

LRGT

# Travel Edition

## Salisbury

3rd-7th June 2009



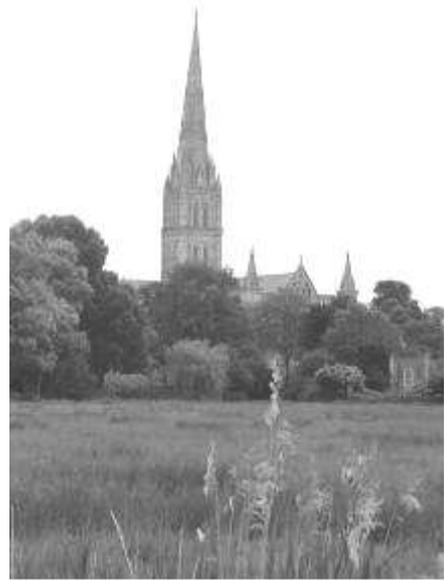
Last day and time for a group photograph on the Palladian Bridge at Wilton

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## Introduction

With the help of the travel company, Travel Editions, L.R.G.T. have visited some of the greatest gardens in the country: Great Dixter, Sissinghurst, Stourhead etc. and some in France, including Versailles. However, I think it was this year that the holiday as a whole came together. The hotel, for instance, was extremely comfortable (particularly for those with double glazing) the staff were attentive and the food was excellent. The situation, within minutes of the Cathedral Close was ideal. Woods provided us with a very helpful driver, John, who was always on hand to be of service, including assistance with a wheelbarrow in one of the gardens. Jane Balfour, who you will remember gave the Spring Lecture in 2008 on Harold Peto, was an excellent guide, particularly at Iford Manor and Shute. Not only that, but she and her husband were kind enough to sort out and arrange suitable places for lunch on a couple of days. But what of the gardens, which were, after all, the purpose of the visit? These are described in more detail in this Newsletter, but from an overall perspective, I think we had a really good mix, for example, 18th century parkland with Palladian bridge at Wilton, Italianate Peto at Iford, 20<sup>th</sup> century Jellicoe at Shute, Gertrude Jekyll at Upton Grey and two Water Gardens, Longstock owned by the John Lewis group and again Shute...



All the gardens were noteworthy in their own particular way, and we all had our favourites. There were some particularly memorable moments, for example arriving at Farleigh House and being ushered into the Pool Garden on a gloriously sunny June morning. The walls were covered in climbers and a table was laid for coffee and homemade biscuits. The owner, the Countess of Portsmouth met us there and took us on a tour of the garden of which she is very proud. She was a really lovely

woman. Jennifer and I did think it must be a real dilemma, deciding where to have your coffee and read the newspaper in a garden with so many inviting places, with interesting views and vistas.

The week ended with a bang, as there was a splendid firework display on our final evening to mark, not our departure, but the end of the Salisbury Arts Festival. All in all, I think, a really good few days.



In 2010, we had hoped to visit Gardens in Rome and Travel Editions did price this for us; however it proved to be very expensive, costing almost £1,000 without the single supplement and dinner. So following a little bit on the Jellicoe trail, we have opted for Surrey and plans are going ahead with some of our ideas. I am getting advice

from Surrey Gardens Trust and other sources on lesser known sites and possible after dinner speakers.

*Elizabeth Bacon*

### **Iford Manor** Wednesday 3rd June 2009

Transported to Italy! This is the best way to describe the initial impact of the garden at Iford Manor. After a long drive down the Fosseway, enjoying the English countryside, this was somewhat disorienting.

Firstly, I have to tell you that I was overwhelmed by Iford. All the time, I just had to stop and stand and absorb the atmosphere. So I am afraid that much of the information from Jane Balfour, our guide and Peto expert, passed me by. Fortunately, we had a copy of her excellent article about the garden in our travel pack and I had also heard the lecture that she gave last year about the architect and designer, Harold Peto.

Iford was Peto's own home from 1899-1933. It was here that he created a unique and romantic hillside landscape, inspired by Italy and the gardens of Ancient Rome. After training and working as an architect for some years, he found himself increasingly out of sympathy with trends in English architecture. Several long visits to Italy drew him to the style of the Italian Renaissance and into developing the idea of designing house and garden together. Many of his design commissions were in the South of France, where he designed Italianate villas in garden settings for his wealthy clients – often expatriate Americans.



