

St. Mary's House and Gardens



The Victorian 'Secret' Garden

Introduction

One of the most interesting owners of St. Mary's House was the flamboyant and dashing Hon. Algernon Bourke, second son of the Earl of Mayo, Viceroy of India. Algernon married the beautiful Gwendolen Sloane-Stanley, descendent of Sir Hans Sloane, Founder of the Chelsea Physic Garden. A cousin of the poets Lord Alfred Douglas and Wilfred Scawen Blunt, Algernon was author of an impressive two-volume history of White's, the earliest of the London gentleman's clubs, of which he was the popular proprietor. He and Gwendolen were the inspiration for the eponymous characters in Oscar Wilde's witty play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It was Algernon Bourke who, in the 1890's, laid out the Kitchen and Pleasure Gardens; also during their time, a new west wing and the elegant Music Room were built. The gardens would have provided flowers and vegetables for the house.

In 1944, St. Mary's, threatened with demolition, was rescued at the eleventh hour by Dorothy Ellis, who devoted 35 years of her life to the house. However, financial constraints forced her to sell Bourke's Victorian Kitchen and Pleasure Gardens in 1950. From 1984, the house and the surviving gardens were once again saved and restored for the public to enjoy by the present owners, Peter Thorogood, Mary Thorogood and Roger Linton.

It had long been the wish of the owners to retrieve these 'Lost Gardens' and to return them to St. Mary's. In 1997, an opportunity arose when the gardens were put up for sale, and thanks to temporary loans, the purchase of Bourke's old gardens and gardener's cottage was secured.

Following this successful rescue, the owners were faced with a picture of dereliction and neglect. The gardens had remained 'asleep' for some fifty years and had become overgrown with an impenetrable jungle of brambles, nettles and saplings. The last of the four Victorian glasshouses had barely survived. However the magnificent 140 foot fruit wall, the heated pits for the pineapples with their stove-house, and the Boulton and Paul potting shed with its apple store had all survived intact.

Restoration

Restoration projects completed:

- Re-creation of herbaceous borders and fruit wall planting
- Re-establishment of woodland area as nature reserve
- Establishment of former potting shed as a Rural Museum
- Restoration of heated pits and stove house

Other projects completed:

- Orchid meadow
- Jubilee Rose Garden and Rose Border

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- Establishment of former circular orchard as an English Poetry Garden
- Commemorative ginkgo planting

Restoration projects planned or in progress:

- Wildlife pond
- Knot garden

The Gardens

We enter the Gardens by a temporary entrance near the last surviving Victorian greenhouse (1), built by J. Weeks & Co. of Chelsea in 1894. It is now beyond repair and there are plans to demolish it while preserving the bricks for paths, etc. Looking to the right, you can see the gardener's cottage and 19th century laundry for St. Mary's.

Opposite the greenhouse there used to be an old garage housing a classic MG Magnet; this was removed to make way for the present summerhouse.

Beyond the greenhouse we cross the stream (a tributary of the Adur) via a wooden bridge; its construction includes sleepers and original rails from the closed railway line through Bramber.

The Rural Museum

The Rural Museum (2) is housed in what was the potting shed; this is an original Boulton & Paul building, dating from 1894. Nearby are the Victorian tool stores and gardener's privy!

The Rural Museum has agricultural implements from the Thorogood family farms in Essex, as well as many artefacts which were found in the potting shed, and the Colt Ironwork collection, which was donated by a member of the Colt family (of revolver fame).

Particular items of interest are the costermonger's cart, a branding iron, old carriages, a church pew and an old desk from Roedean school.

The scale models depict the original plans for the restoration of the gardens. The knot garden has been replaced by the more 'open' design for the Terracotta Garden (4). The Rose Garden design is now based on the Union Flag.

The Walled Garden

Going through the small door in the wall (3), we enter the walled garden. The original heated pineapple pits can be seen, with the stove house at the west end. We are now in the Terracotta Garden (4).

