

Gertrude as a young woman

GERTRUDE JEKYL: BEYOND THE BOOTS

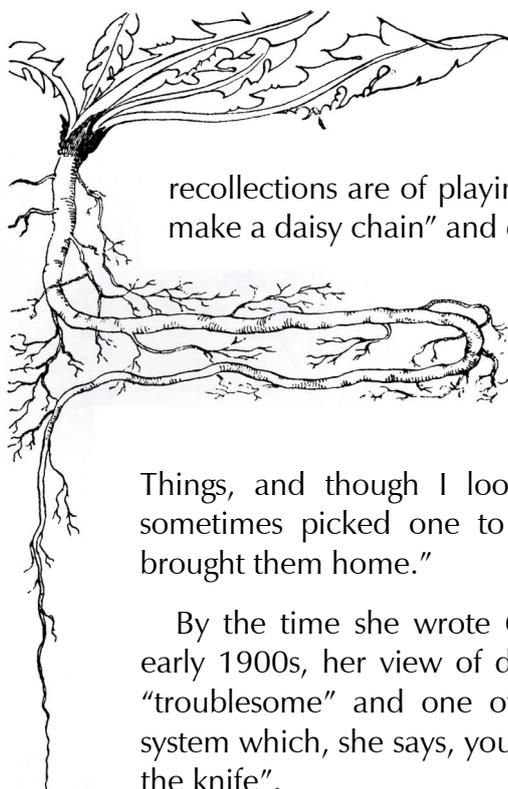
INTRODUCTION

Many people know of Miss Jekyll as a garden designer who collaborated with Sir Edwin Lutyens but are not aware of her earlier years spent as an accomplished artist and craftswoman. She had a large circle of friends in London, most of whom were famous in their own fields, and she travelled widely in Europe and the Mediterranean before, in her forties, settling at Munstead in Surrey. When her sight problems prevented her from continuing her painting and embroidery, she turned to professional gardening as a designer, writer, plant breeder and nurserywoman.

This article draws extensively on the biography of her, written by her nephew Francis Jekyll not long after her death. He had access to “the diary or engagement book, kept without a break [from 1864] until her final illness, which records though with tantalising briefness, her movements and occupation and the people with whom she came into contact”. Alas, this diary is no longer in existence – it is possible that Francis, having completed his *Memoir* of his aunt, had it destroyed. Most of the quotations in this article are taken from this book.



Pencil and charcoal drawing of Gertrude Jekyll, aged 77 (after William Nicholson)



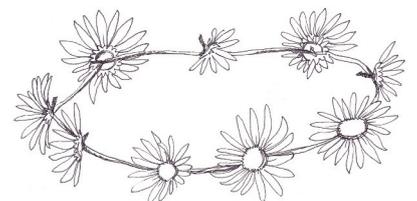
DANDELION.

DANDELIONS & DAISY CHAINS

Gertrude Jekyll was born on 29 November 1843 in London, close to Berkeley Square. Her earliest recollections are of playing in the Square garden and it was there that she “learnt to make a daisy chain” and describes how difficult it was.

She then wrote, “When we walked in the Green Park earlier in the year I was attracted by the dandelions, and wanted to bring them home to the nursery. But our nurse, Marson, ... did not like dandelions. She always said they were Nasty Things, and though I looked at them longingly and sometimes picked one to smell, I don’t think I ever brought them home.”

By the time she wrote *Children and Gardens* in the early 1900s, her view of dandelions was less enthusiastic and she describes them as “troublesome” and one of “the worst early weeds” and illustrates their deep root system which, she says, you should cut “as far down as you can reach with the blade of the knife”.



FAMILY

Gertrude was the fifth of the seven children of Edward and Julia Jekyll. Her father served in the Grenadier Guards and her mother's family were bankers. Her only sister Caroline was seven years older than her, one brother died in infancy and she came in the middle of the four remaining boys, Edward & Arthur and Herbert & Walter.

CAROLINE (1837-1928) married Frederic Eden and lived for more than 40 years in Venice.

EDWARD JOSEPH (1839-1921) served in the army and was a JP for Bedfordshire.

ARTHUR (1841-1863) was Lieutenant in the Royal Navy and drowned off the coast of New Zealand.

FREDERICK (1842) died in infancy.

GERTRUDE (1843-1932).

HERBERT, KCMG (1846-1932) was Colonel in the Royal Engineers, twice Private Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland and held various official, railway and business appointments, including in the Board of Trade.

WALTER (1849-1929) was educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was ordained but soon left the Church, taught music and finally settled in Jamaica.

EDWARD



ARTHUR



HERBERT



WALTER



CAROLINE



CHILDHOOD AT BRAMLEY HOUSE

In 1848 the family moved to Bramley House in Surrey, three miles south-east of Guildford. Gertrude spent her childhood exploring the local area. She wrote "I was always strong and active in my limbs ... I had no girl companions ... It was therefore natural that I should be more of a boy than a girl in my ideas and activities, delighting to go up trees, and to play cricket, and take wasps' nests after dark, and do dreadful things with gunpowder ... but when my brothers went to school I had to find my own amusements." With the "dear old pony, Toby, and the dog Crim" she would "wander away into the woods and heaths and along the little lanes and bye-paths of [the] beautiful country."

Together with her brothers, she visited the working people of the village. There was Whittington, the carpenter; Meates, the lame red-haired carrier; Stanton, the wharfinger who taught her to fish; Parsons the saddler and many more. From them she learned the "secrets of forge and farmyard,

thatching, fencing, walling with her own hands – never satisfied till she had discovered the reasons for doing things one way rather than another”.

Later in her book *Old West Surrey*, she would draw on her early experiences to provide a store-house of practical folk-lore of the area.

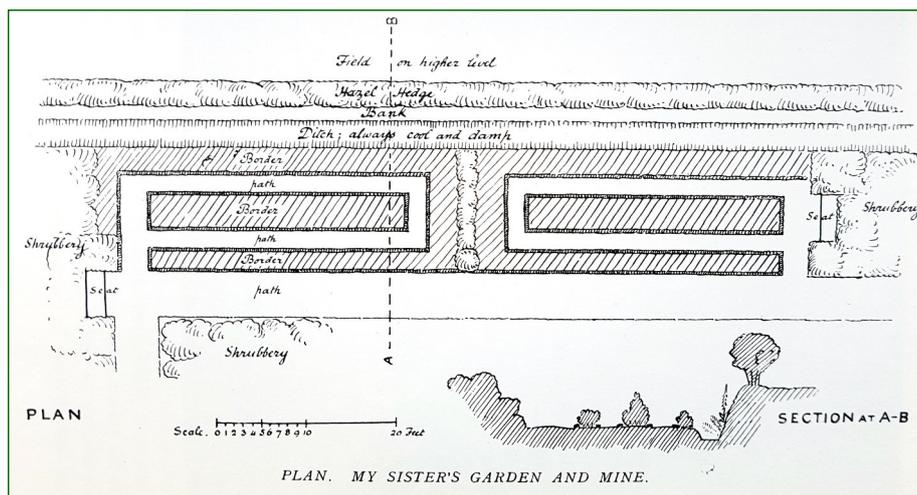
FIRST GARDEN

At Bramley, as well as exploring the extensive main gardens of the house which included “a large rambling shrub garden with broad turf paths” and “two parterres with spring flowers, followed by the usual bedding plants and some well-filled plant-houses”, Gertrude and her sister were given their own gardens, long strips of ground end to end, backed by a bank topped by a hazel hedge, with a shallow ditch at its foot, and divided by a hedge of sweet-peas. The “cool face of the bank was a grand place for Ferns and Foxgloves, Primroses and Columbines”.

In the spring they grew “Primroses and Forget-me-nots, yellow Allysum, white Arabis and Aubretia, and a few patches of the common double yellow Daffodil ... For summer flowers we had Monkshoods ... Then Lupines and Columbines, with annual Larkspurs and Pot Marigolds, and some of the delicious old garden Roses ... We grew no late summer or autumn flowers, for we always went to the Isle of Wight for August and September, and I can remember that when we came back there were sad scenes of overgrowth and neglect, and it took a lot of cleaning up to make the little places tidy for the winter.”



Bramley House, home of the family from 1848-68



Children and Gardens, pp. 99-103

EARLY TRAVELS

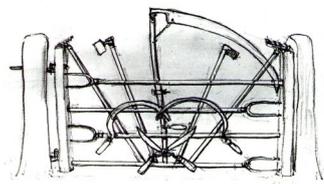
Gertrude’s father was a keen yachtsman and “his happiest moments were spent at the helm of his thirty-ton cutter *Ariel*, which would accommodate some, if not all, of his growing family.” His log “shows that they went as far afield as Norway in one direction and the west coast of Ireland in the other. Later, when the family outgrew the capacity of their floating home, they contented themselves with a visit to the Isle of



Pencil sketch by Gertrude of *The Idle Club, Seaview, Isle of Wight*

Wight, Seaview or Bembridge being the favourite destination and it was here that Gertrude acquired her love and knowledge of boats and all their appurtenances."

