

Jekyll in Devon?

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The theme of the Devon Gardens Trust winter meeting in February, 2001 was 'Gertrude Jekyll: Artist and Inspiration'. Afterwards the then Chairman, Joy Williams, wished that we had a Jekyll garden in Devon. This article is a belated response, identifying some connections between Devon and Miss Jekyll.

Devon Links

Miss Jekyll visited Cornwall regularly but Devon less often. She sometimes broke her journey at Exeter, for instance in 1884: 'In Exeter she was (again) judging, this time at a fruit fair.' Her close friend, Barbara Bodichon, owned 'The Poor House', Zennor, and left it to Gertrude Jekyll in 1891, who sold it in 1896. However, she continued to take holidays in Cornwall and in September, 1911, she spent a week at Looe. On her way back she visited the Exeter nursery of Peter Veitch, 'third in a line of famous nurserymen'.¹

Lady Marion Stucley lived at Hartland Abbey, on the coast in the north-west corner of Devon, from 1879 when she became the second wife of Colonel Lewis Stucley, who succeeded his father as the second Baronet in 1900. Clovelly Court, just along the coast to the east, was her family home and she remained in close touch with her sister there, Mrs. Christine Hamlyn. 'A circle of friends with architectural and literary careers' visited both sisters and Gertrude Jekyll was amongst these.² Marion was widowed in 1911, but continued to live at the Abbey until 1932. Sadly there is no documentary evidence of visits by Miss Jekyll but family tradition is clear that she not only stayed but also advised on the gardens.³ Steps from the drive lead to the terraced south-facing Baronet's Bog Garden and fernery, rescued from brambles and *Rhododendron ponticum* by the present owners, Sir Hugh and Lady Angela Stucley, and show Miss Jekyll's influence most clearly; but she may well have been consulted about the Ladies' Walk, which runs from the Bog Garden and parallel with the drive towards the walled garden outside the main gate. Within the sloping walled garden are three divisions and the first contains terraces in which the planting may have been influenced by Miss Jekyll.⁴ The recent restoration has certainly been carried out with her ideas in mind, but no Jekyll plans exist for Hartland. Alongside the Jekyll connection, William Goldring is reported to have worked as a designer for Colonel Stucley at Hartland in 1895.⁵



The Baronet's Bog Garden, Hartland Abbey
(Carolyn Keep, 2004)

In 1910 Julius Drewe bought the land for Castle Drogo, above the Teign valley near Drewsteignton. Before the end of the year, Edwin Lutyens was drawing plans for the site, including the drive. The position and shape of the lodges had changed by 1915 and there was tension between owner, architect and contractor (Peter Veitch) as to whether a ha-ha or a fence should define the drive. On 13 October, 1915, Lutyens proposed to Mr. Drewe that 'Mr. Veitch and Myers should lay their scheme

before Miss Jekyll, who is a great designer, an Artist, old and experienced in the way of plants and a lover of the Wilderness and moorland'. On the same day, he wrote an affectionate letter to Miss Jekyll putting his point of view and telling her that Mr. Hall from his office would visit her and explain the contours and nature of the ground.⁶

Presumably Miss Jekyll was supplied with the three sets of plans which are in the Berkeley archive and she responded tactfully by ignoring both ha-ha and fence but using the existing trees to outline the drive. She accepted the evergreen oak, *Quercus ilex*, which Lutyens had already planned for the entrance, around the lodges on the bend in the middle of the drive and in the castle courtyard.⁷ However, her own planting enhanced the natural flora, which reminded her of her own Surrey woods.⁸ She gradually introduced non-native species in the last stage of the drive to the castle. Sadly this scheme was not implemented but nor were the fence, ha-ha or lodges.⁹

There are three sites in Devon for which Miss Jekyll designed herbaceous borders and the rest of this article will look at these, although there is no evidence that she visited any of them. Wingstone, Manaton, was the home of John Galsworthy and Miss Jekyll designed a pair of borders for Mrs. Galsworthy in October, 1908.¹⁰ Miss Jekyll could have called at Manaton by breaking her journey to Cornwall or to Hartland. At Newton Abbot on the Great Western Railway, there was the option of a branch line to Moretonhampstead, while the London and South Western Railway went round the north of Dartmoor to Okehampton, and on to Bude after 1898.¹¹ Either route would then have required a long drive through narrow lanes to Manaton. The plan for Glebe House, Cornwood, was dated 1925.¹² Those for Lewtrenchard Manor were drawn in 1928.¹³ She was certainly not travelling as far afield as Devon by then and she died in 1932.¹⁴