During this time, he collected authentic artefacts – Italian, French and Spanish. These were all 'going for a song' and he used them to decorate both the houses and their gardens.



Back in England in 1899, he found the ideal site to create a garden for himself and bought a honey-coloured Elizabethan house with an 18<sup>th</sup> century classical façade in the valley of the River Frome. The land rose steeply to one side and behind it – an ideal setting to create a terraced garden.

Although the overall impression is Italianate, Peto created areas of entirely different moods. The lowest terrace is enclosed on one side by a loggia with 18<sup>th</sup>

century balconies above and, on the other, by a pool where water flows from springs in the hillside above.

A succession of stairways lead you up to an oval pool and thence to the Great Terrace, which is edged with columns and closed at one end by a semi-circular seat – an exedra – and at the other by an 18<sup>th</sup> century teahouse. At every turn, you encounter architectural artefacts – sarcophagi, urns, terracotta pots, marble seats, columns and fountains. Objects which linger in my mind include a “term” – a slender Roman column with the head of the god ‘Terminus’ – used to delineate property boundaries in Ancient Rome. I also loved a pair of dogs, one of which was scratching himself with a back leg in a remarkably life-like fashion.



Above the Great Terrace is a Japanese garden, which I felt was less successful. A path through a wooded area of naturalised bulbs – martagon lilies, which pre-dated Peto’s ownership – led us down to the Cloisters, which were built in 1914, in a Romanesque style. As I sat inside, looking up at the antique fragments, I was reminded of a similar cloister in Ravello. Only the outward view brought me back to sunlit Wiltshire.



Jane Balfour, Elizabeth and Irene take a break in the shade

The planting is predominantly in shades of green – cypress, juniper, box and yew, although wisteria, just going over, cascaded over balconies.

I have to go back to Iford and see it all again, though nothing could replace that first impression.

*Sue Blaxland*

## The Inspirational Gardens of Farleigh House Thursday June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009

I would find it difficult to describe the garden at Farleigh House in complete detail: it is a very large garden or rather a collection of gardens, all different – I am not sure I can remember them all: but they all share striking common characteristics. In her talk about the gardens, Jane Balfour had emphasised the fact that they had been designed by Georgia Laughton, who had herself been influenced by Jellicoe (in particular his designs for Sutton House). And



this is what strikes first and foremost: it is a designer's garden.



From the swimming pool courtyard, hung with a sublime white, very long racemose wisteria (and also a white climbing rose), one moves into a small garden: a neat rectangle, surrounded by a clipped yew hedge (as they all are) divided into narrow rectangular beds, planted in a single central line with a trim row of green plants dotted with white garlic flowers (with bright green dots in each floret). It was all very restrained, very geometric, almost abstract - very design, very Chelsea. This garden set the tone, even though the following two gardens were more traditional: first the old vegetable garden, with its mixed borders, again very carefully designed, with the borders curving in the angles of the garden not cutting each other at right angles) whilst a lovely group of pale blue

irises were arranged in a lozenge at the crossing of the paths in the centre; the planting, of course, was carefully selected! I was struck by the effect of some very pale pink poppies contrasting with the dark foliage (such a different effect from the bright red poppies in the Gertrude Jekyll garden). In the rose garden, one noticed the symmetry of the planting of the rose bushes, as well as the restraint of the colours: all the roses, of course, are old ones, their shades, from white to pink to dark purple, harmonising beautifully (no bright reds – no oranges, hardly any yellows) and their scent is delicious (I like sticking my nose in as many as possible). Geometry and design again in the row of pleached limes; in the amazing crinkle crinkle hedge (leading into the gentleman's garden, which I felt should be the setting for a romantic/detective film) with the surprise of two clipped yew peacocks nesting in one of the curves. The most striking 'designed' garden was the lily pond garden (the second one). A large rectangle of grass around the rectangular pool with its very "designer" statue; (it had 'blocks' of greenery like cut sections of a hedge (but actually made of small leaved ivy growing on a netting frame), some lying horizontal on the grass and placed asymmetrically in relation to the pool: very unusual, very austere.





