had made the roses flower earlier than usual and, of course, they do not like rain. But nevertheless in the garden it seemed that almost every tree had a rose growing up or through it. Some were climbing to a height of 50 feet or more. The effect was sensational. Most are propagated by the Fosters and are unique.

Of the plants in flower there were collections of *Philadelphus* and *Deutzia*, but the star of the show was a walk of *Hydrangea serrata* all raised by the Fosters. There must have been well over 100 of them, all propagated on site and close planted on each side of a grass walk forming a ribbon in shades of white, pink and blue. We were invited to choose those we liked best as the most garden worthy will be propagated for sale but it was an impossible task.

At virtually any time of year there are collections of plants putting on a display of flower or colour but when we saw it the *Hydrangeas* were absolutely sensational.

**Frances Redfern**

**Members will be able to visit White House Farm again next year to see the remarkable collection of *Magnolias*.**

**Kent Gardens Trust**

## CHART COTTAGE SEAL, Nr SEVENOAKS

Members visited the garden on September 18th. It is at its best in June/July so we were not seeing it in its full glory but it was still full of colour and interest. Perhaps another visit can be arranged earlier in the year.

The house was Kentish ragstone on the lower storey, and tile hung above, with a steeply pitched roof and tall chimneys. The garden was surrounded by local woodlands, so it was well sheltered. There was a series of wooden pergolas, giving a welcome dimension to the area of the garden and dividing it into compartments filled with peonies, irises and white valerian. There was a rose garden in which the present owner had endeavoured to use varieties that would have been available at the time that Gertrude Jekyll designed the planting, having taken advice from well known rose growers. The flower beds were surrounded by low clipped box hedges giving a formal atmosphere. Plenty of blue flowers – giant cat mint, agapanthus and irises all served to increase the perspective. The framework of the pergolas also gave a wonderful dimension to the height of flowers and shrubs. There was a large quantity of white valerian, probably growing very naturally, as valerian does if given half a chance.

The Collacotts arrived at Chart Cottage immediately after the Great Storm of 15 October 1987 to a scene of devastation. For some months, Peter told us his main gardening tool was a chain saw. He talked very interestingly on the redevelopment of the garden, and the difficulties they had reading Gertrude Jekyll's hand writing on a facsimile of the original plan, which they acquired from the Reef Point Collection held at the University of California. What also puzzled them were references in the plan to Hut 1 and Hut 2 which they later discovered referred to the huts in which some plants grown by Miss Jekyll were kept! Unfortunately, Peter said, as a result they found it impossible to know the actual plants that were originally planted from these sources.

We followed the visit to the garden with a delicious tea and plenty of chat – meanwhile running in the background, was a professional video of the garden, taken when it is at its best in early summer.



**Valerie Perez**

*Peter Collacott with KGT members*



# THE RECREATION OF GERTRUDE JEKYLL'S GARDEN AT CHART COTTAGE

Having seen suggestions that the garden had at one time been designed by Gertrude Jekyll, Peter and Frances Collacott contacted Richard Bisgrove who had written books on Jekyll and who was at that time at Reading University. He advised that all Jekyll's plans now reside at The University of California in Berkeley, U.S.A. The University was duly contacted and copies of the plans and various letters were obtained.

Jekyll had been commissioned by Bernard Blunt in 1911 to produce plans for the garden. It is thought unlikely that Jekyll ever visited the garden, it being quite late on in her life. She was, however, given detailed plans and notes of the existing garden on which she could base her plans. We saw photographs from 1950 showing that Jekyll's plans had been followed. Lady Rhondda (a Suffragette) lived at the house for a short while and enjoyed the garden so much that she requested that Jekyll designed a garden for Stonepitts Manor (about half a mile away) when she moved there. By the time the Collacotts arrived in

1987, however, none of the planting scheme remained, most of the flower beds having been grassed over.

Once the plans had been obtained, the next task was to decipher them! Richard Bisgrove was of great assistance in decoding the sometimes almost illegible handwriting and also in suggesting which varieties Jekyll had probably intended.

The Rose Garden was the first area to be restored, partly because it already had the thick yew hedge planted in 1911 and therefore felt contained and achievable. The grassed over beds were dug out and topped up with soil and, wherever possible, Jekyll's suggested roses were planted. In some cases the roses are no longer available so David Austin was approached to suggest substitutions which would be in keeping with the colour scheme. All the rose beds are edged with grey leaved *Stachys lanata*.

The herbaceous borders in front of the house were the next to be tackled. Only one remained from 1911 but the outlines of what had once been

there could be made out under the turf.

The low box hedging was replanted and gives structure to the drifts of colour which are so typical of Jekyll. Immediately in front of the house the classic combination of mauve, pink and white in the form of Old Blush China roses, white pinks, lavender and rosemary were replanted.