Her first experience of foreign travel seems to have been in 1855, at the age of 12, when she and sister Caroline went with their mother to Brückenau in Bavaria.



A silly job made of nonsense tools. The Press

Here she "attached herself to a large German family ... is only seen at meals, and is out fishing or on a donkey all day, never speaking a word of English, and now German seems her native tongue."

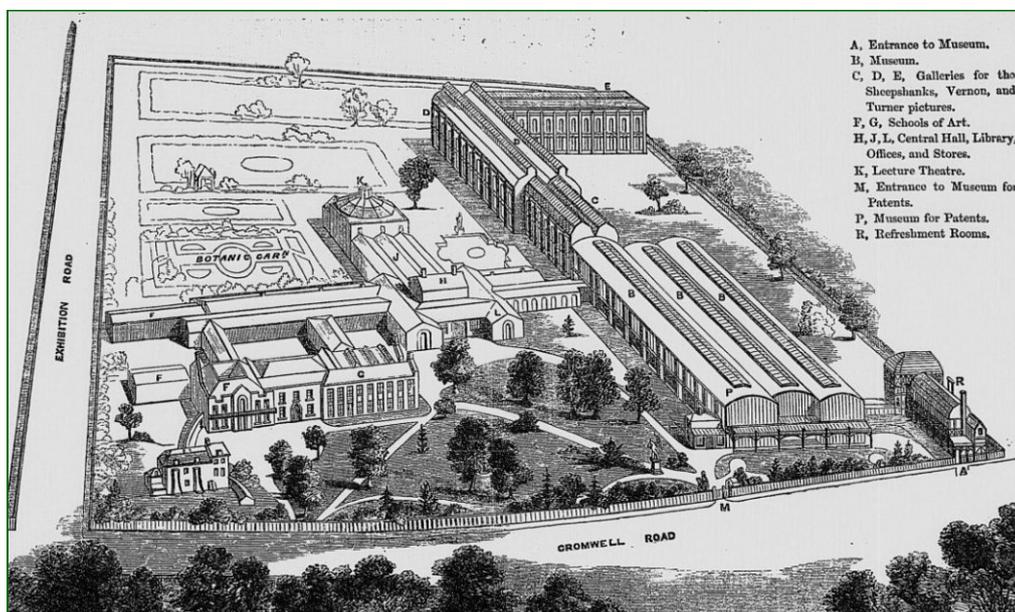


Watercolour painting by Gertrude of *The Needles* from H Hammersley's house at Lymington

ARTISTIC TALENT

Gertrude's artistic talents would seem to be inherited from both her parents. Her father's "took the form, chiefly, of military diagrams, with which he would illustrate his letters on the war, and the lectures he delivered in the surrounding villages." He also "loved to exercise his remarkable mechanical gifts in making models of steam-engines ... He had the wisdom to cultivate in his children the taste and aptitude for making things with their hands." Her mother was a musician (strangely for a Victorian young lady, Gertrude, although happy to sing, never appears to have mastered an instrument) and "an accomplished draughts-woman, and a large portfolio full of studies of buildings, trees, boats, etc. ... remains as a witness to her taste and precision."

Thus it was that she expressed a desire to become a professional artist and in 1861, aged 17, she entered as a student at the School of Art in South Kensington. This also gave her some independence and "the two years which followed were spent in the happy combination of a student life with its freedom and opportunities for contacts with other artists, and a home where her open-air pursuits found an ever-widening scope."

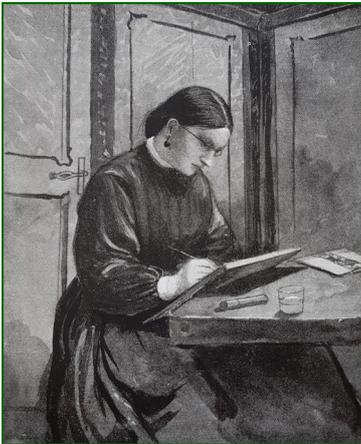


View of The South Kensington Museum in *The Leisure Hour*, 1859, showing the Schools of Art to the left (blocks F and G)

TRAVELLING WITH THE NEWTONS

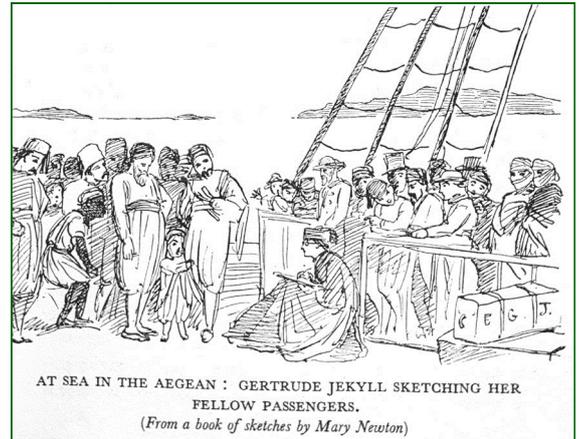
13 OCTOBER – 26 DECEMBER 1863

After art school Gertrude writes: “When I was just grown up, though still in my late teens, I had the great advantage of going with friends to the Near East – the Greek Islands, Constantinople, Smyrna, and Athens, with several weeks in Rhodes.”



Gertrude, aged 19, sketched by Mary Newton

The friends were Charles Newton, “a distinguished Orientalist and excavator of Halicarnassus, Keeper of the Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum, and a friend of her father” (also a collector of Greek art), and his wife Mary Newton, an artist, whose brother was a friend of John Ruskin, one of the great visionaries of the 19th century.



Thus Gertrude, as well as enjoying the experience of travelling in the Near East, sharing drawing and painting opportunities with Mary Newton, was also moving into the circle of Ruskin of whom she had been a fervent admirer through the schoolroom years.

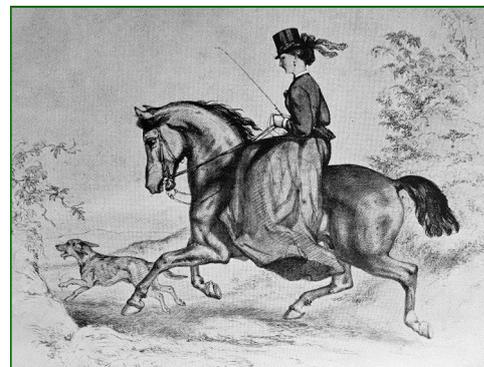
As might be expected, Gertrude entered with enthusiasm into every new experience that this expedition offered and described her travels at length in her diary.



AN INDEPENDENT YOUNG LADY

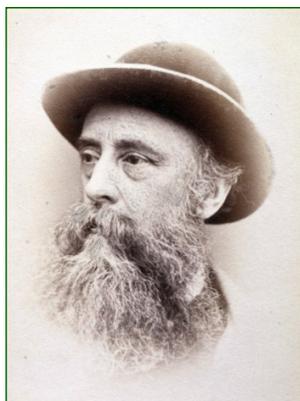
After her travels, Gertrude settled “down to a life of the most varied activity at home and in London ... An old laundry building was converted into a studio” and she produced “a steady output of miscellaneous works, including many pictures and drawings of animals, for which her studies at South Kensington had prepared her. One of these – a portrait of her brother Teddy’s Indian dog – was [exhibited] at the Academy in 1865.” In addition to painting, she “essayed her hand at carving, gilding, inlaying, and a dozen other crafts ... Social distractions were provided by county and military balls at Guildford or Aldershot.”

In London she went to exhibitions with the Newtons. She visited Ruskin, "his notice having been attracted by a picture of *Jehu driving furiously*, which he pronounced to be 'very wonderful and interesting'." The Duff Gordons were her friends and with them she visited Wales and Paris where she copied paintings in the Louvre and took singing lessons.



Gertrude riding in her 21st year

Her studies continued in 1867 "where she attended Fiori's classes in Grosvenor Square and made copies, chiefly from Turner, in the National Gallery. A Female Artists' Exhibition was the means of introducing her work to a wider circle, and the proud entry, 'Sold picture of Toby in snow,' shows that by this time she had definitely entered the ranks of the profession"



G F Watts (1817-1904)

On 16 June 1867 she visited G F Watts at Holland House, beginning a lifelong friendship with the renowned artist.

Another fellow student who became a lifelong friend was Miss Susan Muir Mackenzie and in 1868 they visited Italy together and, whilst in Rome, studied at Gigi's *Atelier* and took lessons in the art of gilding. "Other days were spent in sketching trips, rides among the cork woods, and rather surprisingly, amateur theatricals."