I must also mention the many artefacts scattered around the gardens, all in perfect taste: the elegant benches, the several iron gates, in particular the one at the end of the raised walk, separating the garden from the countryside, with its pattern of plants and animals (not actually my favourite), a lovely statue of a young girl by the swimming pool, the two different dolphins in the pools, some shining birds flying above waves of clipped yew. White was the dominant colour: the

wisteria, the roses, the water lilies, but also some beautiful trees; the wedding cake tree next to a magnolia, (actually no longer in flower) and an even paler one looking over a hedge, rather like an olive tree with leaves white on both sides. Every square inch of the garden was impeccably neat, every inch of hedge beautifully trimmed: we congratulated the head gardener.



I found this conceptual (I can't avoid the word) garden very striking, very beautiful: I admired it, yet it wasn't ultimately my favourite of those visited during our four days; first of all it lacked unity (admittedly inevitable in such a multiple garden) and then it was perhaps rather too self-conscious. Nevertheless it was a real privilege to have been able to visit it.

*The Rawsons*

### **Upton Grey, Odiham** Thursday 4th June

This is a Gertrude Jekyll garden. It has been faithfully restored since 1983 by Ros Wallinger after a long period of neglect. She tracked down the original plans in the Reef Point Collection of Jekyll garden plans at the University of Berkeley, California, and has recreated it exactly. Her achievement is considerable.

The garden was designed in 1908 for Charles Holme, a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts movement. It is about 5 acres in size and shows many aspects of Jekyll's talents including a Rose garden, a nuttery, herbaceous borders, orchard, tennis lawn, a Roman Bank and the Wild garden. We saw it at the perfect time of year, the first week of June.



The Formal Garden stands within a geometric framework of yew hedges. The original grass slope was converted to terraces supported by dry stone walls, which gave the appearance of vertical flower beds. The immediate impact was of colour. Huge peachy peonies were abundant. Roses were strung out along ship's ropes on the heavy oak pergola. The trapezoidal beds were glowing with foxgloves, aquilegia, more peonies, and edged with lambs lugs. Swifts and sand martins zoomed above us.



The herbaceous borders were ablaze; delphiniums, red poppies, Johnson's Blue geraniums, red hot poker, day lilies, pinks and alliums joined the popular peonies and blushing roses. What a show!

To the west of the house lies her only surviving Wild Garden. It has mown grass paths, shrubs, roses, bamboo and trees. There is a small copse of walnut trees. The cool, calm pond, edged by yellow iris is surrounded by rocks and planted with indigenous water loving plants.

It is an area of curves, unlike the formal garden. It is probably at its best in spring but we all found it remarkably peaceful and enjoyed it after the excitement of the Formal Garden.



This was a garden that made you think. Gertrude Jekyll was 65 years old when she designed it. In her terms it was smaller than the gardens she was usually called upon to design. She sent the plans and organized the delivery of plants, but she never came to visit it. She never saw it planted and one was left wondering whether she might have made it a bit less overblown and "in your face" if she

had. What modifications would she have made if she saw it now? Have our tastes changed? Would it seem too busy, too marshmallow? Is it a period piece and should it just be appreciated as such? Next day we were to move on to a Geoffrey Jellicoe garden with a pool of dark and light, and the contrast of this garden with those we had seen, formed in more recent years, made this garden a great yardstick for comparison.



*Irene Jones*

For all that, I would not have missed visiting this garden for anything.

## Longstock Water Gardens Friday 5th June



A narrow short walk between high hedges of yew brought us to a wide view of a shallow lake with patches of yellow water lilies and low wooden bridges linking 16 small islands. The whole scene was backed by tall trees, rhododendrons and the sound of birdsong.

The garden was created by Spedan Lewis, the founder of Waitrose and the John Lewis Partnership. He added Longstock to his huge estate in 1946, and later made it over to his employees. They now enjoy his house as a holiday

home and conference centre. You could understand a harassed M.P. wanting an away-break here on the John Lewis List!