The shrub garden runs down from the rose garden and is accessed by shallow ragstone steps. Only two of the four beds have been recreated since it is such a huge task. Many of the shrubs are now mature and some are being replaced with different varieties considered more likely to be the ones Jekyll intended. At the bottom is a paved area with a stone seat (both guesswork by the owners) backed by a yew hedge which has grown to six feet thick in the fifteen years since it was planted.

The final stage in the restoration was the construction of the pergola. Peter and Frances considered that it was most likely to have been an oak construction and once the pillars and beams had been put in place the beds were planted up. In early summer, garlands of fragrant roses clamber over the pergola and the beds are full of peonies, damask and gallica roses, lilies with white valerian linking them all together.

Some of the planting is in the Jekyll style rather than a faithful recreation partly because the garden had to adapt to family requirements. In addition, not all of the plans have been implemented – such a scheme nowadays would be impossible without a full team of Edwardian gardeners to maintain it!

**Peter Collacott**



*Chart Cottage*

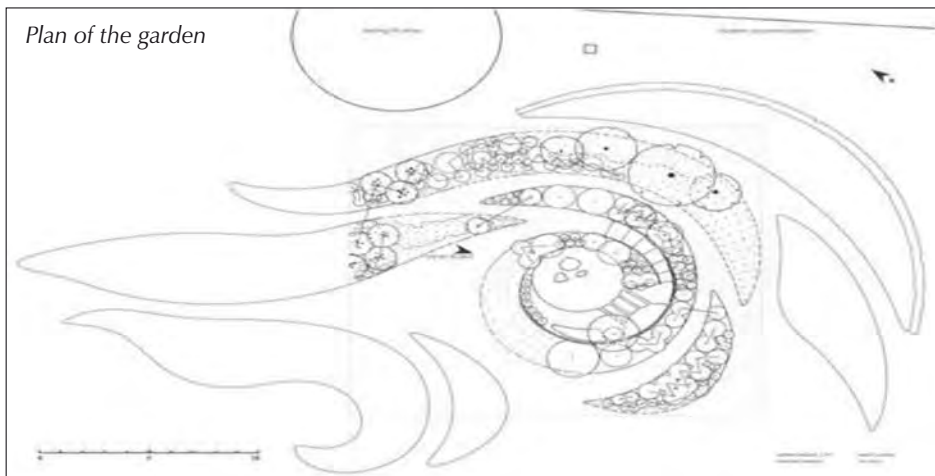




**Bruce Lowrie describes the ideas behind his prize winning design**

# SERENITY

*Plan of the garden*



This project started with a thorough survey and site analysis of the areas to be redesigned. This included soil and subsoil analysis, pH, general topography and orientation regarding sunlight and the prevailing wind direction and protection.

The design process itself began by producing a spider or bubble diagram to highlight key words that represent the mood and atmosphere to be evoked. This also served as a framework to design within. Words such as tranquility, calm, subdued, monochromatic, swaying, retreat, graduated and sanctuary were included. A montage was produced to primarily explore colour, shape and texture.

I chose the name Serenity for my garden design with the intention of producing a peaceful retreat within an active college environment. In this case the idea was exaggerated by a circular sunken garden surrounded by planting, with a dark reflective pool at its centre. A small bench would enable an individual or couple to enjoy this peaceful retreat.

The plan view was that the planting would radiate out from the centre, an abstraction of an unfurling new plant in nature or a broken spiral. The height of planting and the narrowness

of some of the pathways maintain the intimate atmosphere of the garden. Much of the garden would not be clearly in view from some points, therefore beckoning the visitor to continue circulating the garden. This will also give the sense that the garden is actually larger than it really is.

I chose a fairly limited colour palette, monochromatic shades of green with subtle graduations of colour, only punctuated with deep reds, purples and blues. This restrained use of colour was designed to calm but also to give focal areas of interest. With the restrained use of colour, form and texture became more