The Sources

Many of Miss Jekyll's working papers are in the Reef Point Gardens Collection at the University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A. They were donated to a Red Cross sale in Surrey in September, 1940, and acquired in 1948 through Agnes Milliken and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in Boston by Beatrix Farrand, the American landscape architect. Beatrix Farrand had met Miss Jekyll in 1895 and admired her designs and books.¹⁵ We can still see her major contributions to the garden at Dartington for the Elmhursts.

The residue of Miss Jekyll's surviving papers was probably sold just after the sale of her home at Munstead Wood in 1948. Some notebooks from this sale are held by Godalming Museum and include lists of plants to be supplied by her nursery. There are entries for Glebe House, Lewtrenchard and Wingstone. These can be checked against the plans, which are working drawings and often abbreviated or hard to read; clients received a traced fair copy. Her system revealed further details:

*The quantity, type and total cost of the plants to be supplied would be entered in black ink, while the individual cost of a plant was entered in ordinary pencil beside the plant name... Where Miss Jekyll had sent items by road or rail, she deleted the entry in red crayon, while items for which she had submitted an invoice were deleted in blue.*¹⁶

A further selection of papers was found in the attic of Halnaker Park, Sussex and purchased by Surrey Record Office in 1997. Halnaker House was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1938 for Sir Reginald McKenna, who married Pamela, niece of Gertrude Jekyll. Pamela's brother, Francis Jekyll, may have given her the papers when he was disposing of his aunt's possessions.

Plans and letters relating to Castle Drogo and Lewtrenchard are held at Berkeley, although Surrey holds copies of those which are not too fragile. There is a second set of border plans at Lewtrenchard Manor, which appear to be copies made in the architect's office by an employee who had no knowledge of plant names as many are incorrect. A letter relating to Glebe House is at Berkeley but the border plan is part of the Halnaker collection at Surrey History Centre. The plan for Wingstone is at Berkeley and there are no letters available.

Visiting the sites and talking to the owners has illuminated all the plans. Their hospitality and assistance is gratefully acknowledged. Additional helpful background to the Galsworthys was supplied by the late Eileen Arnold. Ron Wawman has been an invaluable source of information about Lewtrenchard.

Wingstone, Manaton

John Galsworthy (1867-1933) had Devon ancestors; his father's family had been in Wembury since the sixteenth century. In 1895 John began a ten-year affair with Ada (1866-1956), the wife of his first cousin, Arthur Galsworthy. The relationship was kept secret from his father during his lifetime and significantly affected *The Forsyte Saga*. John had found Wingstone during a walking tour in 1904 and they took a holiday there, just after the death of his father. This deliberately provided evidence from the farmer's first wife, Annie Endacott, for the divorce that allowed them to marry in September, 1905. From 1908 until 1923 they were technically tenants of the Regency guest wing at Wingstone. The Galsworthys were most often in residence during the summer but liked to escape to Manaton at other times, even December in 1909.¹⁷ The farmer and his family lived in the ancient kitchen opening into the farmyard, supplying meals for the Galsworthys and stabling for their horses.¹⁸ Ada later described a normal day at Wingstone as 'writing for Himself and gardening for me from breakfast to near lunch-time'.¹⁹ Involving Miss Jekyll by October, 1908 showed Ada's enthusiasm and their determination to make a home there.



Ada Galsworthy, c.1894
(H.V. Marrott, opp. p. 101)



Wingstone border
(Carolyn Keep, 2005)