The lake was originally dug out of gravel pits for road-making in the 1870s and it is partly fed by the River Test. It took Spedan Lewis six years to create the complex of water gardens with the help of his head gardener, Jim Saunders. It is now immaculately maintained and manicured by three full-time gardeners. Spedan Lewis was keen on all kinds of wild-life and once had a family of baboons on one of the islands. The thatched summer-house by the lakeside was equipped with a telephone so that he



could be in instant touch with his chain of department stores without leaving the garden. There are 42 different water lilies planted in the shallow water.



There is an aura of peace and spiritual refreshment here, with tranquil vistas of willow, swamp Cyprus and acacias, and banks of iris, marsh marigolds and primulas around the water's edge; especially the bright red primula japonica 'Jim Saunders', named after the first head gardener, and among the buttercups and grasses, a scattering of wild orchids.

*Jennifer and Malcolm Elliott*

## Shute House, Donhead St Mary, Wiltshire Friday 5th June

Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900-1996) was first commissioned by Lady Ann and Captain Michael Tree in 1969 to design the garden at Shute. In 1994 he resumed working on it with new owners, John and Suzy Lewis. As a visitor, one's imagination is immediately aroused by the house, tight up against the narrow roadway with courtyard to the west. Built as a medieval pilgrims' rest, it was extended in the eighteenth century. Creamy yellow and pink roses cling precariously to the severe stone walls and compete at ground level for some nourishment with



pink and white Valerian. We entered via the French-looking courtyard containing an ancient carved stone font or well head. To the south of the house, herbs cluster in the cracks between the stone slabs of a long sunny terrace which offers extensive views down across a lawn, ha-ha and the pink and yellow sheen of meadows to the horizon.

The experience of any garden is enriched by a theme and a distinct sense of place. Here the location is evocative; something the designer immediately felt and explicitly expressed. Wiltshire is one of Europe's richest areas for prehistoric, sacred and ritualistic remains with major sites such as Avebury and Stonehenge, plus innumerable strange mounds and hollows in the landscape. In particular the garden's site is special; with an unexpected spring that provides the central focus for the water garden. Like the so-called bluestones at Stonehenge, the water that issues from the ground at Shute originates hundreds of miles away in Wales. For millions of years the water has been filtered through layers of rock, travelling through space and time (including beneath the Bristol Channel), to rise from a high, east-west ridge in the landscape at Donhead St Mary. What a magical spot to design a garden! In a relatively compact space, along the ridge to the west and only partly down the hillside, Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe celebrates the source of the River Nadder.



On plan Jellicoe's design looks forced and unnatural. In practice we are led effortlessly towards dramatic vistas such as a mountainous bank of lilac coloured rhododendrons alongside a calm lake with a black swan; through narrow openings in tall hedges; over low, mossy covered stone bridges; below the dark underbelly of

giant camellias; through a black swamp surrounded by the towering, translucent leaves of skunk cabbage; and out into bright, unspoilt meadowland. Jellicoe has composed a figure of eight 'journey' following the crystal clear spring water bubbling up from its source in a small, circular pool hidden in woodland; placidly flowing through a tranquil rectangular tank or canal lined with white arum lilies; then gurgling between exuberant planting along a series of rills and small waterfalls where it drops down fast over different shaped copper lips to finish in a broad and shallow, slow-moving stream between simple, grassy banks.



Jellicoe poetically fuses the picturesque and the classical in this garden so that the sources (Persian, Italian and English) are completely synthesised and transformed. An architect and artist, he understands proportion and scale; space, height and enclosure; solid and void; contrast and surprise; drama and mystery. The judicious and sparse placing of classical sculpture is just right. Similarly, every tree, shrub, grassy bank or dense cluster of perennials looks natural as though they had just grown



happily in the appropriate place. This is not a plant-person's garden in the sense of unusual species and varieties, and parts are quite impractical like the tall beech hedge up against the entire length of one side of the canal making clipping a nightmare!

*Rowan Roenisch*

### **Heale House Garden Saturday 6th June**

After a relaxing morning in Salisbury, we were really looking forward to Heale and its Peto influenced garden. The tantalising glimpse of the house, as we entered the car park, was soon lost and we started our tour with the Head Gardener very much via the 'tradesman's' entrance, through the plant centre.

Walking through the wild-flower meadow there was little evidence of the bulbs they are trying to naturalise or the wild flowers brought in with hay from Great Dixter. Surrounded by beautiful trees including, down to our right, the magnificent *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* (the second largest in Europe) the overall impression very green!



