

# Gardens by Oliver Hill in North Devon

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Oliver Hill was commissioned to work on two sites in North Devon. His designs responded to the exceptional isolated coastal settings and included some shared features.

## The First Cock Rock

Brenda Girvin (1884–1970) and Monica Cosens (1888–1973) were authors of children's books, often jointly (Figure 1). In WWI they served in the WRNS and published books about 'munition girls'. Fairy stories, such as *Wee Men* (1923) illustrated by Charles Robinson, and Guiding or school themes were more typical of their output. They also wrote plays together, such as *The Red Umbrella* and *Madame Plays Nap* (1929). In 1952 Girvin published *Food and Flowers*, a book of decorative recipes with photographs by the author.



Figure 1. Monica Cosens in the sunbathing garden at Cock Rock (courtesy Paul Petrides)

Hill was commissioned in 1925 to build their holiday cottage on the west side of a lane just outside Croyde towards Saunton. 'We attempted to build in harmony with the old Devonshire farm-houses of the district.'<sup>1</sup> They left a detailed, but sadly undated, record of its evolution. 'We chose Oliver Hill who brings imagination into his work and turns bricks and mortar into dream houses'. The first plan was drawn on the sand with a little wooden spade; it had a centre and two wings for visitors, which could be closed at the end of summer to leave a cottage in the centre for two that 'is so simple to run that one can be "done for" by the gardener's wife coming in for a few hours daily'. A separate workroom was to connect with the main house through an outdoor dining loggia with sea views. 'It must slide into the landscape', which at that stage was a field sloping down to the golden sand of Croyde Bay and enclosed to the north by Baggy Point.<sup>2</sup> Initial drawings by Hill showed a series of spiky tiled roofs: the final undulating thatched roof with dormer windows on the landward side offered a softer profile (see Figure 1 on p. 10 of this journal).<sup>3</sup> Reductions were made to the original plan in order to cut costs. Experience of

gales on the north coast of Devon ensured that each room should have two windows looking opposite ways, so that one could always be opened; evidence of a shared interest in fresh air!

The house was named Cock Rock after 'that rugged, jutting piece of brown rock beneath the shelter of which the sketch-plan was drawn'. The long window on the landing commemorated the 'squad of lads all under twenty-one' who built it, from the firm of C. T. Webb in Beaulieu, Hampshire. The design was criticised by those who preferred a modern style and had probably only seen the drawings. 'The house pretends to be what it is not, a haphazard growth, like these cottages of the countryside which many generations have pulled about and altered to their needs.'<sup>4</sup> More recent assessments have recognised Hill's sensitivity to the *genius loci* with both design and materials. 'A fine example of regionalism used in a domestic setting'.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 2. 1925 postcard of Cock Rock (courtesy Adrian Symons)

On the west side of the house was 'a wide green lawn stretching away down to the sea ... broken with groups of flowering veronica (*Hebe*) bushes fringed with ragged carnation poppies ... a forest of colour against a deep blue sea'.<sup>6</sup> A *Country Life* article added gorse and escallonia and such groups were well established by 1935. The inland entrance was approached directly from the lane by a drive which then swept round the orchard on the left to the garage. By August 1925 there was a small bed set in grass on the right side in front of the forecourt wall (Figure 2). A round thatched gatehouse contained an electric plant and batteries and a pump for the well below. It provided covered access to a path of blue beach pebbles going straight across the forecourt lawn to an arched wooden door with a random stone surround and set in whitewashed brick walls. This appeared to be the front door of the house but actually revealed a dramatic open view to the sea. A total contrast to this was the forecourt, enclosed by the Cornish style of double drystone walls with stones laid vertically, tapered sides and topped with turf. These formed an approximate hexagon, edged inside by herbaceous borders and terminated at the southern end by the circular gatehouse.<sup>7</sup> 'The workroom and gatehouse are early examples of circular elements used to terminate the plan, increasingly favoured by Hill, and often utilised in his modern work of the 1930s'. How far Hill was involved in the planting is not known.