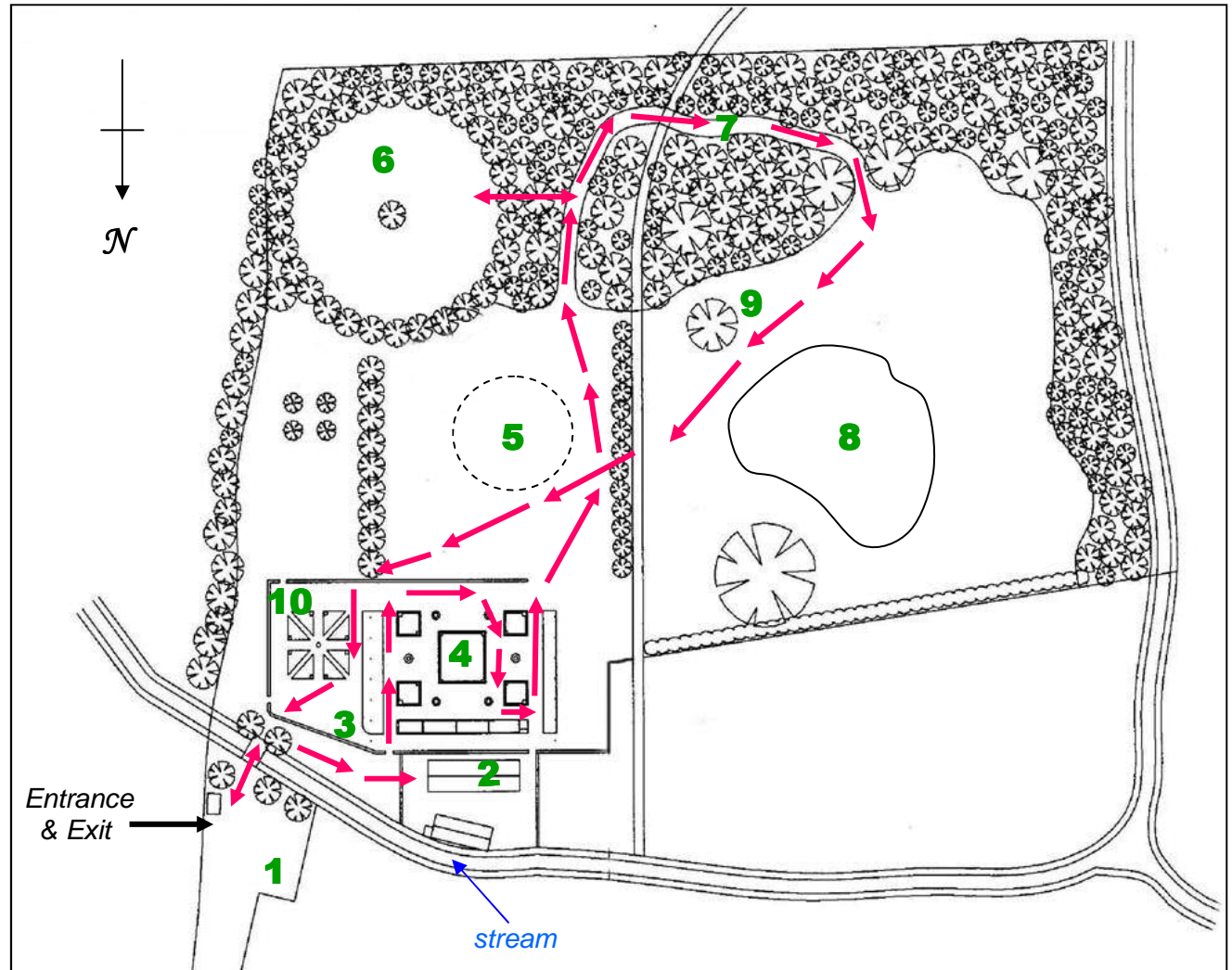


English Poetry Garden and Woodland Walk

Passing the orchid meadow (5), we enter the Poetry Garden (6). The outer yew circle

of trees from the former circular orchard have been cut to 10ft, and an inner yew circle planted and trimmed to 5ft. The pergola is planted in white, yellow and blue colours. A bust of Byron provides a central focus. The woodland walk (7) has undergone major clearance of saplings, nettles and brambles, and is now underplanted with snowdrops, primroses, bluebells and daffodils.

Near the site of the planned wildlife pond (8), a *Ginkgo Biloba* (9) has been planted to celebrate Peter Thorogood's 80th birthday.



KEY

Rose Garden

The Jubilee Rose Garden (10) was planted to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee in 2002. The climbing roses commemorate Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

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|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. The Greenhouse | 7. Woodland walk |
| 2. Rural Museum | 8. Site of future pond |
| 3. Fruit wall | 9. Commemorative Ginkgo |
| 4. Terracotta Garden | 10. Jubilee Rose Garden |
| 5. Orchid meadow | |
| 6. Poetry Garden | |