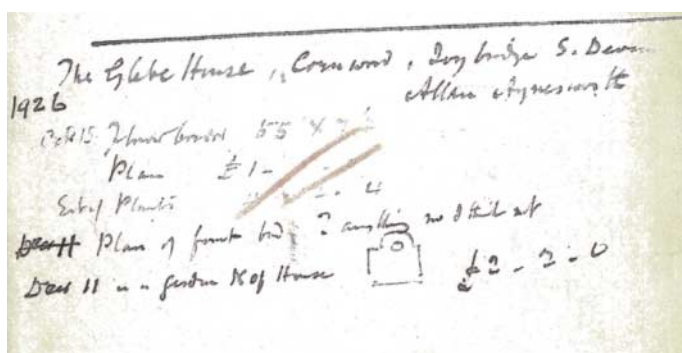
While Miss Jekyll was well known by then through her writing, there was also a possible link through John Galsworthy's cousin, Frank. He was a flower artist and a friend of E. A. Bowles from May, 1908. Miss Jekyll knew Bowles and visited him at Myddleton House twice in 1910, when it was unusual for her to travel far from home.²⁰ There might have been further connection with the literary visitors at Hartland. Galsworthy read a paper at Newnham College, Cambridge, in December, 1911, the year that Miss Jekyll submitted the plans for the Sidgwick Memorial Garden; and a cluster of commissions has been identified by Jane Brown as associated with Newnham. Could the Galsworthys have been another, though admittedly in 1908?²¹

The notebook entry for Mrs. Galsworthy was not costed but the individual hardy plant orders were crossed out in pen and then the two borders (L & R) were deleted in red pencil. These were 'to go Oct 20', presumably to Bovey Tracey station as specified on the plan. The half-hardy items were listed separately at the end of each page and ringed in red with the comment, 'ask her in spring whether full enough without the extras - extras not in the bill sent her Oct 1908'. The invoice must have been calculated elsewhere.

Glebe House, Cornwood

While Galsworthy was a man of letters, the design for Glebe House, Cornwood, was for a man of the theatre. Allan Aynesworth was born in 1865 as E. Abbot-Anderson and 'frequently figured in star casts'.²² By July 1922 he was pursuing his listed hobby of gardening to the extent of writing to *Country Life*. His request for advice on four plots with a central pergola had been passed to Miss Jekyll. She responded with detailed plans for beds to provide interest in spring, summer and autumn, as asked.²³ The site was the Old Parsonage, High Street, Otford, Kent, a modest tile-hung house in the centre of its garden.²⁴ A photograph of the rear, dated 1942, shows mature bushes, which could well be China roses from Miss Jekyll's design.²⁵

However, Mr. & Mrs. Aynesworth-Anderson (as they were often called) had a holiday home in Devon. From there they visited the actor-manager, Cyril Maude, at Redlap, near Dartmouth, where there was 'a stream of visitors...old friends from the world of the stage, Allan Aynesworth (always called Tony)...'.²⁶ Miss Jekyll planned a border for 'A. Aynesworth, Glebe House', dated 15 October, 1925, and charged him one guinea for a flower border plan 55' x 7'. This charge was dated 15 October, 1926, and in a different notebook from the plant lists. A file label, 'Various 1925' included 'Glebe House, Aynesworth' in Miss Jekyll's hand-writing, suggesting that the earlier year was correct.²⁷ Below the plan cost was an undated charge of £4 12s. 4d. for a 'set of plants' and both entries were crossed with a double red line, which suggests that these plants were indeed dispatched by rail.²⁸ However, the only plant list for 'Mrs. Aynesworth, The Glebe House, Cornwood, S. Devon; G.W. Rly' does not relate to the border plan and was not costed or crossed out. It followed on from the Otford 1922 order and was dated 1927.²⁹



Entry for Glebe House in Miss Jekyll's notebook
(Godalming Museum N2:68)

A letter to Miss Jekyll from Margaret Aynesworth might have helped but frustratingly was dated 29 November with no year:

May I consult you again 'professionally' about another small problem? The front lawn here is such an odd shape & the house is so formal looking, they don't seem to 'match' - I enclose a photo of the house (it no longer has Ivy on it, only roses etc)... I want advice as to design... I hope my small problems are not tiresome to you?