Later images showed shrubs and climbers on the house wall, probably roses and clematis, with potted plants on the paving and massed lupins.<sup>8</sup> The 1934 painting on the



Figure 3. *Cock Rock forecourt on the cover of The Ideal Home, July 1934.*

cover of *Ideal Home* was probably idealised but delphiniums and oriental poppies were included (Figure 3).<sup>9</sup> A wide border was also proposed on the sea side of the kitchen wing, where it would be slightly sheltered.<sup>10</sup> The mushroom shaped thatched workroom had its own little sunny garden, complete with postbox. It was paved in circles 'with d(D) elabole [slates] and blue and yellow r(R)ust tiles, gay in late summer with petunia'.<sup>11</sup> A mention of 'new windows for the Workroom', in an undated letter about 'setting out of the Sea Garden' suggests that it may have been created about 1929 (Figure 4).<sup>12</sup>

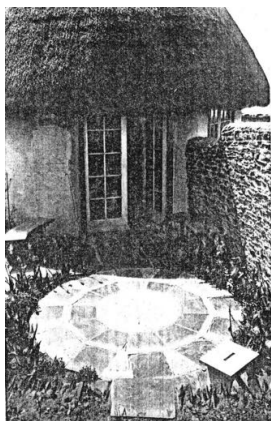


Figure 4 (left). *The workroom garden (courtesy Paul Petrides)*

Figure 5 (below). *The sun bathing garden (courtesy Paul Petrides)*

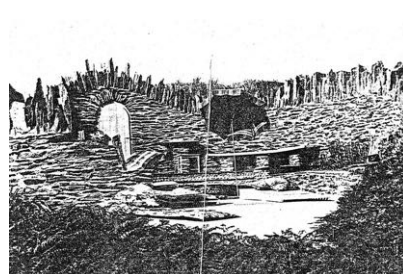


Figure 6. *Monica Cosens in the sun bathing garden, showing detail of steps (courtesy Paul Petrides).*

At some point a 'Sun Bathing garden sloping to the south with a track through the bracken straight into the sea' was created. One photograph showed a tall curved stone wall topped with upright jagged stones, forming a shelter for seating and terracing (Figure 5). Two more photographs were of Monica Cosens, wearing an elegant bikini. She was holding a striped parasol in one and posing within this garden in front of the arched wooden door and beside a stone bench (Figure 1). In the other, Monica was cushioned on a sloped sunbed with steps above her in a typical Hill combination of overhanging stone treads and risers of round pebbles set in mortar (Figure 6).<sup>13</sup>

### Madame's Garden<sup>14</sup>

Early photographs taken from the hill to the east showed the house standing out in the bare landscape but subsequent building and planting helped to soften the effect. Hill had suggested gorse and pines on the sand dunes behind the gatehouse. In 1928 a gardener's cottage was being added to the southwest of the main group and this was one of the Oliver Hill designs included in the 1936 book '*Houses for Moderate Means*', edited by R. Randall Phillips. The cost was given as '£500 in 1932', so perhaps it took that long for 'Mr. Webb of Beaulieu' to be paid.<sup>15</sup> Two more gardens were built between the gardener's cottage and the drive, which was extended towards them. Different names were used for these two gardens over the years, causing some confusion; eventually the established names were 'Secret Garden' for the southern enclosed one and 'Wind's Garden' for the adjacent northern site. This latter area was also named the Sea Garden, the sunk garden and known as 'Madame's Garden' in some of the surviving correspondence about it. No dates on some of these documents further prevent establishing an exact sequence of events.

The Secret Garden was built first and the walls were probably referred to in an invoice dated 13 March 1929. It was approximately hexagonal, high stone walls coming to a point furthest from the sea and with a convex curved wall nearest the sea. At the centre of this wall was a thatched Sun House 'with two cement pillars, painted blue with a mass of pink geranium flowering over them'. Conical thatch against a wall and with front supporting pillars was a popular Arts and Crafts design, such as the one by Thomas Mawson around 1900 in the north garden at Wood, also in Devon.<sup>16</sup> At Cock Rock there was a window in the wall at the back looking over Wind's Garden to the sea and a pair of wide elm doors gave access on either side. A Y-shaped path led from these doors to 'a stone table at the end of the Secret Garden'. By the 1930s there was a shallow birdbath on a slim column in the centre and photographs showed flourishing herbaceous borders in

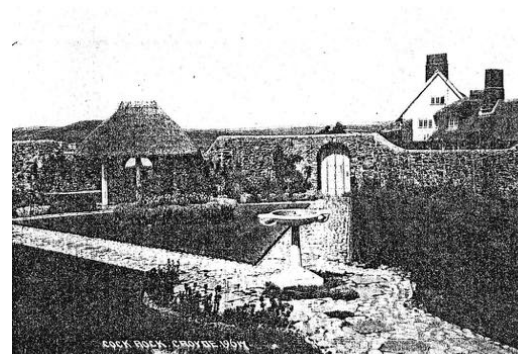


Figure 7. *The secret garden in 1930s (courtesy Paul Petrides)*



front of the walls here and in the forecourt (Figure 7). It is not possible to identify how far these included the plants used by Jekyll and familiar to Hill at Fox Steep, Wilbraham House and Valewood. If Hill had suggested planting to Girvin, it is likely that his ideas would have been welcomed. A hand-written letter from Girvin to Hill on 4 August 1930 asked for advice on their sitting room furniture in London and suggests the tone of their relationship.