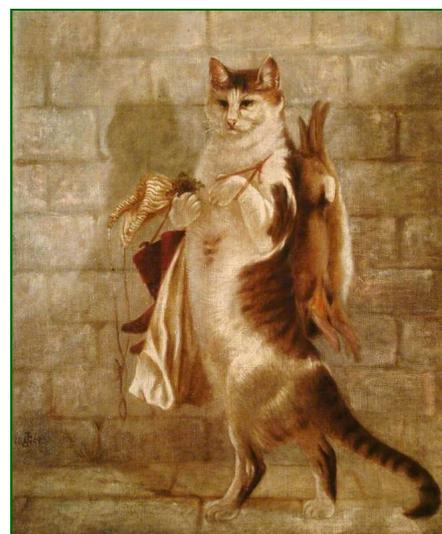
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Jehu driving furiously



Gertrude Jekyll's copies of paintings by J W M Turner's
The sun of Venice going to sea (above)
Clapham Common (below)



Portrait of *Thomas in the Character of Puss-in-Boots*

WARGRAVE HILL

In 1868 a piece of family property at Wargrave Hill, on the Thames in Berkshire, came into the possession of her father and on 8 June “to my great grief”, the family moved from Gertrude’s beloved Surrey. For some reason she never came to love her new home. One reason she gave concerned the proximity to Reading, “I must explain that I had no personal dislike to the biscuit-making chimneys – on the contrary I thought their perpendicular lines were rather



Part of the garden at Wargrave Hill

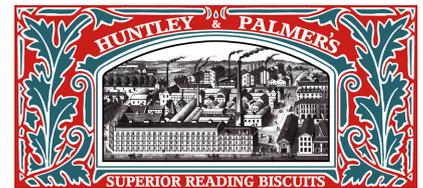


Wargrave Hill

pleasant in the distant valley; but

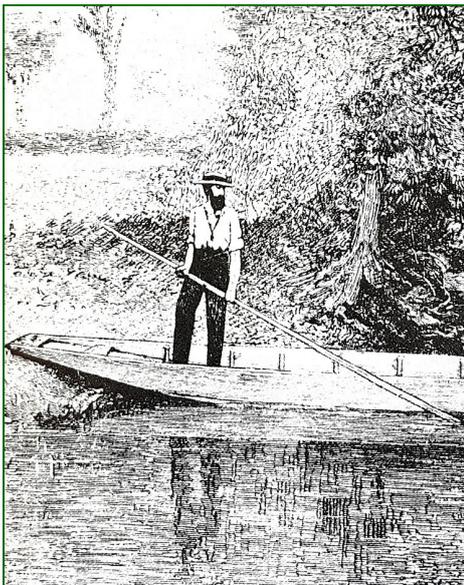
I do own to feelings of irritation when every visitor, looking at the view, found it necessary to tell me that those were Huntley & Palmer’s chimneys!”

However, the new home “afforded ample scope for decorative activity” and “the new garden yielded rich opportunities for experiment” and in July 1871, she wrote “much



interested in garden plants – always collecting” so her love of gardening continued in the background.

GEORGE LESLIE’S IMPRESSIONS



George Leslie punting on the Thames

The painter George Leslie in his book *Our River* described the impression she made upon him: “Through my brother-in-law I became acquainted with Miss Jekyll, then living at Wargrave; a young lady of such singular and remarkable accomplishment, that I cannot resist giving my readers some account of her various occupations and pursuits. Clever and witty in conversation, active and energetic in mind and body, and possessed of artistic talents of no common order, she would at all times have shone conspicuously bright among other ladies. The variety of her accomplishments, however, is far more extensive; there is hardly any useful handicraft the mysteries of which she has not mastered – carving, modelling, house-painting, carpentry, smith’s work, repoussé work, gilding, wood-inlaying, embroidery, gardening, and all manner of herb and flower knowledge and culture, everything being carried on with perfect method and completeness.

“Her artistic taste is very great, and if it had not been for the extreme near-sightedness of her vision, I have little doubt that painting would have pre-dominated over all her other talents ...

“Her garden at Wargrave was a perfect wilderness of sweets, and old-fashioned flowers bloomed there in the greatest profusion; there were lavender hedges of marvellous growth, and the generous way she, with a lavender sickle of her own construction, reaped me an armful, I shall long remember with grateful admiration.”

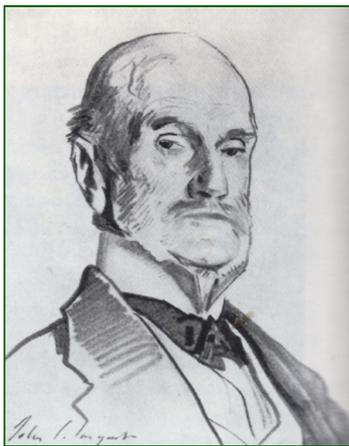
THE BLUMENTHALS & "THE CHALET"



Jacques Blumenthal

During her frequent visits to London, Gertrude often stayed at 43 Hyde Park Gate, the home of Jacques and Léonie Blumenthal. Jacques (1829-1908) was a German pianist and composer at the court of Queen Victoria and his short piano pieces and songs achieved considerable popularity. His wife "was a past mistress in all the arts of hospitality". She and Gertrude worked together on "works destined for [the house's] adornment", including the painted Drawing Room and the Music Room curtains.

During the summer months, the Blumenthals moved to "The Chalet", "a mountain home near Les Avants, above the Lake of Geneva". Special friends, who included Gertrude, "not more than a dozen at a time – often a polyglot party whose only common tongue was French – [beguiled] the days with gardening, sketching, and walks among the flowery alpine pastures, and the nights with dramatic and musical pastimes".



Hercules Brabazon
by John Singer Sargent

It was at "The Chalet" that Gertrude met Hercules Brabazon (1821-1906) with whom she formed a lasting friendship. He was an English artist, accomplished in Turner-manner watercolours. In 1872, she painted some furniture in the music-room of Oaklands, his Sussex home.



The Blumenthals' house at 43 Hyde Park Gate, London.

Right: The Music Room and inlaid door.

Below: The Drawing Room.



Gertrude plant collecting in
Switzerland,
drawn by Lionel Benson

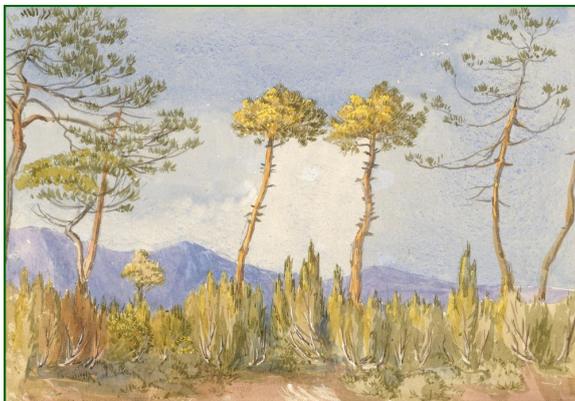
VISIT TO ALGIERS WITH BARBARA BODICHON



Barbara Bodichon

Through Hercules Brabazon, Gertrude met Madame Barbara Bodichon (1827-1891), an English educationalist and artist, and a leading mid-19th-century feminist and women's rights activist, chiefly remembered as one of the founders of Girton and Bedford Colleges. Through Barbara, Gertrude met the Rossettis and George Eliot.

Barbara and her husband alternated between the house that she built for herself at Scalands, near Robertsbridge, and his villa on the outskirts of Algiers where she filled her days with painting and philanthropic work.



Painted by Gertrude Jekyll at Algiers an example of the 'bold and striking foliage'

During the winter of 1873/4, Gertrude spent five and a half months with her friend in Algiers, soaking up the experiences of Oriental art but also developing a "love for bold and striking foliage plants, such as the Agaves and Opuntias". Later in *Wood and Garden* she recalled her plant-rambles in search of *Iris stylosa*: "What



Iris stylosa

a delight it was to see it for the first time in its home in the hilly wastes, a mile or two inland from the town of Algiers!"

INTERIOR DESIGNER

In 1874 she acted as hostess to her brother Herbert, then employed at the War Office, at the flat she took for him in Morpeth Terrace. Among visitors there was the Duke of Westminster and she was soon employed by him "to design



Eaton Hall, Cheshire, 1814

curtains and other fittings at Eaton Hall – the most important and elaborate commission that she had as yet under-taken." Her designs included "some fine panels of embroidery on silk for the 'Turret Doors' worked 'under my occasional supervision' by the Royal School of Embroidery."