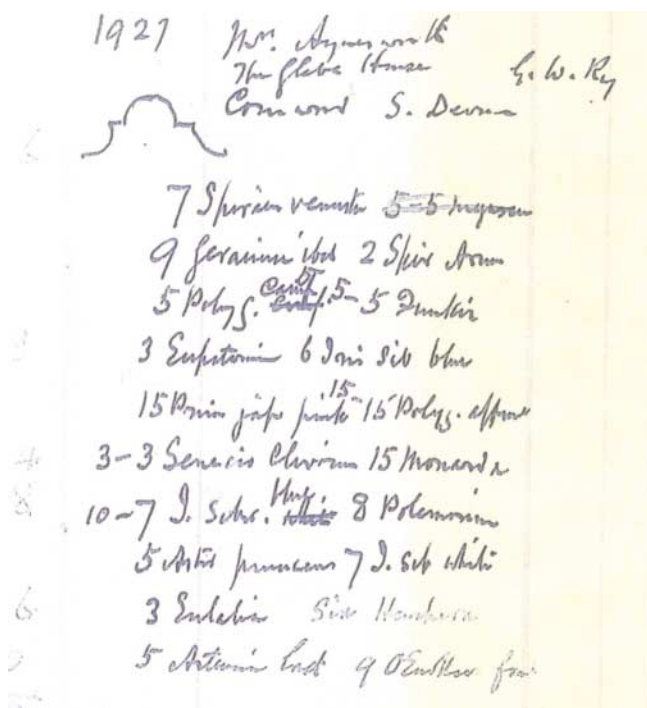
The photo has also survived and shows the curve of the gravel drive edging a plain lawn, where there is now a low stone wall with steps opposite the front door down onto the lawn.³⁰ The only existing reference by Miss Jekyll to this request is the undated entry below the cost of the set of plants, 'Plan of front bed? anything no I think not'. There has not been a bed on the south-facing lawn for many years.

The final notebook line is dated 11 December: 'Plan of garden N of house &2 2s. 0d.'. Next to this is a tiny sketch of a rectangle but with a curve inserted off-centre on the top side. Within the curve is a circle, which could have been a pool or birdbath. A small walled garden northwest of the house, probably from an old farm building, best matches the shape of the plan but the price is rather high by Miss Jekyll's standards for a small area. The plants listed for 1927 in the other notebook mainly prefer shade and damp, suitable to the small walled garden rather than a bed at the south-facing front of the house.

An intriguing doodle sits at the top of the plant list, showing an elegant arch shape. The top half is a semicircle with lines at right angles, the basic element of the 'Indian' path pattern on either side of the formal garden at Castle Drogo. That plan was dated December, 1926, by the Lutyens office.³¹ Edward Hudson bought Plumpton Place, Sussex, in 1927 and invited Lutyens to renovate the house and garden. By August, 1928, Hudson was asking Lutyens to send his plans to Miss Jekyll for planting advice.³² Had Lutyens already discussed his design for the waterfalls with her? The planting has altered at Plumpton Place but the waterfalls are still as they were admired by Christopher Hussey in 1933:

*These consist of a steep slope built of shaped paving tiles about an inch thick, but so arranged that each course projects in front of the one above it. The water, rushing over these rows of 'teeth', makes a beautiful net-like pattern.*³³

The pattern on the tiles is in the shape of the doodle and they are laid in alternating rows to complete a typical Turkish design. Miss Jekyll would have been familiar with the design and it is tempting to make a direct link.



Plant list for Glebe House in Miss Jekyll's notebook (Godalming Museum N6:17)

Lewtrenchard Manor

Architects were another source of regular commissions for Miss Jekyll, not just her beloved 'Nedi' Lutyens, but many other established practices. Walter Sarel wrote to Miss Jekyll from his London office about Lew Trenchard on 23 February, 1928:

*Am I too late to plant an herbaceous border in North Devon, if not would you be able to supply us with plants and material? I have been doing a fairly big garden for the late Sabine Baring Gould's son and heir who has come into the property near Tavistock. I was there on Tuesday...*³⁴

Edward Baring-Gould (1871-1957) is not even named here and several writers assume that the commission was from his famous father.³⁵ However, the plans of the border site, which Sarel sent to Miss Jekyll, are 'For E. Baring Gould Esquire'. Edward had been sent in 1889 to work at the Baring bank in America, where he married Marion Litton (1870-1931).