I'd be most terribly grateful for a little wise counsel  
... I'd be eternally grateful for a quick reply. What ages  
since we have seen anything of you! Cock Rock has  
been a dream this summer. What lovely houses are  
you doing now? Yours with very best wishes from the  
Collaborator, Brenda Girvin.

In contrast, two early dated letters were from Webb on 10 December 1928. The relationship between Girvin and Webb had deteriorated over a sub-contract to Garton & King for laying an electric cable to the gardener's cottage. Girvin had asked for costs to be cut and had tried to bring in another firm, despite Webb negotiating a sizeable reduction in the original quotation. He felt that she had lost confidence in him and all his arrangements seemed to be upset. 'I have been to all this trouble for nothing... I have always been very proud of having built Cock Rock and have been to considerable trouble and expense in your interest.' At some point Webb enlisted Hill: 'My continual visits to Croyde [from Beaulieu, Hampshire] and being unable to settle things is causing me considerable expense on such a small job and I think it will be much the best if we can all meet and discuss matters'.

However the second garden project proceeded and an estimate dated October 1929 gave details of the materials for the proposed design: an 18 inch stone wall with flat stone capping; two circular piers 3 feet wide at the bottom and 8 feet 6 inches high with pebble caps; Delabole slate and pebble paving; more Delabole slate for stepping stones; stone and pebble risers for steps. The pool was to have a concrete base with a jet and sump for a fountain (which may never have been installed) with water supplied from the cottage. A statue was to be given a base and fixed: 'Wind' by Cecil Thomas was chosen and this 'delicately moulded figure of a slight boy, his hair swept back from his forehead', gave the final name to this garden. These materials can be identified in subsequent photographs of the completed site.

When Webb set out the sunken garden to Hill's plan, 'the ladies were not quite pleased' and the alterations were sent for Hill's approval. Confusingly, the thatched Sun House in the Secret Garden was also referred to by variations on the Garden/Work House/Room but it is clear from this letter that the circular window at the back of this was crucial to the design.

You will see [at] the centre of this [plan], lines through window to the centre of the stone table at the end of the Secret Garden. The Entrance [to the Sea Garden] I have reduced in size and removed around so that the view through it is direct to Baggy Point. The height of the outer wall is being brought up higher, so that the vision through window when standing is over wall and edge of cliff, direct to the sea. A little planting on the top of this between the Entrance and the lawn will block out

all the houses on the other side of the Bay, so that from the window of the Work Room you get a clear view of the sea and the hills over Baggy, without seeing the houses.

The sloping site meant that the whole plan had to be moved outwards, in order not to undermine the wall of the Secret Garden, but this in turn altered the steps from the entrance down into the garden to four on the right and five on the left. The outer wall was to be raised to 5 feet 6 inches instead of 3 feet, making the columns only 3 feet above the wall. Steps at the entrance up into the garden could reduce the need for excavation and cut costs; a recurring theme, to which Webb tried to respond. The amended scheme was 'quite satisfactory' and details of the pool were sent on 23 October 1929. The little pool (3 feet 6 inches diameter and 9 inches deep in the middle) was to have an edging of blue Delabole thin slate, bedded in cement and flush with the turf, and the water level was to be kept within two inches of the top edge. The bottom was to be dished out and lined with Rust's mosaic cubes, set in white cement. The turfed borders were to be swept up to the top of the enclosing walls, with no angles. The concept seems to have been of a shallow turf bowl, ridged by the planted low terrace and with a blue reflecting pool at the centre but opening up a slope to a framed seascape (Figure 8).



Figure 8. View from Wind's garden (courtesy Lady Cairns 2006)

The weather was 'very bad, making things difficult' in late 1929 but work continued. Girvin wanted a porch for Mrs Arnold's (gardener's) cottage but as cheap as possible; 'in stormy weather immediately the door is open the rain blows in across the hall and upstairs'. On 20 December 1929 Webb reported to Hill that Girvin claimed to be unable to afford the blue frog 'but as it has been definitely ordered from Doulton's and it cannot be cancelled'; once again Webb was caught between the financial limitations laid down by the client and the vision of the designer, in this case involving Hill's signature ornament. Hill won, as he also did over the seat for Wind's Garden; on 24 December 1929 he was 'going to the Engadine to seek inspiration for Madame's seat on a mountaintop'. Webb was still under pressure to proceed, 'to enable Miss Girvin to plant as soon as possible so as to get flowers for the spring'. Some of these flowers Girvin recalled in her account of the house and garden: daffodils, primroses, iris, lupins, bugloss. Irises were clearly shown in

1930s photographs and there was thrift in the turf around the pool; sadly the water level was already low. In summer the grass grew tall and looked untidy, so it is not surprising that at some point the flat area around the pool was gravelled instead. Girvin sent the final cheque for Madame's Garden to Hill on 20 October 1930. 'It is a great joy to see and we hope you will come down and see it.'

