

A Perfect Paradise

ARTS & CRAFTS GARDENS IN THE COTSWOLDS

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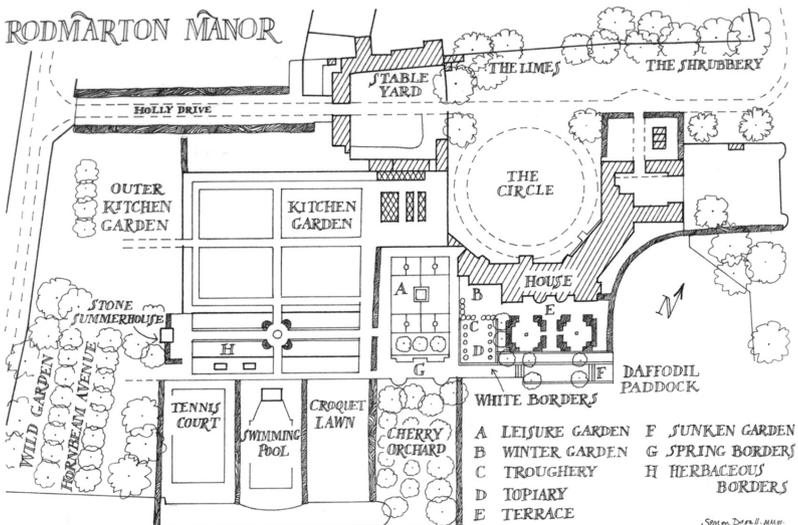
Noted for their hidden valleys and the distinctive soft, variably-grey limestone used in their buildings, the Cotswolds are a mecca for Arts & Crafts houses and gardens. Because the Cotswolds became remote and economically depressed after the removal of their once-flourishing wool industry to the north, their sleepy villages and trove of medieval and Tudor stone buildings remained undisturbed, only to be rediscovered in the late nineteenth century. William Morris, whose Kelmscott Manor was situated on the region's edge, revelled in the area's old buildings, traditional crafts, and natural beauty. He, in turn, inspired several architects and designers to move to the Cotswolds to set up workshops practicing some of the local crafts, such as furniture making and metalwork. Among them, Ernest Gimson and fellow architects Ernest and Sidney Barnsley embraced the world of the Arts & Crafts Movement by relocating to the Cotswolds with their families in 1893 to earn their livings along the lines dictated by Morris. In their work as architects and designers, Gimson and the Barnsleys, as well as their followers, created many of the region's most memorable houses and gardens as well as exquisite pieces of furniture and decorative arts that drew heavily on traditional models and craftsmanship.

Morris's Kelmscott Manor, a small late-sixteenth-century Tudor manor near Lechlade, was celebrated in his writings: 'a perfect paradise', he wrote. The walled garden was filled with the flowers familiar from his firm's renowned pattern designs and beyond was a meadow of bluebells, apple blossom, and birdsong. The garden could be savoured from both inside and outside the house. At Kelmscott he set the record straight about the importance of gardens, which he thought were often marred by 'vulgarity and stupidity'. In the end, he declared that Kelmscott embodied the best of England, its countryside, architecture and gardens. Today one can enjoy

Kelmscott for its wealth of Morris & Company furnishings as well as its delightful setting and gardens.

