

Andrew Sankey-Smith - Gertrude Jekyll and her gardens

At the July monthly meeting we were treated to a very interesting talk by Andrew Sankey-Smith on Gertrude Jekyll (rhymes with 'treacle')
Gertrude Jekyll (29 November 1843 – 8 December 1932) was a British horticulturist, garden designer, artist and writer. She created over 400 gardens in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States, and wrote over 1,000 articles for magazines such as *Country Life* and William Robinson's *The Garden*.

She was born in Mayfair. Her father was a Captain and her mother a musician who studied under Mendelssohn and she had excellent social connections which proved very useful later in her career. Her family moved to Munstead and bought 15 acres of land.

Jekyll was one half of one of the most influential and historical partnerships of the Arts and Crafts movement, thanks to her association with the English architect, Edwin Lutyens, for whose projects she created numerous landscapes, and who designed her home Munstead Wood, near Godalming in Surrey. Gertrude recommended Edwin to her contacts searching for an architect and he reciprocated by recommending Gertrude to design the gardens.

Jekyll is remembered for her outstanding designs and subtle, painterly approach to the arrangement of the gardens she created, particularly her "hardy flower borders". Her work is known for its radiant colour and the brush-like strokes of her plantings; it is suggested by some that the Impressionistic-style schemes may have been due to Jekyll's deteriorating eyesight, which largely put an end to her career as a painter and water colourist.

She was one of the first of her profession to take into account the colour, texture, and experience of gardens as aspects of her designs. Jekyll's theory of how to design with colour was influenced by painter J.M.W. Turner and by Impressionism, and by the theoretical colour wheel. Her focus on gardening began at South Kensington School of Art, where she became interested in the creative art of planting, and more specifically, gardening. Jekyll later returned to her childhood home in the village of Bramley, Surrey to design a garden in Snowdenham Lane called Millmead.

Not wanting to limit her influence to teaching the practice of gardening, Jekyll incorporated in her work the theory of gardening and an understanding of the plants themselves. In works like *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden* (reprinted 1988) she put her imprint on modern uses of "warm" and "cool" flower colours in gardens.

Later in life, Jekyll collected and contributed a vast array of plants solely for the purpose of preservation to numerous institutions across Britain. At the time of her death, she had designed over 400 gardens in Britain, Europe and a few in North America. Jekyll was also known for her prolific writing. She wrote over fifteen books, ranging from *Wood and Garden* and her most famous book *Colour in the Flower Garden*, to memoirs of her youth.

Her favourite elements were sundials, pergolas and water features. .She was also interested in traditional cottage furnishings and rural crafts, and concerned that they were disappearing. Her book *Old West Surrey* (1904) records many aspects of 19th-century country life, with over 300 photographs taken by Jekyll.

Hestercombe in Taunton is one of the best examples of her work to have survived to war, partly due to the fact it was one of the smaller gardens.

I am sure Andrew inspired all of us to take another look at our own gardens and to consider aspects such as a 'borrowed view' or use of colour to imply greater depth.