## Higher Trayne

The original farmhouse at Higher Trayne was probably built in the early nineteenth century. It was of three bays and joined to a barn at the north end.<sup>17</sup> Alterations were doubtless made according to the needs of the occupiers, such as inserting two bedrooms above the dairy by raising the roof.<sup>18</sup> This building was the base onto which Hill designed a very different house for Vere Latham Baillieu (1892–1949), daughter of an Australian financier and herself a musician and writer, including poetry and children's books. In 1941 he had to conform to wartime regulations but it was a remote spot for inspectors. He used stone quarried on site and some recycled materials, such as timbers, an ancient door and old tiles.<sup>19</sup>

The first design put a single thatched roof over the three bays on the west side and changed the entrance to the east side, where two lower roofs covered two storey wings on either side of the single storey front door, flanked by two circular windows containing glazing bars forming the letters 'V B' for Baillieu. The original chimney became a typical Hill tapering slab stack and an open loggia was shown on the plan at the southern end with another eastern circular window.<sup>20</sup> The barn became a single storey music room with a matching circular window and a solid chimney on the east side. The west side of this was the most original feature; initially proposed as six full height double windows with glazing bars, these were built as triangular bays with the bottom two thirds opening to the garden, giving air or shelter according to the wind (Figure 9).<sup>21</sup>



Figure 9. Higher Trayne music room (author 2018)

Steps at the north end linked the garden to the lower level of the courtyard. Each roof was intended to end in stone slabs but these were changed to crow-stepped gables with wide flashing to protect the thatch from the Atlantic gales. Hill's life-long attraction to Scottish architecture culminated in 1953 with the publication of *Scottish Castles of the sixteenth*

*and seventeenth centuries*.<sup>22</sup> These gables were a significant and practical nod in that direction. A more immediate source of this design may have been a traditional French hay barn with crow-stepped gables, painted by Hill on a tour of the Pyrenees. This watercolour, entitled 'Farm Garvarnie', was purchased by Baillieu from Hill's 1946 exhibition of paintings.<sup>23</sup>

When described in *Country Life* in October 1943, the buildings were still not finished. The northern low roof was left with the original tiles, the stonework was white-washed and in places pink-washed to match the shutters on the upper west side of the main house. The eaves soffits were brilliant orange-chrome; a vivid Hill colour scheme. Above the main garden door was a circular stone decoration like the windows and emphasised by vertical pink angular edgings, echoing the horizontal window pattern of the music room.<sup>24</sup>

The drive turned off narrow Oxenpark Lane to run along a ridge and had curved round to the west to approach the farmhouse from that side. In order to place the garden there instead, Hill added a final stage to drop steeply north down into the hollow which concealed the house (Figure 10). An open courtyard was framed by the house and the barns with a large pond on the far side. Baillieu wanted to raise white geese and this was to be their home; they would also have been good 'watchdogs' in a very isolated spot. As an owner of geese, Hill would have been sympathetic and it was one of the themes of a mural by Hans Tisdall on the north wall inside the music room.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 10. Looking down on Higher Trayne from the east (author 2018)



Figure 11. Looking across pool and stream through the central piers at Higher Trayne (author 2018)





Figure 12. The reflecting pool at Higher Trayne (author 2018)



Figure 13. Piers below the viewpoint at Higher Trayne (author 2018)