"The designing and superintendence of these large works occupied the autumn of 1874 and much of the following year. 'I wonder,' writes the Duke of Westminster in 1875, 'if you would accept the position of "umpire-in-chief" as to the furnishing generally at Eaton? I don't see how without your advice it can ever be satisfactorily accomplished'."



Some products of the workshop



MUNSTEAD GLASSES designed by Gertrude who wrote in *Home & Garden*: Some years ago, seeing that there was a want of flower-glasses of simple shape that would hold plenty of water and would be moderate in price, I made some designs which were taken up by a large firm in the glass and china trade, Messrs. James Green & Nephew, 107 Queen Victoria Street.

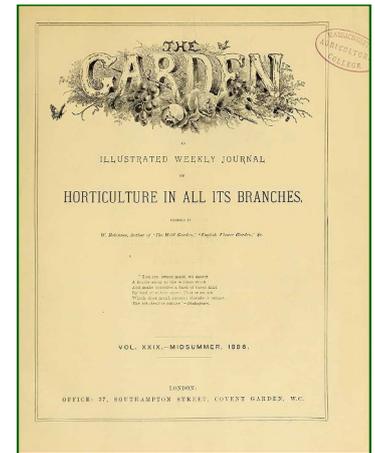
WILLIAM ROBINSON & THE GARDEN

In January 1875, Gertrude records in her diary that she visited “Robinson at Garden Office”. “William Robinson ... was already conspicuous in the gardening world as the leader of the revolt against ‘bedding-out’ and the excesses of the formalists.



William Robinson
1838-1935

“His paper, *The Garden*, founded in 1872, was foremost among the journals which catered not only for professional horticulturalists but for the growing class of amateurs, and it was not long before Gertrude, an original subscriber, became one of its regular contributors, though many years passed before she was invited to join the staff of the paper and assist in its management.”



The Garden, Vol XXIX,
Midsummer 1886

MUNSTEAD HOUSE

In March 1876 Gertrude’s father died. The family at home was reduced by the marriages of her sister and elder brothers and her mother took the opportunity to return to the vicinity of their former home near Bramley in Surrey. Aware of the “compromises inseparable from the house of others, [she] was determined to acquire a site in the neighbourhood and to build herself a house which should satisfy her somewhat altered requirements”.

Mrs Jekyll chose “a site of twenty acres on Munstead Heath, some four hundred feet high, midway between the old home and the market town of Godalming, to which the new direct line to Portsmouth had brought improved communications.”

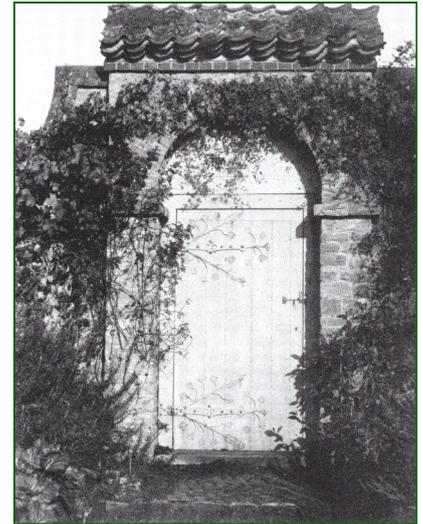
Mr W Stevenson was selected as architect and building began in 1877. Gertrude, as may be imagined, took a keen interest in all aspects of the building operations. “In an excess of geological zeal, [she] was with difficulty restrained from descending the well by the workmen, who dreaded the possibility of having to raise her to the surface.”



Munstead House, the south front, where Gertrude lived with her mother between 1877 and 1894 .
(Photographed in 1934)

FIRST GARDEN ON VIRGIN SOIL

The building of a new house gave Gertrude her first chance to create a garden from scratch. It was “laid out on lines which, while not impervious to criticism, showed promise of the mastery she afterwards attained. Some of the salient features – the low terrace wall in front of the house, widened at intervals to admit a series of tubs or vases; the lawn, irregularly square, invaded by the skirts of rhododendrons; the long grass walk flanked by cypresses, the south border sheltered by the kitchen-garden wall; the sunk rockery, the nut-walk, the transition of formality into a ‘wilderness’ of chestnut, birch, and holly, carpeted in spring with wild hyacinths and other bulbs – have, apart from their own amenities, the interest which attaches to her earliest work.

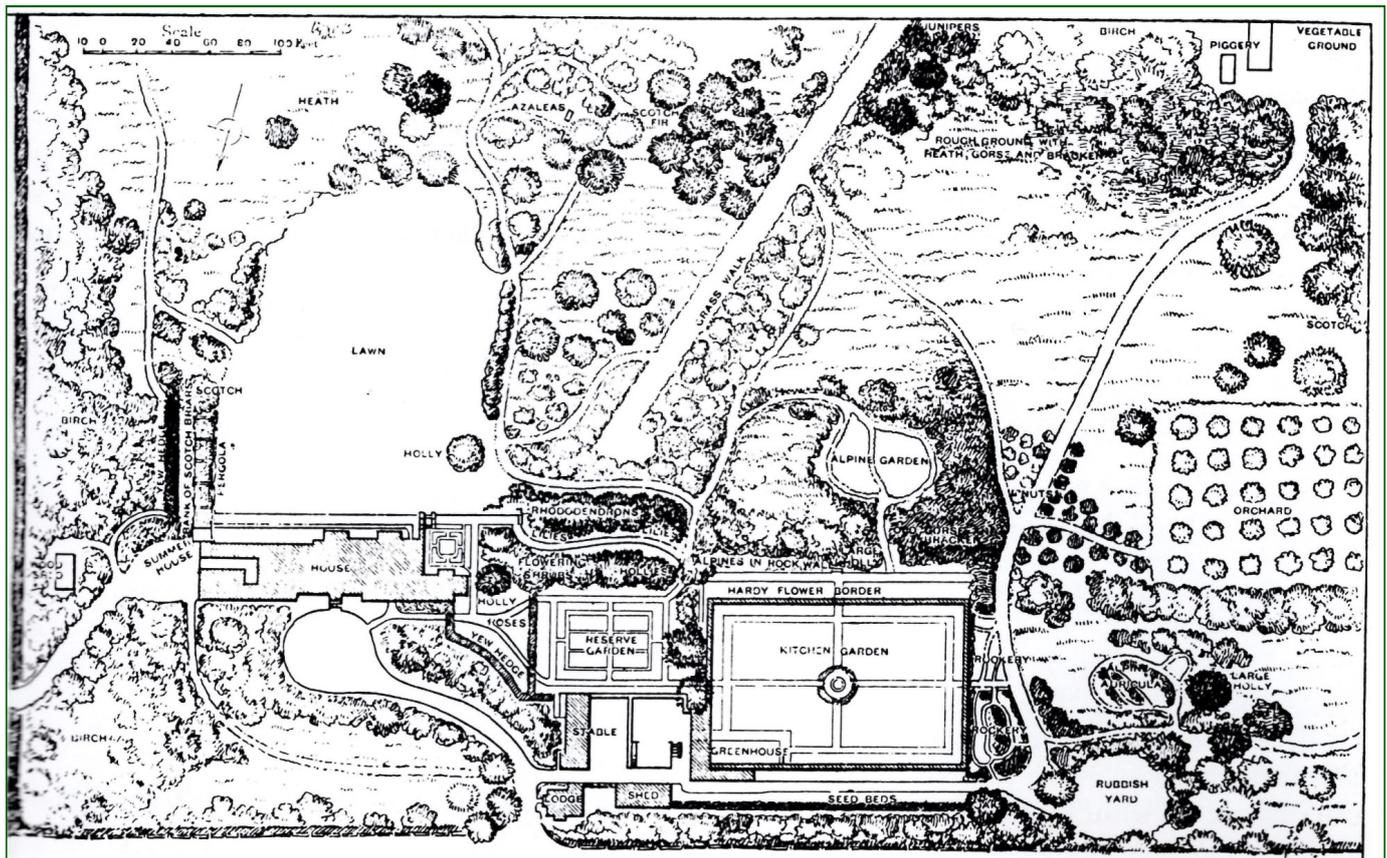


Doorway leading to the kitchen garden at Munstead House, 1885



Michaelmas daisy borders in the kitchen garden, 1885. The Scots pines in the background are along the boundary edge of Munstead Wood

“Plant nurseries in those days were few and expensive ... ‘Moving plants to Munstead,’ ‘Waggon of fruit trees from Wargrave,’ are among the entries for the autumn of 1877. The summer of 1878 saw the new home ready for occupation. ‘Sept. 26th. - To Munstead for good.’ ... The remainder of her life - another fifty-four years - was destined to be passed, with brief and infrequent intervals, within half a mile of this spot.”



The garden at Munstead House

THE GARDENS OF MUNSTEAD HOUSE BECOME FAMOUS

As well as creating the garden at Munstead House, Gertrude continued with her craft work and travels. She had her own large workshop in the house, accessed by a winding stair from her bedroom above.