Through the wrought iron gate in the cob wall which, topped with terracotta, tiles looked very continental, we entered the walled Tunnel Garden. The original 1910 Peto design here was for a rose garden, but now there are beautiful apple tunnels, flowers, fruit and vegetables, although the focal point of eight large box balls surrounding the lily pond remains the same.

It would have been nice to stay, but it was onward and through a tiny gate right in the far corner, across a driveway and up onto the wide Top Terrace with its curved benches at either end, very typical of Peto. Then, wow, at last a beautiful view of the house, its soft pink brick and yellow stone sitting so well at the end of the yorkstone path, softened with *Alchemilla mollis* and oregano and flanked by rows of mop-head Acacias. We could have been back in France.



The original house was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and Charles II took refuge there in 1651 before fleeing to France. Since then it's seen several owners and was 2/3rds destroyed by fire in 1835. The present owner's great uncle, the Hon. Louis Greville bought the house in 1894 and rebuilt on the original foundations using Detmar Blow as his architect. Great care was taken to use materials contemporary to the original house both inside and out, including a fine oak staircase from a house demolished to make way for Admiralty Arch.



Sadly we were unable to walk down to the front of the house, so retraced our steps and on past the stables and across the croquet lawn beside the house to the Boat Terrace, very Venetian with its beautiful balustrading and steps leading down to the Avon. Here we could linger amongst the irises, enjoy the scented roses and look across to the water meadows.

Strolling back, passing the musk roses and beautiful long border we could enjoy the tranquillity, the views across the meadows to the Venetian Wellhead and the swans drifting along beside us (until rudely interrupted by a roaring jet overhead) to a gate framed by roses and into the Sundial Garden to admire the 100 year old mulberry.

Louis Greville was a Diplomat in Tokyo and, on his return to England, brought back not only wonderful stone lanterns, but gardeners to create the Japanese Garden heralded by the bright red Nikko bridge and with one of the few original eight-tatami (The size of a tea house is measured by the number of tatami mats that will fit inside it) tea houses in Britain. This stands over the 'Drowning Carrier', part of the water meadow irrigation system, designed by Dutch engineers in 1690.



The garden was neglected during the war when the house was used by Salisbury hospital, but since the family moved back in 1959, much has been done to reinstate the garden using the outline of Peto's plans and it continues to evolve, new design ideas now being implemented by the current owner's wife.

A delightful afternoon's tour round Europe by way of Japan, a piece of cake and a chance to buy plants – what more could we want.

*Deb Martin and Annie Bainbridge-Ayling*

## Wilton House Sunday 7th June

The visit to Wilton House was on Sunday morning and was the final site to be seen on the holiday. We had time to view the grounds, before a guided tour of the house. The gardens at Wilton have been transformed several times and have a long and interesting history. Of the famous Seventeenth Century gardens little remains, but standing on the Palladian bridge our guide pointed out the Casino amongst the trees on the hillside across the meadow on the south side of the River Nadder. This gave us a sense of the scale of that vanished garden that ran from the south front of the house.



As a visitor, you see the garden to the east of the house which is largely a flat lawned area with specimen trees; at the eastern edge there is a belt of trees with a woodland walk. To the west of the trees are a number of garden features including a water garden with five red Japanese style bridges which was created by the previous earl, a rose garden, a laburnum arch, a whispering seat, pergola, and a loggia with a newly planted avenue leading to an Egyptian column and a riverside walk.

The gardens in Wilton are not set in aspic: on the walk leading from the east front is a water feature erected for the Millennium. On either side of the path are two right angled flights of steps, each with 5 steps on each angle. Water flows down from the top into a small bowl in each step and then on to the next step. The feature can be illuminated at night and was designed by Mr Pye. The design is quite attractive but its current setting is too open to show it off to advantage. In the forecourt of the house is a fountain surrounded by pollarded limes and box hedges created by David Vickery. The fountain was commissioned by the current Earl as a memorial to his father.



Although the grounds and gardens have many interesting features, they do not seem to be part of a unified design so that the sum of the parts is less than the whole. Added to this is the frustration that parts of the grounds are not open to the public and contain many features that would be worth seeing.

*Stephen Barker*