In the garden that he created on the west side, Hill achieved a subtle design that focused on the wonderful view across the deep coombe below within a setting that enhanced it. A pair of white painted brick piers on the plan of an eight-pointed star framed the views into and out of the garden (Figure 11). Between them was a flight of V-shaped steps of rough stone and tiles on end, which led to the lower meadow and a path down to the stream in the valley.<sup>26</sup> To maximise the effect required considerable excavation of the upward slope to achieve ‘a wide natural-looking trough’ along the central axis from the garden door of the living-room. At the centre of the trough was a shallow circular turquoise pool set in the turf, large enough to reflect the house and be in proportion to the space around (Figure 12). From this ran a twisting stream with a smaller pool, lined with flag iris and aquatics. By the house this stream joined another already running down from the southern hillside, which split into rills around either side of the house and would have fed the goose pond. The bowl effect was enhanced by the surrounding low stone walls; these might have been higher but a visit from a building inspector left them half finished. Turf swept up to these walls but massed shrubs were planted around the bowl: blue hydrangeas and fuchsias were named. Against the house and garden walls were magnolias, gardenias, figs, roses, ceanothus and bay. A flourishing buddleia was shown on the cover of *Ideal Home* (see Figure 3 on p. 11 of this journal).<sup>27</sup> Beside the water and near the house were ‘old, wind-swept and gnarled silver birches collected and transplanted from rocky scrubs in the locality’.<sup>28</sup> These had been sketched in on Hill’s first drawing and shown clearly in a later water colour by Hill.<sup>29</sup> They were separated from the house beds by an attractive path of Delabole slate ‘set within wide borders of porphyry-coloured beach pebbles brought by boat from the mouth of the river near Hunters’ Inn and set in white mortar, their perfectly regular shapes graded in size from a duck’s egg to a football.’<sup>30</sup>

On the northern edge of the turf bowl was a flight of zig-zag stone steps with beds on either side containing (initially) slender Irish yews set in herbaceous planting; Hill might well have remembered Jekyll’s drystone wall plans at Fox Steep. The zig-zag walling on either side of this ‘Italian garden’

repeated the theme of the music room windows. Hill had used a curved version of ‘crinkle-crankle’ around the car park of the Prospect Inn, Minster, Kent, in 1938.<sup>31</sup> Had he seen the tall pair of such walls in brick on either side of the walled productive garden at Pilton House, only 12 km. from Cock Rock along the direct road to Barnstaple and adapted the idea to his angular designs?<sup>32</sup> This would have been a good spot for sun-bathing and also led up to two more piers (Figure 13). These did not frame a view but indicated that one was to be found above them; a short walk uphill revealed a glorious panorama to the north. Down the coombe lay the village of Hele, a wide expanse of sea, Lundy Island and beyond that the Welsh coast.

Baillieu only enjoyed a few years at Higher Trayne and the property stood empty for two and a half years from December 1949. It was then owned by a series of farmers, understandably more interested in the land than the house and garden.<sup>33</sup> The roofs were tiled and internal alterations spoilt the music room.<sup>34</sup> When it was bought by Dr. and Mrs. Richard Pool in 1971, all needed considerable restoration, which they gamely attempted. The metal cat silhouettes on top of the main piers date from this time. However by the time it was up for sale again in 2015, the garden was overgrown and only the large birch tree by the main pool was flourishing; it too subsequently died. The yews were huge, almost obscuring the steps, but two figs had survived. Newman claimed that all Hill gardens had a birch and a fig.<sup>35</sup>

The new owners, Steven and Ally Poore, have restored the house as closely as possible to the original design with sensitivity and in quality materials.<sup>36</sup> The farm buildings on the east side of the courtyard have been attractively converted to living accommodation and garaging while work continues on the house. Only a short length of wall from the goose pond had survived. The garden has been reclaimed, later additions largely removed and walls mended, revealing some shrubs along the banks; yucca and fuchsia may well date back to Hill. The slope up to the view of the tree-lined coombe continues to delight but if there was a particular focus it has now been lost.



## The Second Cock Rock

In September 1938 the ladies at Cock Rock decided to glass in the open loggia, as most owners of Hill houses did when such features were less fashionable and their impracticality in the unreliable British climate had become obvious!<sup>37</sup> Girvin had boasted of the efficiency of thatch instead of slate and the low insurance rate of 2s 6d in the £100.<sup>38</sup> This did not prevent the main house burning almost completely in 1943, though not as a result of WWII. Only the great chimney and the walls of the entrance and workroom survived. The pump house, gardener's cottage and the two attached walled gardens were unharmed, so Hill designed a curved sitting room for Girvin, attached to the cottage on the east side and opening into the Secret Garden.<sup>39</sup> It had a huge, solid chimney, like the first Cock Rock. However the kitchen had to be shared and in order to build a separate one, Hill had to obtain the permits required by post-war building regulations. By 1952 he had used part of the flower bed against the wall to add a long, narrow, curved room with modern fittings. The two rooms were of the same local stone with a cobblestone coping to hide the flat Ruberoid roof. They were linked by an open covered porch, giving a close resemblance to the entrance of the old house, but there were plans to add sliding glass doors.<sup>40</sup> Girvin's photograph of the terrace outside the sitting room was published in *My Garden* in January 1950. A pair of large pale blue vases stood in front of well filled wall beds and climbers; they were planted with pink and blue cinerarias.<sup>41</sup>