“Much of her time was occupied by silver repoussé work ... for ornamental dishes, blotting-book covers, and other decorative objects; ... then there were carved chimney-pieces, and ‘Richezzas’ – hanging cupboards for the display of miscellaneous ornaments.”



Detail of wallpaper design by Gertrude

Commissions reached her from the Prince of Wales, Lord Carnarvon (to whom her brother Herbert was Private Secretary), and neighbours at Peperharow and Cranleigh and there was more work for the Duke of Westminster at Eaton Hall.

She travelled to Brittany in 1880 with the Blumenthals and in 1883-4 she visited Italy with a six-week stay in Capri as the guest of her neighbour Lady Grantley of Wonersh. “As usual, her sketch book accompanied her.”

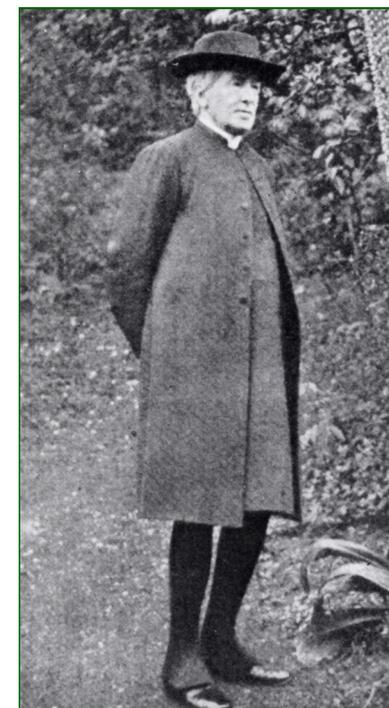
The garden at Munstead drew other notable gardeners and “neighbours sought her help in laying out their own properties”. In 1880 there was a visit from William Robinson and Revd Reynolds

Hole, Dean of Rochester. Others included Sir Joseph Hooker, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; James and Harry Mangles of Littleworth, pioneers of rhododendron-growing; Theresa Earle, author of *Pot-Pourri From A Surrey Garden* and G F Wilson “whose property at Wisley ... was the nucleus of what are now the gardens of the Royal Horticultural Society.” Painters, too, were attracted by the chance of delineating rare and interesting plants; among these were the botanical specialist, H G Moon, and Miss Marianne North, well known for her collection of flower paintings at Kew.

On 7 August 1884, her diary records “Garden plan for Mr Okell, Manchester” – the first mention of a garden plan for a client.



The workshop at Munstead House, showing some of Gertrude's oil paintings, her inlaid work and her pottery collection



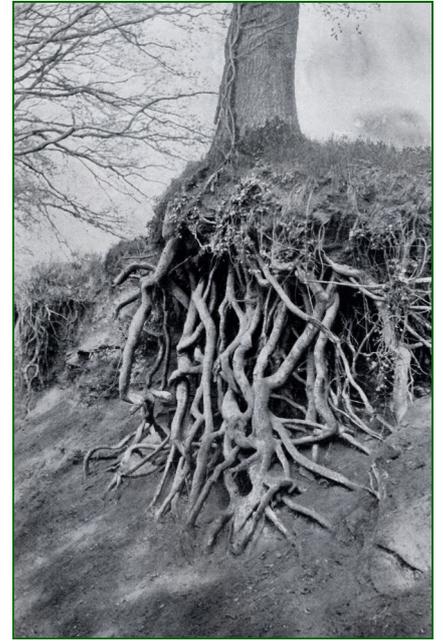
The Very Revd Dean Hole (1819-1904), founder of the National Rose Show



Designs for embroidery

PHOTOGRAPHER

“The year 1885 saw [Gertrude’s] introduction to photography, then in its infancy. This soon became an absorbing interest, and, as usual, the entire process was mastered from start of finish; sinks and dark-rooms were fitted up at home, and the long series of tree and flower studies, farm buildings, and old Surrey types which were to figure in her books began to issue from the ‘shop’.



“Some of her earliest efforts may be seen in the illustrations to Mr Robinson’s books and papers, including the *English Flower Garden* ... An entry for July, ‘Phot. at 4 a.m.’ shows the spirit of the true enthusiast.”



Gertrude’s choice of subject matter was hugely diverse



EMBROIDERER



Tulips and roses with tracings made preparatory to embroidery. Godalming Museum

EDWIN LUTYENS MEETS MISS JEKYLL



About 1880

It was on an afternoon in 1889 that an event occurred that was to have a significant effect on the rest of her life.

In the Foreword to the *Memoir* Sir Edwin Lutyens recalls his first meeting with Gertrude. "It was in 1889 that Mr Harry Mangles asked me to meet his remarkable friend, Miss Jekyll. I eagerly accepted the privilege. She was already celebrated in the gardening world, and by her ever-growing circle of devoted and appreciative admirers.

"We met at a tea-table, the silver kettle and the conversation reflecting rhododendrons. She was dressed in, what I learnt later to be, her Go-to-Meeting Frock – a bunch of cloaked propriety topped by a black felt hat, turned down in front and up behind, from which sprang alert black cock's-tail feathers, curving and ever prancing forwards.

"Quiet and demure, of few words and those deliberately chosen and deliberately uttered in a quiet, mellow voice – with keen, bright eyes that missed little in their persistent observation."

He was invited to tea on the following Saturday – this time, Gertrude was "genial and communicative, dressed in a short blue skirt that in no way hid her ankles", wearing her gardening boots and "a blue linen apron with its ample marsupial pocket full of horticultural impedimenta; a blue-striped linen blouse box-pleated like a Norfolk jacket" and "a straw hat turned up and down back and front, trimmed with a blue silk bow and ribbon."

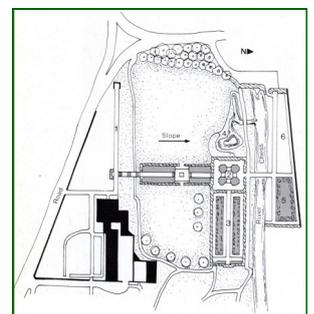


Lutyens by Phipps, circa 1906

FAILING EYESIGHT BRINGS A CHANGE OF CAREER

By 1891 Gertrude's "eyesight, never strong and severely taxed by the strain of so much work, was beginning to cause her grave anxiety, and ... she was induced to visit the renowned oculist Patenstecker of Wiesbaden, whose advice enabled her to arrest the damage, though he could hold out no hope of a substantial recovery. Painting and embroidery in particular were discouraged, if not forbidden."

Having met the young architect Edwin Lutyens a couple of years earlier, she watched with interest as he worked "on his first commission – a house on the southern slopes of Crooksbury, a fir clad hill a few miles from Farnham ... [and] ventured on a few suggestions for the laying out of the grounds." Thus at the age of 47 began a new professional career as a garden designer and many years of happy collaboration in a partnership "which carried their names all over the English-speaking world."



Top: Plan of Woodside, Chenies, Buckinghamshire, was the first garden of the partnership, made in 1893.

Bottom: The photograph shows the vista down the slope to the pond court at it appeared in 1982.



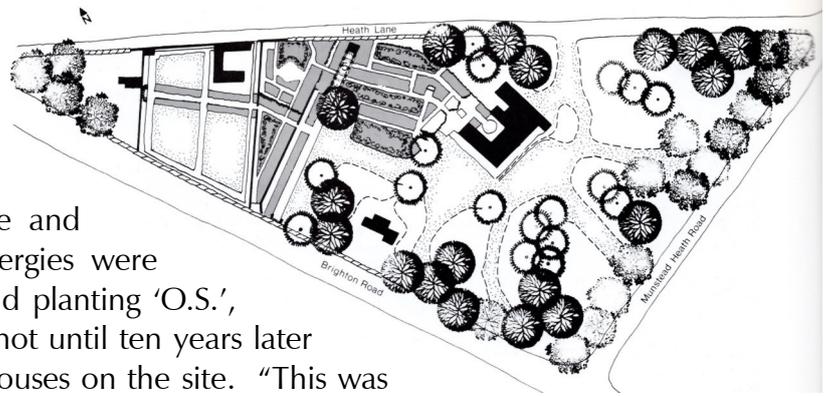
Gertrude Jekyll with cat, Lutyens with a T-square, drawn by the architect himself around 1896.

