

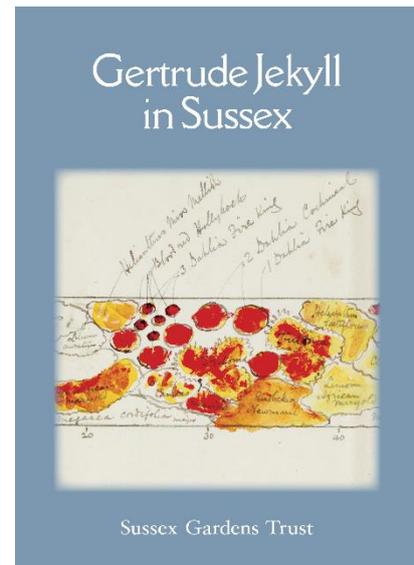
Gertrude Jekyll in Sussex

ISBN 978-1-5272-9646-6

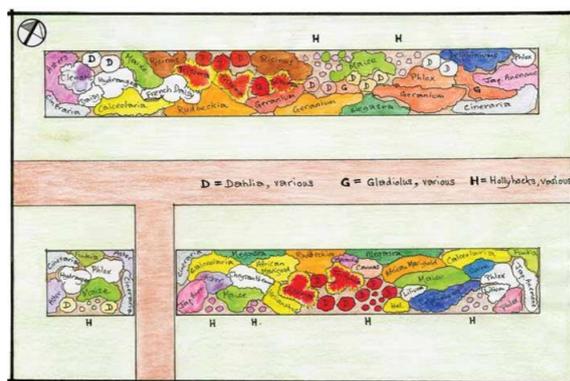
Edited for Sussex Gardens Trust by Sally Ingram

Book Review

A common Buddhist meditation calls for the contemplation of a single flower, inviting the meditator to become aware of its gradual decay, a gentle reminder of the impermanence of all things. A garden lasts longer than a single flower, but it too eventually dies, overtaken by nature or by man's thirst for more houses or car parks or supermarkets.



Gertrude Jekyll often collaborated with the architect Edwin Lutyens, but whereas his designs were written in stone and survive today, there is little left of the 400 gardens that Jekyll designed. And yet, even though direct access to her work is not available to us, her name is still well-known today. This lavishly-illustrated book explains why, providing background to her life, and reproductions of some of the sketches and plant lists she prepared for the 30 gardens she advised on in Sussex. The Sussex Gardens Trust (SGT) are to be congratulated on this collection of new research by its members. A central focus is the Environmental Design Archives, University of Berkeley, California, collection of Jekyll's drawings for her commissions in Sussex. Access to the drawings was made possible by a project SGT supported in 2019 to digitise the drawings as high-resolution images, making them fully accessible online for the first time