Finally Hill was able to build a new house 1953–5 but was restricted by regulations to a floor area not exceeding 1500 sq. ft. He also needed to accommodate the post-war circumstances of Girvin and Cosens: Girvin was then 71 but lived to be 86 and wanted the new house to be 'labour-saving and easy to maintain with the minimum of domestic assistance and all on one level', while retaining access to her sitting-room in the gardener's cottage.<sup>42</sup> Hill drew together all the separate surviving elements of the site in a brilliant response, siting the modern single storey flat roof house at the centre and with views and doors out into the garden areas so that they must have felt that they were almost living in the garden (Figure 14). The adjoining garage had a service flat above it. The furniture in the London house had been destroyed by enemy action and of course there was nothing from the first Cock Rock, so Hill was able to include a few

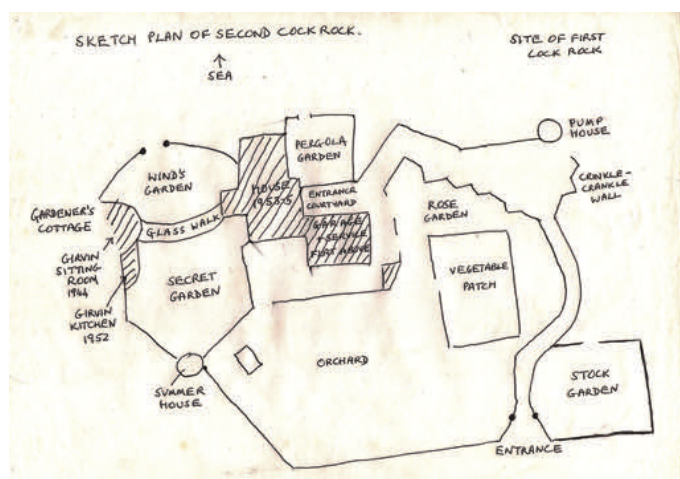


Figure 14. Plan of second Cock Rock gardens (Paul Petrides & author).



Figure 15. The Glass Walk in the secret garden, Cock Rock (courtesy Lady Cairns 2006).

choice built-in items, mainly in travertine marble, but he also used salvaged items for flooring: Delabole slate from the first site and waxed pine from a demolished dance hall in Croyde. The new feature that attracted most attention was the curving Glass Walk linking the house with the sitting-room (Figure 15). Slate steps made a path down the middle of the Glass Walk and wide beds on either side contained such tender plants as vines, mimosa, jasmine, genista and bottle brush. A blue-tiled pool was surrounded by arum lilies. The circular window was retained but the summer house had to be rebuilt exactly opposite and therefore facing north. Instead of the birdbath, an urn on a solid pillar was in the centre of the Y-path.

While he was designing, Mr Hill spent a good deal of his time there, sitting on a canvas stool with a drawing board on a folding table before him, observing the lie of the land, choosing the best views, fixing the position of the garden walls so as to ensure privacy, and generally planning to make the most of every feature of a magnificent site.<sup>43</sup>

The entrance drive turned off the coast road into a splay and through a pair of round rubble stone pillars with conical pebble tops, like the pillars in Wind's Garden (Figure 16). A shelter belt of mainly sycamore and tamarisk lay behind the roadside wall and to the east. The drive wound between tall



Figure 16. Entrance to Cock Rock (courtesy Lady Cairns 2006).





Figure 17. The original chimney stack at Cock Rock (author 2006)



Figure 18. Crinkle-crankle wall at Cock Rock (author 2006)

banks of flowering shrubs before passing through an archway into an open space beside the old pump house and centred on the original chimneystack with its attached ruins (Figure 17). 'Hill's decision to consolidate and retain the ruined cottage as a reminder of the past echoes a pervasive post-war outlook, linked to picturesque theory and the romanticism of ruins.'<sup>44</sup> Rubble from the old house was used to create grassy mounds, adding interest to a flat site. Some walls of the original forecourt survived and the sense of enclosure was enhanced by tall zig-zag walls to the south and east; these had not been mentioned or pictured previously. Hill had taken the zig-zag form of 'crinkle-crankle' and played with it to give a complex angular pattern in keeping with the modern house design. 'Windows' in the southern wall offered glimpses into and out of the 'rose garden' beyond, while protecting the planting from the coastal gales (Figure 18). An opening beside the ruins over the rubble heaps and dunes to the northwest gave a view of the sea, contrasting with the final stage of the drive as it turned sharply into a small paved courtyard; the urns in the terrace photograph had been moved here.<sup>45</sup> It was formed by the garage, a house wall of brick (painted petunia-pink) containing the front door and windows, and one of the 10 foot stone garden walls. Behind this wall was a new enclosed garden, designed for sunbathing and entered from the house by a flight of square steps of pebbles, leading down from a pergola along the back of the wall (Figure 19). A wooden door in the wall on the far side led down pebble steps to the rough grass towards the sea and may have been re-sited from the original Wind's garden. Turning left out of this door would give access to Wind's Garden through the stone pillars. The rest of the site contained more garden 'rooms', some used for an orchard and a productive garden with two greenhouses and cold frames. A separate walled