From Jane Brown, *Gardens of a Golden Afternoon*

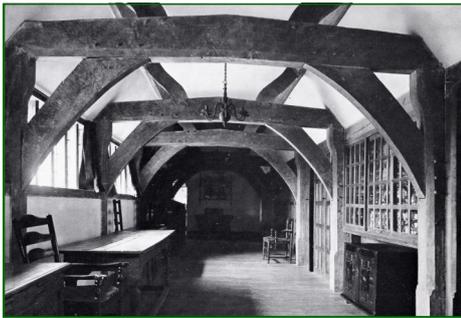


MUNSTEAD WOOD

In 1884 Gertrude acquired a triangular strip of land, about 15 acres in extent, across the road from Munstead House and “from this time onwards her main energies were transferred to the work of laying out and planting ‘O.S.’, i.e. on the other side.” However, it was not until ten years later that building began on the first of the houses on the site. “This was modestly described as the ‘Hut’ – in reality a substantially built cottage, containing two living-rooms, one of them a large east-lighted studio, a kitchen and two attic rooms above.”



Plan of Munstead Wood



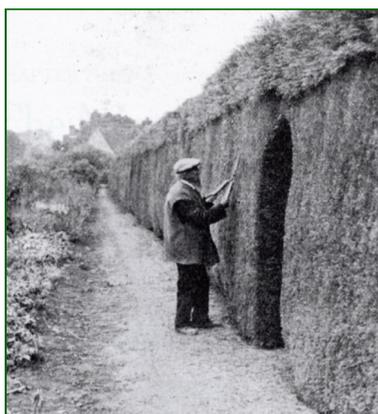
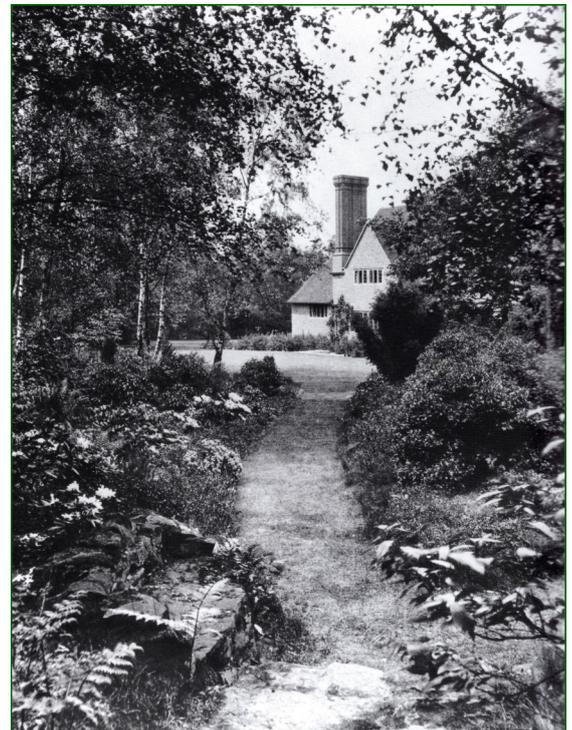
The oak gallery

In July of the following year, Mrs Jekyll died and Munstead House passed to Gertrude’s brother Herbert, by then married to Agnes and with three children, so she felt obliged to move out to the “Hut” and expedite the construction of her permanent home which was begun in the summer of 1896.

This is described in *Home and Garden* and “every detail, both inside and out, was planned with

fastidious care.” The architect was, of course, Lutyens and “every portion was carefully talked over” and she confessed “in most cases out of the few in which I put some pressure on him to waive his judgment in favour of my wishes, I should have done better to let matters alone”.

She watched progress from her “tiny cottage on the same ground only 80 yards away from the work”, and enjoyed the sounds of the artisans at work and the result was that her “own little new-built house is so restful; so satisfying, so kindly sympathetic” that it felt as though she “had never lived anywhere else”.



Head gardener, Albert Zumbach

A gardener’s cottage at the extreme northern corner of the property was built a year or two later to be occupied by Albert Zumbach, a Swiss retainer of the Blumenthals who served her for over 30 years with “intelligent obedience untainted by ideas at variance with her own”.



South side of Munstead Wood from the woodland
Top: Gertrude’s own photograph. Bottom: in 2017

THE WRITER

1899 saw the publication of her first book *Wood and Garden*, subtitled “Notes and thoughts, practical and critical, of a working amateur”, revised from articles she had written for *The Guardian* and illustrated “from the abundant store of her own photographs”. This was published by Longmans and soon followed by *Home and Garden*.



Frontispiece to *Wood and Garden*

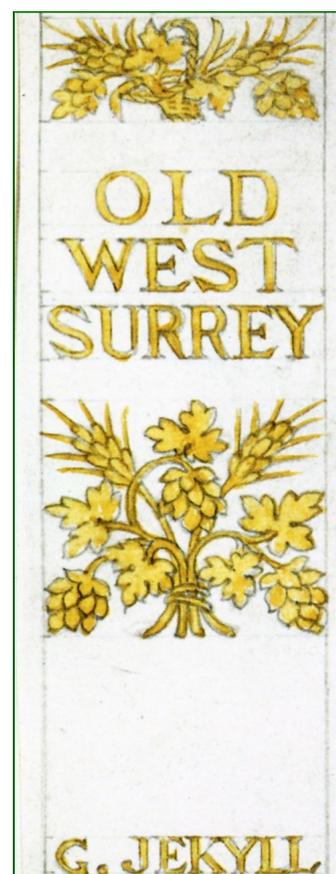
In the same year she welcomed two visitors, Edward Hudson and Mr E T Cook who had persuaded her to undertake joint editorship of *The Garden* which she did in 1900/01. “They now came to enlist her interest and co-operation in a new enterprise – *Country Life* – an illustrated weekly paper devoted to the various outdoor activities centring around the English home.” She remained a contributor for the rest of her life, writing over 1,300 articles for this and other publications and illustrating them with her own photographs.

Thereafter her books were published by *Country Life*:

- 1901 *Lilies for English Gardens: A guide for amateurs*
- 1901 *Wall and Water Gardens*
- 1902 *Roses for English Gardens* (with Edward Mawley)
- 1904 *Old West Surrey: Some Notes and Memories*
- 1904 *Some English Gardens* – drawings by George S Elgood, with notes by GJ
- 1907 *Flower Decoration in the House*
- 1908 *Colour in the Flower Garden*, republished in 1914 as *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden*
- 1908 *Children and Gardens*
- 1912 *Gardens for Small Country Houses* (with Sir Lawrence Weaver)
- 1913 *Wall and Water Gardens: With Chapters on the Rock-Garden and the Heath Garden*
- 1916 *Annuals and Biennials: The Best Annual and Biennial Plants and their Uses in the garden*
- 1918 *Garden Ornament*



From the cover of *Home and Garden*.
Note the pussies.



All these books are as readable today as when they were written over 100 years ago.

NURSERYWOMAN & PLANT BREEDER

Gertrude had always collected plants on her travels and her first “reserve garden” was at Munstead House where she propagated plants and held them for friends such as William Robinson. Significantly, in addition to the “Hut”, the first buildings on the Munstead Wood site were the tool shed, workshop, potting and packing sheds and stable and it was from there that she ran a professional nursery from 1897 for 35 years until her death. Her success in this endeavour required a knowledge of plants and their cultural needs and a ready outlet. Although the main nursery was sited beyond the spring garden, she used many spare areas of ground to maintain her “reserve garden”. Details of plants sold were listed in the 41 “notebooks” held by Godalming Museum, covering the period from 1903-1929. Here, for each commission, in addition to the individual plants and their cost, she noted the name of the property, the client’s and gardener’s name and address and the name of the nearest railway station for that was how the plants travelled.

Vann Water Garden Jan 1912

1.	7 Herb. Jan. 7 1/2 doz feet	3	2	Prud 4	39 Marston Bunch		
					39 Marston 3 Cherrill		
					6 Marston		
2 A	9 Herb. Jan. 7 doz feet			4 A	10 Rho. myrtifolia		10
	1 Bonyhill						
			9	4 B	8 Herb. Jan. 16 doz feet		
2 B	10 Herb. Jan. 24 doz feet			4 C	5 Silliman 8 doz feet		1 3
	18 Cardamine 24 doz feet						
	18 Cardamine 24 doz feet		3	4 D	12 Herb. Jan. 12 doz feet		4
2 C	12 Herb. Jan. 18 doz feet				12 Spand 6/		7
	10 Silliman 17 Bonyhill		5 3		20 Primrose 2 doz feet		
	50 Silliman 6 doz feet		2 6		15 Bell Helleb. 9 doz feet		7 6
	24 Hellebore 16-10 doz Hellebore		13		18 Primrose 1 doz feet		
3 A	50 Silliman 1 doz feet				15 Galata 1 doz feet		3 7
	18 Silliman 24 Cardamine		4		7 Silliman 5 doz feet		
	24 Silliman 5 doz feet		13		9 King's 18 Coller Jan.		
3 C-3 D	12 Herb. Jan. 18 doz feet		7		5 Silliman 1 doz feet		3 7
	10 Silliman 7 Bonyhill						
	6 Rho. myrtifolia 24 Hellebore						
	50 Silliman 24 Cardamine		40				
	7 Silliman 18 doz feet		50				
	10 Silliman 12 Glyceria		40				
	8 Silliman 12 doz feet		68				

Handed in Jan 13

A page from one of the notebooks showing plants for the water garden at Vann



The Iceland poppy
(*Papaver nudicaule*)

favourites, such as Lent Hellebores, Nigella, Aquilegias, double pink Poppies, and white Foxgloves, [which] owe their ... perfection to the selective breeding carried out at Munstead under her supervision.”