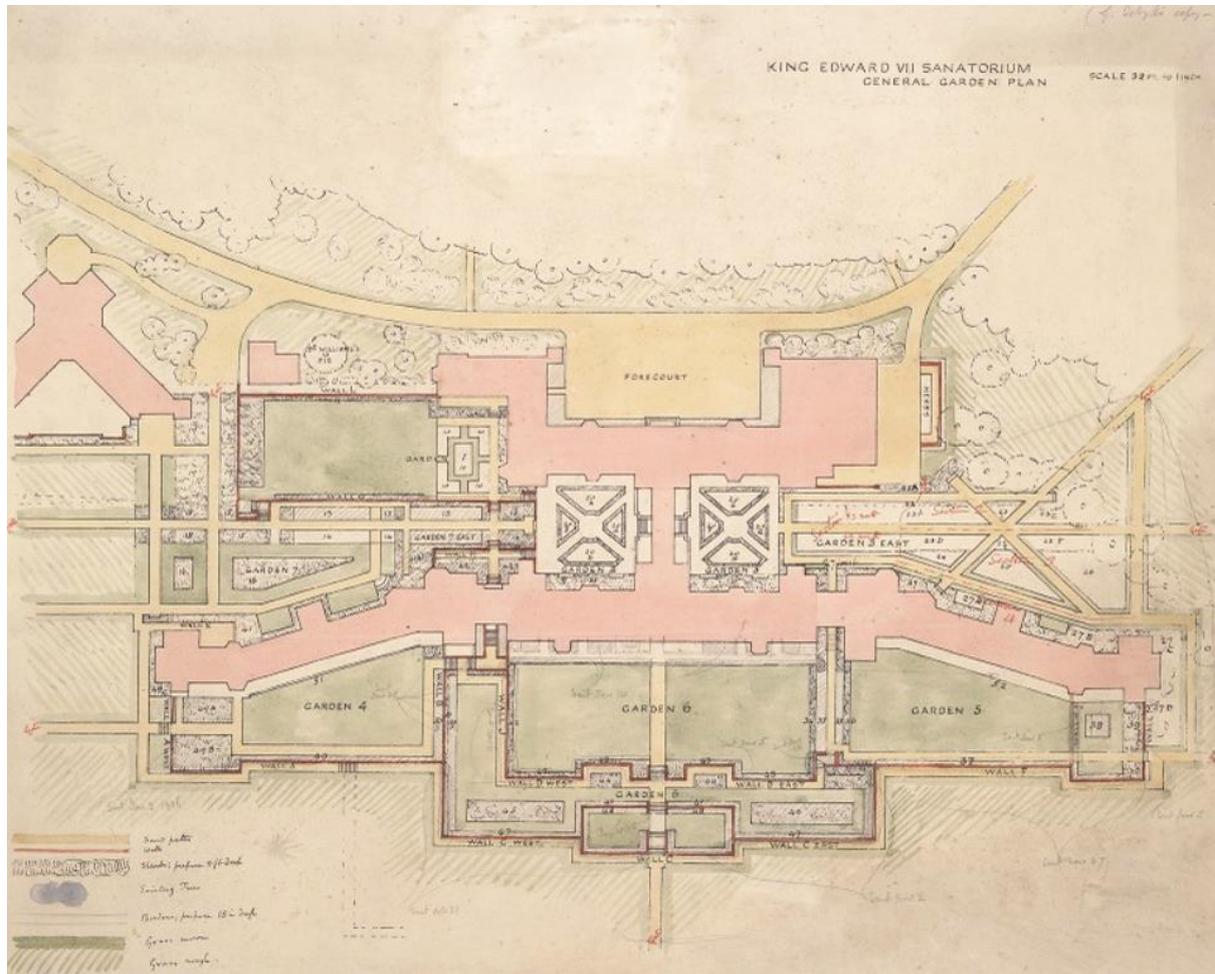


West Dean Flower Borders, a hand-coloured 'Turner Sunset' © Susi Batty

Jekyll was born at the beginning of the Victorian era, before the emancipation of women; before the Married Women's Property Act. It was a man's world. And yet it is clear from the correspondence shown here that she was regarded, and indeed regarded herself, as the equal of anyone. Originally, England had borrowed the idea of a garden from mainland Europe, with geometric shapes and straight lines everywhere. The 'English' garden had begun to emerge earlier in the 19th century, so

Jekyll was not its first exponent, but she took these new ideas and refined them into an art form. Reject straight lines and formal plantings, using drifts or clouds to reflect natural shapes. Consider each cloud in relation to its neighbours. Have regard to the texture of a plant. A garden should provide 'food for the eye'.

Jekyll was not just an academic, she was a plants-woman with her own nursery. She supplied plants for her commissions, crating them up with specific instructions. And if she was not able to supply them herself, she would know which nursery to go to.



© Environmental Design Archives: 38 of 53 King Edward VII Sanatorium

Living just over the Surrey border near Godalming, it is not surprising that Jekyll was asked to work in Sussex as well. In fact, her first public commission was in Sussex. She was invited to help create a new garden for the King Edward VII Sanatorium on a hill to the north of Midhurst, which opened in 1906. This was not simply a matter of creating pleasing shapes and colours. The whole ethos of the Sanatorium was that patients would recover quicker when exposed to fresh air and natural surroundings, rather than remain cooped up in a stuffy hospital bedroom. The garden and grounds were to be part of the healing process. Indeed, patients were encouraged to engage in light gardening duties as part of their rehabilitation. Jekyll's belief that a garden 'should give happiness and repose of mind' was perfect for this innovative project.

Shortly after this, Jekyll was asked to advise the Reverend Frank Tatchell, Vicar of Midhurst and well-known eccentric and philanthropist, on two adjacent areas area on the southern

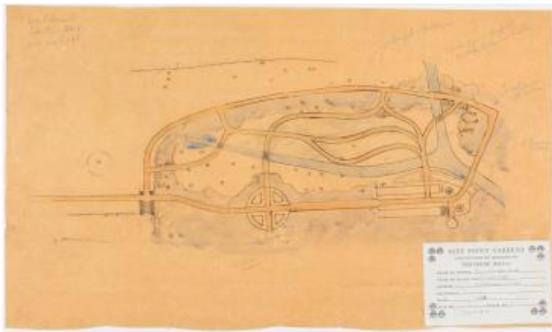
edge of the town, South Pond and Close Walks Wood. Before that, she had advised on the gardens at West Dean – suitable for a Society Hostess! If only these gardens had survived!

But what has survived are the sketches, drawings and letters, which bring this book to life. And from them we glimpse the nature of the woman, as well as her knowledge and expertise. It is from these records that modern gardeners can draw inspiration.

Another lesson for the Buddhist meditator: whilst everything is impermanent, nothing is ever lost. Matter and energy don't disappear; they undergo a transformation. Gertrude Jekyll's spirit lives on in countless gardens around the world as modern gardeners strive to achieve the drifts and clouds she described. This book will help preserve her legacy.

Harvey Tordoff
The Midhurst Society

2 August 2021



© Environmental Design Archives: 2 of 6 West Dean Park



© Environmental Design Archives: 5 of 11 Close Walks & South Pond

Note: This review was written on behalf of The Midhurst Society but does not necessarily reflect the views of The Society

<https://www.midhurstsociety.org.uk/>

<https://sussexgardenstrust.org.uk/>