Figure 19. Pergola garden at Cock Rock (courtesy Lady Cairns 2006)

'stock garden' occupied the southeast corner of the site by the entrance. An aerial photograph in *Country Life* showed clearly the designed views both between the enclosed areas and outwards to the sea, chimneystack and pump house.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps there were echoes of his visits to Sissinghurst.

Monica Cosens' nephew inherited the property in 1973 and a pitched roof replaced the flat one in the 1970s. His son, Paul Petrides, moved into it in 1987 with his wife, Helena, and young family. They were keen gardeners and gradually recovered the overgrown site, propagating shrubs and perennials, including half-hardy ones, all suited to the coastal situation.<sup>47</sup> A storm had covered the original sun-bathing garden in the dunes with sand and the Petrides tried in vain to excavate it. The workroom shell was roofed over. They sold the property in 1998 to Lady Cairns, whose family continue to use it as a holiday home. A replacement kitchen inspired Lady Cairns to redesign the courtyard south of the second house, so that they could 'eat out all summer'; an aim of which Hill would undoubtedly have approved.

## Conclusion

Both house designs were linked with Castle Tor (designed by Fred Harrild, a pupil of Lutyens) in Torquay as a 'slightly twee and cosy type of revived *cottage orné* with vernacular allusions'.<sup>48</sup> This was much less than fair to Hill's ability to respond appropriately to both the setting and the requirements of a client. Hill was as versatile in his garden designs as he was in his architectural commissions, although the two north Devon sites have several features in common. Firstly the clients were 'artistic' women with their own careers. Hill knew and worked for Girvin and Cosens over a long period. In the late 1930s he had designed a thatched cottage for Baillieu at Much Common, Hampshire, but it was destroyed in a 1939 air raid, possibly because 'its Y-shaped plan appeared as an aeroplane from above'.<sup>49</sup> They all shared an interest in keeping birds. As well as the outdoor ones, Hill owned a parrot that was 'acquired chiefly because of his queer cries' and Cock Rock's voluble West African parrot survived the fire.<sup>50</sup> The owners knew each other; Girvin was credited with the photographs for the *Country Life* article on Higher Trayne.<sup>51</sup> Both sites were in exceptionally attractive situations and Hill focused attention on the main views by the use of piers and the sweep of turf up to the view from

within a bowl. He went a subtle step further at Higher Trayne by using piers to indicate where a view would be found. The signature reflecting blue pools were to be found at both places but there was no frog, statue or fussy planting at Higher Trayne; his style had been honed down to restful essentials. Perhaps he remembered Lutyens' statement that 'a garden scheme should have a backbone, a central idea beautifully phrased'.<sup>52</sup> Wartime restrictions may have helped. The gardens of both have a sense of enclosure to contrast with the open views, repeated several times at Cock Rock. A secluded sun-trap was included in both designs but the stark stonework of Cock Rock was softened by 'Italian' planting at Higher Trayne; perhaps a memory of Iford Manor. How far all the planting reflected the influence of Jekyll is less easy to determine but there is no evidence to suggest otherwise and strong hints that she was indeed the main inspiration for Hill.