A further endeavour was the sale of cut flowers from a window on the north side of the house.

One of the reasons for having her own nursery was to ensure that the plants she recommended to her clients were available to achieve the effect she had in mind, rather than risk the use of unsuitable substitutions. She also prided herself on selling them more cheaply than other nurserymen. Many thousands of plants were despatched each season. Gertrude had no foreman and so was engaged both in the nursery and in the packing shed. She made up the bills and kept the account books and, in the earlier days, visited the sites and helped with the laying out and planting.

In addition to raising large quantities of plants for sale, she was also involved in breeding improved varieties, particularly of her re-nowned Munstead bunch-flowered primroses – a process she began as early as the 1870s – but also “many other garden



Primula 'Munstead Bunch'

THE PUSSIES



Tabby in the window

Some indication of Gertrude's character, especially in later years, may be perceived in her love of cats. This was not "passing fancy; it proceeded from a fundamental sympathy, a common attitude to the outside world. Like them she preserved a core of independence, she guarded an inviolable frontier which none might cross. Intolerant of dogs, whose barking exasperated her, she found in her "pussies" that perfect satisfaction and companionship which human beings could so seldom be relied on to give her."

A chapter in *Home and Garden* is devoted to "The Home Pussies" where she describes the individual characters of her "dear companions". She writes that she "loved their pretty gentle ways and their extremely interesting individualities, for though I always have four or five, no two that I have ever known have been the least alike; indeed they are almost as unlike as so many human folk. And when I meet with people who say they do not like cats, I

always find that they are quite unacquainted with cat-nature, and have certainly never been on purring terms with any one individual pussy, but have a general notion that a cat is necessarily treacherous and ill-tempered and uninteresting."

She liked "the common short-haired kind" and "tabby and white" was her favourite colouring, preferably "with white fronts and paws; it makes them look so clean and well-dressed.". We are introduced to Pinkieboy and Tittlebat, as well as Tabby, Patty, Toozle, Tommy and Mittens and learn of their favourite area of the garden - "each grown-up pussy chooses a different garden region as his special domain" - and the games they like to play with her.

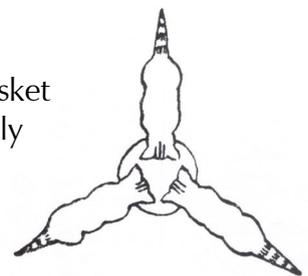


BLACKIE AND THE CATMINT.

KITTENS IN PLAN & ELEVATION

(from *Children & Gardens*)

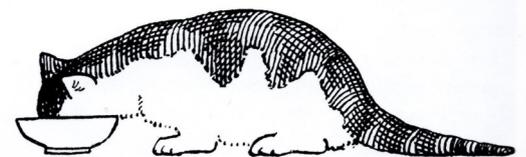
"It is amusing to see the different patterns that kittens lying in a round basket will sometimes get into. I have seen five kittens almost symmetrically arranged like cutlets in a dish, and four with their little paws all up in the middle like pigeon pie. Three kittens at nearly equal distances round a saucer of milk make quite a pretty pattern. The architect said it was an *equicateral* triangle!"



FIVE KITTENS—PLAN.



FOUR KITTENS—PLAN.



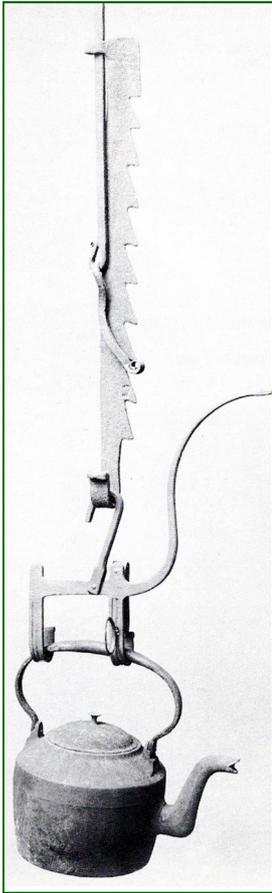
PINKIE WEST ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION

THE COLLECTOR

Gertrude collected everything and it was meticulously archived. In *Old West Surrey*, she recorded “such of its crafts and customs as were to be found lingering on in the memory of the older folk” of her corner of Surrey.



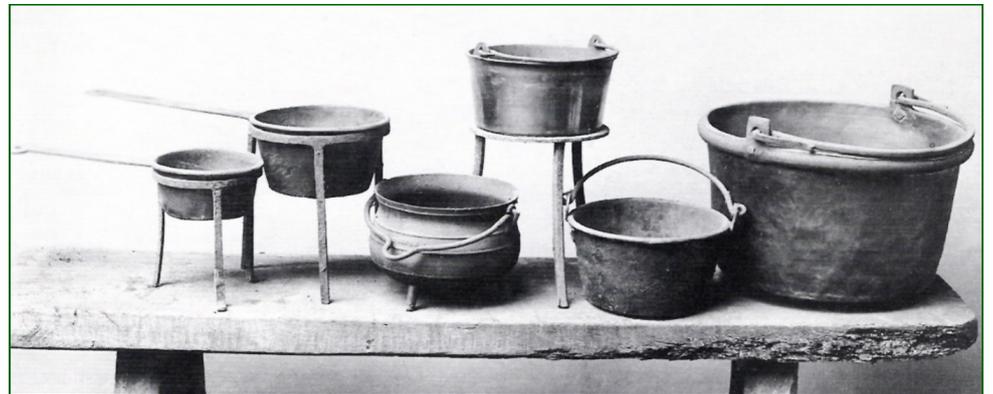
A kettle tipper
or 'idle-back' from
Old West Surrey

She collected “examples of local craftsmanship in building, agriculture and the domestic arts” and in 1907 she presented the greater part of her collection, including a unique series of lighting and cooking utensils to the Surrey Archaeological Society.

She also presented some of her choicest textile pieces to the Victoria & Albert Museum including “a Portuguese quilt of the 17th century with a pattern of trellises and birds; several specimens of Algerian embroidery; details of Oriental and European costumes, a chasuble from the Tyrol, and a series of silk braids and fringes.”



Six Rush-Light Holders from
Old West Surrey



Brass skillets on Trivets, small Iron Pot and Cheese Cauldron
from *Old West Surrey*

When the family came to dispose of her possessions after her death, Francis Jekyll writes: “Vessels of glass, of earthenware, of pewter filled every available shelf and corner. Cupboard doors swung open to reveal the accumulations of seventy acquisitive years – festoons of beads, museums of equine accoutrements, arrays of trinkets native and exotic. Drawers labelled in neat block letters yielded up a miscellany which ranged from such enchanting creations as a dress worn at her sister’s wedding to the scraps of lace, velvet, braid, or damask which had been treasured against some remote contingency of their employment. Complete outfits for carving, for etching, for inlaying; paints, chinks, brushes, easels, palettes, tripods, and all the cumbrous paraphernalia of the photographer; shells for making pictures, sent in response to her appeals from the four corners of the earth; inks, varnishes, glues, resins, gums arabic and tragacanth, samples of perfumes, decoctions of sloe and elder, spices and other ingredients of the famous pot-pourri’ fragments of iron, of brass, of lead, of zinc, nails large and small, clips, quill pens, seed envelopes – everything was provided for and stored in its appointed place. Over all there presided, from his niche in the studio chimney-piece, the dusky image of ‘Pigot’, her tutelary deity and guardian of the workshop, by whose pearly eyes she was wont to swear, on the completion of each task, that it was well and truly accomplished.”