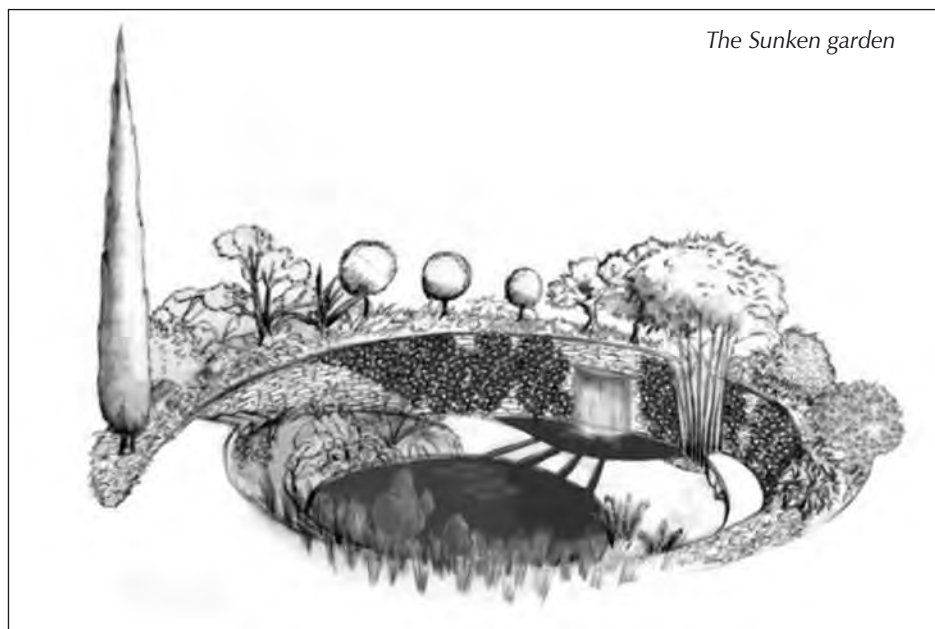
important than usual. Different shapes and shades of foliage, many of them evergreen are intermingled. The frothy seed heads of *Aruncus dioicus* are punctuated by the vertical blades of tall grasses. Architectural interest was created with the inclusion of *Phormium tenax*, the hardy palm *Trachycarpus fortunei* and many ferns. Under planting with dark glossy ribbed *Hosta 'Devon Green'* gave areas a rich almost reflective base.

The orientation of the garden was designed to keep Garrard house, with its grander Victorian architecture mainly in view. In turn I intended to tempt people from those offices and bar area into the garden. Conversely, at the other end of the garden a high evergreen hedge and tree planting is positioned on the outer spiral. This will form a barrier to the less attractive and more functional 1960's architecture of the nearby student accommodation. The design includes trees and taller shrubs that in addition to the surrounding established trees, create shading issues. Great care was taken in the positioning of plants, taking into consideration their individual requirements regarding sunlight and shade.

As a whole, I hope I have created a garden design that would provide something a little different, whilst being sympathetic to its surrounding environment.

**Bruce Lowrie**

*The Sunken garden*



# KENT GARDENS TRUST RESEARCH GROUP TRAINING DAY AT MARLE PLACE

The research group has set itself a hard task in learning to write up their work in the format used by English Heritage for historic parks and gardens on the National Register. We decided that it was important for our reports to be presented in a robust and well understood form so that they would be accepted by planners and so contribute to the protection of our heritage.

We were immensely grateful to Gerald and Lindel Williams for allowing us to spend a training day in the beautiful and historic garden at Marle Place, Brenchley last June under the guidance of our guide and guru Virginia Hinze. The English Heritage format for writing up reports on historic parks and gardens has two main components. First the Chronology of the Historic Development contains the history of the site from the earliest records and traces the ownership over the centuries and the major changes to the site. It is all too easy for people who enjoy doing historical research to get absorbed in the history of the place and the families who have lived there resulting in an overlong account much of which is irrelevant to the main purpose of the work which is to provide a description of the garden, how it developed and what now remains.

*Marle Place*



The second component of the report is the Site Description and the purpose of our day at Marle Place was to hone our skills in describing the garden as it is now.

Again there is a standard format used by English Heritage which falls under 5 or 6 headings depending upon the site.

First the Location, area, boundaries, landform and setting must be described. This should give a snapshot of the surrounding country, locate the property so it can be found easily and identify the boundaries of the historic landscape (rather than the garden as it is in the present day). All this must be done in a short paragraph and we have learned a number of useful phrases and an ability to distill information into a few short sentences.

Next the Entrances and approaches must be described and here some of the historical changes to the layout of the site can be noted. The main approach to the house may have been altered; the existence of a lodge may indicate that there was once an earlier driveway or the remnants of an avenue may survive.

The Principal Buildings on the site must then be described but where they are listed (as is usual) the description can be lifted from the listed building description, saving considerable effort.

The main work concerns the description of the Gardens and Pleasure Grounds and here we are aiming to provide a clear guide of what can be seen to someone who has a map of the site. We are trying to give a snapshot of how the garden appears at a particular moment in time but also identifying the various stages of the garden's development. This is not at all easy as the group has discovered. Where do you start? Do you perambulate around the garden or attempt to describe the various different areas separately? The present planting is mentioned only in general terms so horticulturalists are somewhat frustrated but accept that it is the structural features such as hedges, terraces and paths which are most likely to survive from earlier gardens and should be recorded for posterity. Subjective judgements as to the merits or otherwise of the garden are not permitted nor effusive descriptions of glorious garden pictures. The effect is rather dry but serviceable for the purpose which is to identify and describe the historic garden as it is now so that it can be protected for the future.

*Elizabeth Cairns*

**The beautiful gardens at Marle Place which date from the late C19 – early C20 are open every day from April to early October. Art exhibitions are held throughout the year.**  
**[www.marleplace.co.uk](http://www.marleplace.co.uk)**



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