Marion Baring-Gould (Merriol Almond)

Sabine had the ballroom at Lew House completed rapidly in order to welcome the newly-weds on 1st February, 1897. Eventually Edward and his family returned to England and while he worked in London as a banker, Marion set up their home at the newly built (1906) Lewtrenchard Rectory, designed by Sabine. They moved into Lew House in 1919 to care for the elderly widower. When Marion died soon after his father (1834-1924), Edward moved away but the estate remains in concerned family ownership. Edward was

'always content to leave the care of the estate to a land agent'.³⁶ However, their younger son, Teddy, writing to Sabine's grand-daughter, Cecily Briggs, recalled a closer involvement with the garden in a letter dated 7, 8, 9, December, 1991 (both now deceased):

*I am sure that my mother had a great deal to do with the landscaping of the rose garden below Lew House and my father with the making of the adjacent tennis-court. My impression is that the rose garden could well have been designed by my mother and father and all the stone work done by the numerous stone masons in the area... I don't think the rose garden existed until my mother was living at Lew. The 'wishing well' at one end of the rose garden was moved there from the 'Glen' in the woods far behind the house.*³⁷



Rose garden and wishing-well, Lew House (Carolyn Keep, 2007)

This stone work would have included the lower retaining wall of the terrace, which formed the back of the relevant borders, reached by a flight of steps.

Walter Sarel (1873-1941) had designed Coombe Trenchard for Sabine's friends, the Sperlings, in 1906 on the old rectory site just across the lane from Lew House. Sarel involved Miss Jekyll in at least seven projects. For Lewtrenchard, he followed his letter with scale plans of the two 'proposed herbaceous borders'. On the ground plans these were to be 6' deep and with four buttresses (labelled 'post') to the stone rubble walls on either side of the central steps. On the elevation plan, the fall of the ground was shown: the wall was 4' high at the west end of border A and 8' at the east end of border B. In each angle created by the buttresses was a lilac bush and there was also an Irish yew in front of the lilacs beside the steps. A coping is shown but no decorations on top of the wall. Such scale plans were exactly what Miss Jekyll required from an architect when designing for a site which she would not visit. Owners who approached her directly might send sketch plans, such as the ill-spelt but effective one incorrectly filed with the Lewtrenchard papers.

The notebook entries for these borders were not dated but clearly laid out in two sections for each border (A1, A2) and priced. The wall plants were listed first and ringed in ink. The half-hardy items were listed separately at the end and ringed in red. These pages were followed by an entry for Lew Trenchard, dated 9 April, 1929, for 'Iris sibirica 12 blue 12 white 12 various, 6 Struthiopteris'. Red lines across indicate that these were sent and underneath was written 'gratis'.³⁸ She may have run a successful nursery business but Miss Jekyll was also generous. Where were these damp-loving plants to go? There is a pool to the northwest of the wall in question, fed by a stream which continues down past the west end of the wall. The boggy ground around the pool is still planted and so this area was probably part of Sarel's design, backing onto the west end of the rose terrace. Some confirmation of this comes from the badly transcribed plans at Lewtrenchard, on which was written 'by stream' at the west end of A1.

Other Comparisons

Michael Tooley commented on nineteen gardens designed by Miss Jekyll in northern England between 1882 and 1928 and described six designs in detail. These covered a wide area and were for varied sites and purposes, supporting his contention that they were 'representative of gardens designed elsewhere in Britain'.³⁹ Consequently comparisons between the commissions could only be very generalized.

An article in 1982 on 'Gertrude Jekyll's American Gardens' looked at American links with Miss Jekyll and her plans for three sites there. Each 'was of a completely different type' and only Glebe House at Woodbury, Connecticut, contained borders of the type and scale of the Devon sites. The Glebe House became an historic house museum in 1925 with beds designed by Amy L. Cogswell within a rectangular site of less than a quarter of an acre. However Anna Burr Jennings had visited Miss Jekyll in 1926 and was able to persuade her to create one of her last designs in May, 1927.⁴⁰ How far this was implemented is unclear but a restoration of the garden in the 1950s went back to the earlier design. Only in 1988 did Susan E. Schnare, one of the authors of the article, persuade the Garden Committee to return the site to Miss Jekyll's detailed plans.⁴¹ Perhaps this might encourage one or more of the Devon owners to replant their Jekyll beds; an attempt has been made recently at Lewtrenchard.

The three Devon sites were for clients typical of Miss Jekyll's smaller commissions. Dating from 1908 to 1925 and 1928, they spanned most of her career as a professional garden designer.

All were for flower borders on or near Dartmoor and a detailed comparison of their positions and designs will be the subject of another article.

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