'Pigot'

GARDEN COMMISSIONS

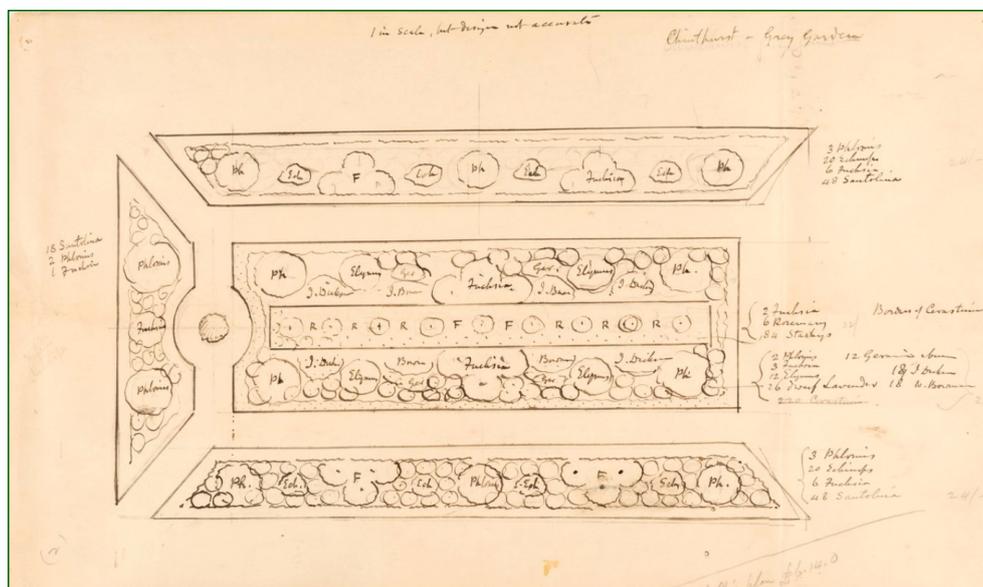
The exact number of her garden commissions is unclear but it seems that Gertrude was consulted on approximately 400 gardens. She retained many drawings, correspondence and photographs relating to her commissions and, after her death, they were acquired by the American garden designer Beatrix Farrand and added to the archive and library at Reef Point, Bar Harbor, in Maine, where the collection was catalogued and labelled and stored in flat folders. They are now in The Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley, US

Her projects ranged in scale from advice about a window-box for a Lancashire factory boy to the preparation of numerous plans for some large estates, such as The Court at St Fagan's near Cardiff, for which there are 27 drawings in the collection and 63 items of correspondence between Gertrude, Lady Llewellyn, her client, and Mr Hibbert, the head gardener. Lady Llewellyn felt she would like Miss Jekyll's advice because "she had eight children and a head-gardener without initiative". Most of her commissions were within the British Isles but she designed three gardens in USA, one each in Hungary and Yugoslavia and several in France including the planting for individual graves in the vast WWI cemeteries of northern France.

She worked with Lutyens on many commissions and also with such other well-known architects as Robert Lorimer, C F A Voysey, Ernest George, Hugh Thackeray Turner, W D Caroe, M H Baillie Scott, Morley Horder and, towards the very end of her life, with Oliver Hill. Sometimes the architect would provide a garden layout for Gertrude to fill in her planting suggestions. For other sites, she would design the garden layout as well. However, much of her early work was for friends or friends of friends.

The collection contains many examples of Gertrude's planting designs for numerous types of planting scheme. Although the majority are for flower or mixed borders, there are some grey garden schemes, spring gardens, rose gardens, planting for pergolas, shrub borders, wild gardens and wildernesses, rock and water gardens and, another speciality of hers, planting in stone walls.

In her later years (she was still working at the age of 89), she would not have been able to visit the sites and had to rely on plans, photographs and sometimes lengthy correspondence in which the client attempted to describe the site. In order to design, Gertrude required details of levels, aspect, etc. and, of course, the soil type and any existing plants that were to remain.



Design for the Grey Garden at Chinthurst Hill
An example of Gertrude's planting plans

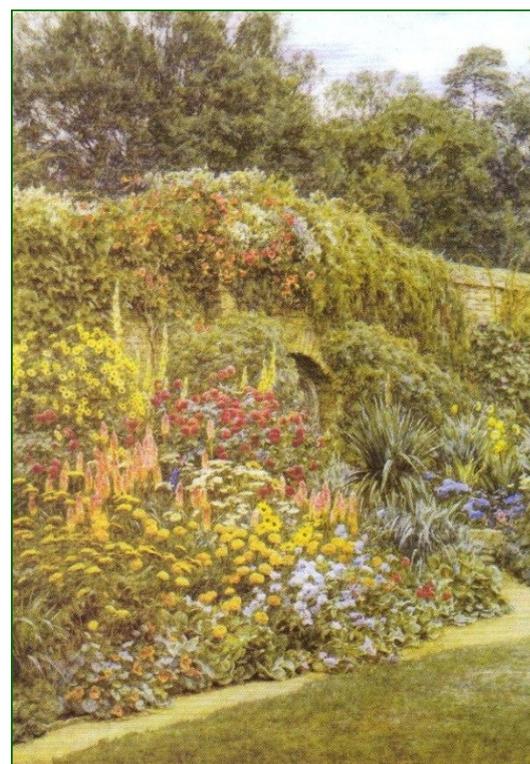
LATER YEARS: 1900-1914

After 1900 Gertrude scarcely left home “except to make short journeys to the sea-side to permit of an annual house-cleaning”. Her last visit to London was in 1904. However, within the immediate locality her “unquenchable vitality of mind spurred her to fresh commitments”. She commissioned Lutyens to build a house at Bramley – Millmead – “to demonstrate by practical experiment how a site of modest dimensions could be utilised to provide an example of satisfactory in- and out-door planning”. She undertook the layout of the grounds for King Edward’s Sanatorium at Midhurst and was present at the opening ceremony in June 1906 and received the congratulations of the King.



She continued with her garden and writing commissions but “as her strength and eyesight failed her, she was compelled to abandon one after another of her cherished pursuits; only a few shell-pictures, whose raised surfaces could be felt rather than seen, served to beguile the long winter evenings”.

Visitors, other than close friends, were discouraged, but among those who came were Miss Ellen Willmott, a fellow gardener and botanist; Countess von Antrim, “Elizabeth” of the “German Garden”; Mr E A Bowles of crocus fame, and Mrs Helen Allingham, an accomplished painter of cottages and their gardens.



The south border at Munstead Wood painted by Helen Allingham (1848-1926)

She was persuaded to supply embroidered banners to the Guildford and Godalming branches of the women’s suffrage movement and attended a meeting at Compton Picture Gallery under the auspices of Mrs Mary Watts.

Following the *Titanic* disaster in 1912, she collaborated with the architect Mr Thackeray Turner in the erection of a memorial cloister on the outskirts of the town for Jack Phillips, the ship’s wireless operator, a native of Godalming.



Phillips Memorial Cloister, restored 1993 & 2012 with help from Surrey Gardens Trust

HOUSEHOLD ROUTINE

“The spring of 1906 brought a new housekeeper, Florence Hayter, whose devoted care continued till the end of her life [and] enabled [Gertrude] to persevere with tasks which taxed to the uttermost her failing strength and eyesight.”

In later years her life was governed by a strict routine:

8.00 am	Called
9.00 - 9.30	Breakfast, a substantial meal
9.30 - 11.00	Letters and garden orders. Workroom
11.00	A cup of soup. Till 1.00 pm in the garden or workroom, according to weather
1.00 pm -1.30	Lunch
1.30 - 2.00	Read the newspapers
2.00 - 3.00	Rest in bedroom
3.00 - 4.30	In the garden or workroom, according to weather
4.30	Tea
5.00 - 7.30	Garden in summer if fine, workroom in winter
7.30 - 8.00	Dinner
8.00 - 10.30 or 11.00	Reading and (after 1926 when she was given a radio by brother Herbert) listening-in
11.00	Bed

WWI & BEYOND: 1914-1932

The war brought disruption to her routine and nursery beds were given over to lettuces and potatoes and, after the war, she undertook a series of planting schemes for British cemeteries in Northern France, designed by Lutyens. “On one day of December alone 1,800 plants of white Thrift were packed and dispatched to the offices of the [Imperial War Graves] Commission.”

In 1920 she was persuaded to sit for her portrait by William Nicholson – daylight was too precious so it was painted mostly by lamplight and the artist filled the daylight hours by painting a pair of her oldest garden boots.

In 1921 she was involved with the erection of a war memorial in a corner of Busbridge churchyard, designed by Lutyens, but the committee meetings were too much of a strain for her although in the summer of 1922 she was in charge of the excavation and laying-out of the concrete foundation.

The winter of 1923-4 saw her at work on the plans for the Queen’s Dolls House, “with model trees and hedges and a lawn of green velvet.”

By 1930, visits from her brother Herbert became a daily routine and his present of an invalid chair enabled her to continue work in the garden. “Roses were gathered for pot-pourri, always a notable operation, and this year the harvest yielded 11,000 – four days’ work”. When Herbert died, her sister-in-law, Agnes was a daily visitor, but Gertrude herself died two months after her brother on 8 December 1932.

She is buried in Busbridge churchyard and her memorial, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, bears the epitaph:

“ARTIST, GARDENER, CRAFTSWOMAN.”