## Thanks:

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## References

1. Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Archive at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A), HiO791, (24 November 1937).
2. Brenda Girvin, 'Cock Rock: how we built it'. (n.d. but before 1944), typescript, courtesy Paul Petrides.
3. RIBA Archive at the V&A, 'Croyde (Devon): House, 1925', PA494/8; c.f. Petrides watercolour p. 10, Figure 1.
4. 'WGN', 'Two ways in domestic architecture', *Architectural Review*, (December 1925), p. 214.
5. Vanessa Vanden Berghe, thesis submitted to the University of East London in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MPhil, (September 2013), p. 79.
6. Girvin typescript.
7. R. R. P., 'Cock Rock', *Country Life* (CL), (1 August 1925), pp. 189-191; *Garden Design*, No. 22 Summer 1935, p. 40. Postcard franked '12 AU 1925' and sent to America by a guest during a seven week rental, courtesy Adrian Symons. View RIBA images RIBA14334 and RIBA14335.
8. Jessica Holland, 'An English sensibility: the architecture of Oliver Hill', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Portsmouth, (2011), p. 126; p. 127, Fig. 83.
9. Cover of *The Ideal Home*, (July 1934).
10. Alan Powers, *Oliver Hill: Architect and Lover of Life 1887-1968*, (Mouton Publications, 1989), pp. 10, 66.
11. Girvin typescript.
12. RIBA archive at V&A HiO 534.
13. Girvin typescript and family photographs owned by Paul and Helena Petrides.
14. This section uses: RIBA archive at V&A, HiO 534, labelled 'Madame's Garden'; Girvin, 'Cock Rock'; 'On the Coast of North Devon', *The Ideal Home*, July 1934, pp. 35-6; 'Cock Rock', *Garden Design*, No. 22 Summer 1935, pp. 40-1; *My Garden*, August 1934, p. 513 (repeated November 1947); and family photographs.
15. R. Randall Phillips, *Houses for Moderate Means*, (Country Life, 1936).
16. T. H. Mawson, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making*, (Batsford, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1926), p. 396.
17. Hugh Meller, *The Country Houses of Devon*, (Black Dog Press, Crediton, 2015), pp. 519-520.
18. North Devon Record Office (NDRO) 2458add/PA/2650 Plans for new bedrooms for Mr. H. Creek, 15 January 1935, Ilfracombe UDC deposit.
19. 'British Listed Buildings', Heritage England 853-1/2/140 (house) & 141 (garden piers, steps and walls) Higher Trayne, Berryarbor, Ilfracombe (grade II).
20. The loggia was not built then according to Dr. Pool's typescript notes on the history of the house; see also 'A Farmhouse Restoration: Higher Trayne, Devonshire', *Ideal Home*, (August 1944), cover picture and third illustration on p. 75. The loggia was finally built in 1999 according to Meller and is visible in the sale particulars from Phillips, Smith and Dunn, Barnstaple (2015).
21. RIBA archive at V&A PA491/9, Higher Trayne. View RIBA image RIBA36008. Hill had drawn angled zig-zag screens in his 1931 plan for the Dorland Hall Exhibition in London, which ran from 18 October to 3 November 1934, so that the visitor focused on the articles being displayed. Vanden Berghe traced the idea back to Macy's New York 'Exposition of Art in Trade' in 1927 but these were very different contexts.
22. Oliver Hill and John Cornforth, *Scottish castles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, (London: Country Life, 1953).
23. Holland, p. 396; Vanden Berghe, p. 39. A joint exhibition at the Leicester Galleries with Felix Topolski.
24. Christopher Hussey, 'Higher Trayne, Devon; a recent conversion of a Devon farmhouse by Mr. Oliver Hill carried out in local materials', *CL*, (29 October 1943), pp. 772-5.
25. The geese at Valewood (plus two dogs and the white pigeons) can be seen in the illustration on p. 72 of . Kathryn Bradley-Hole, *Lost Gardens of England: from the archives of Country Life*, (Aurum Press, 2004). The mural also gave details of those who worked on the house and garden but sadly it has not survived.
26. *The Ideal Home*, (August 1944), p. 75.
27. Ibid, cover.
28. *CL*, (29 October 1943), p. 775.
29. RIBA archive at V&A, PA4919, Higher Trayne; Powers, illustration 66, p. 50.
30. *CL*, (29 October 1943), p. 775.
31. View RIBA images RIBA8060.
32. With thanks to Margaret Reed for details of the Pilton House site.
33. More details in Dr. Pool's notes.
34. Tile roof shown in Powers, illustration 66, p. 50.
35. Newman dissertation (see note 9, p. 16 of this Journal).
36. See websites: highertrayne.com and <https://www.devonbuild.co.uk/node/12>.
37. NDRO 3057A/1/421/38 Additions to Cock Rock for Miss Girvin, Barnstaple RDC, (16 September 1938); Newman dissertation.
38. Girvin typescript.
39. *The Ideal Home*, (November 1944), p. 254.
40. 'Adding an essential room', *The Ideal Home*, (August 1952), p. 23.
41. *My Garden*, (January 1950).
42. 'An unusual one-floor home', *The Ideal Home*, (September 1956), p. 76.
43. 'A house surrounded by gardens', *CL*, (15 May 1958), p. 1082.
44. Holland, p. 399.
45. Petrides family photograph (n.d.).
46. *CL*, (15 May 1958), p. 1080.
47. Paul and Helena Petrides, leaflet for garden visitors, (n.d.).
48. Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Devon*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 110.
49. Holland, p. 395.
50. *CL*, (13 October 1928), p. 524; *CL*, (15 May 1958), p. 1082.
51. *CL*, (29 October 1943), p. 775.
52. Sally Festing, *Gertrude Jekyll*, (Viking, 1991), p. 226.