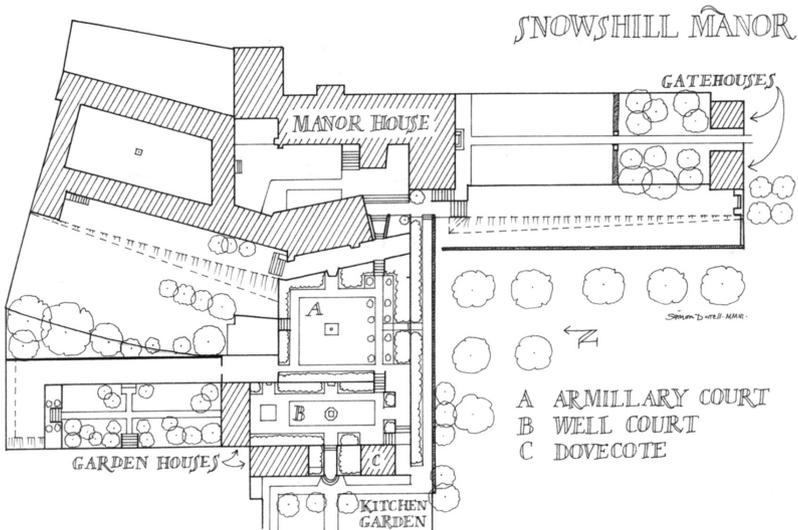
After settling in the Cotswolds, Gimson and the Barnsleys set up workshops at Pinbury Park and later Daneway House at Sapperton, where their designs for furniture were executed by local cabinet-makers. They soon became known for their high level of craftsmanship and the exclusive use of native woods. At Pinbury, which enjoys magnificent views over the Sapperton Vale, they carried out some architectural improvements to the old Jacobean house, adding a wing and an elaborate plastered ceiling. They also refurbished two terraced gardens and added a simple, yet elegant stone summerhouse in one corner. They would adapt all these elements in their later, more renowned work.

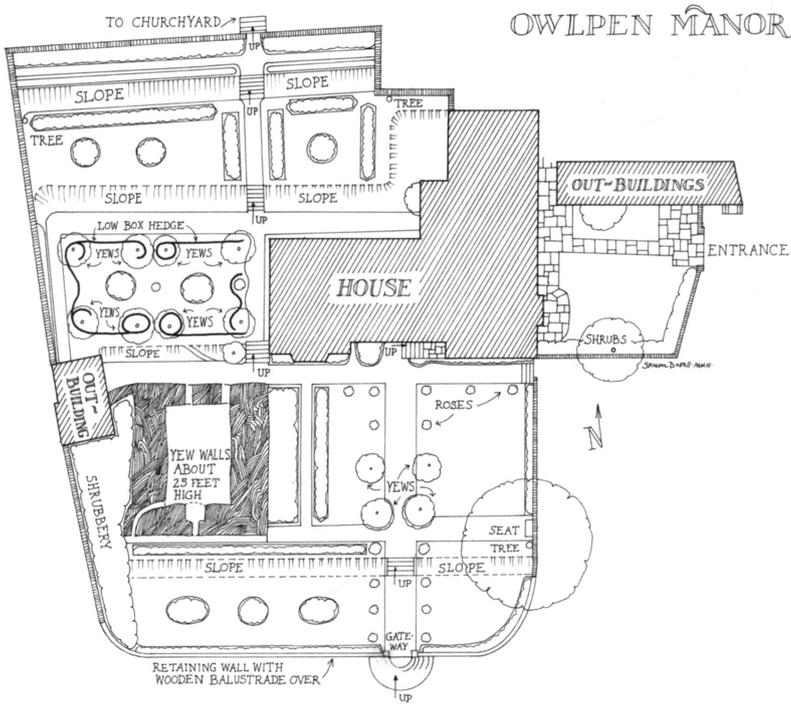
After designing and remodelling their own houses in Sapperton, they began receiving significant architectural and garden commissions, the most extensive and important of which was Rodmarton Manor, in 1909. This commission brought a whole new dimension to the Arts & Crafts philosophy of planning a new house and garden. The client, Claud Biddulph (whose family still owns Rodmar-



ton), probably spotted the 1909 *Country Life* article about Ernest Barnsley's own house, Upper Dorvel House, in nearby Sapperton. He might have also been impressed by the range of furnishings made in their workshops. Rodmarton was painstakingly built by hand from local materials, including stone from the local quarry and timber felled on the estate, and the custom furnishings were produced in their workshops. Rodmarton was conceived to look like a series of cottages on a village street, with five gables on the front and five on the garden side. In the end it took twenty years and deep pockets to build.

The gardens were laid out as a series of outdoor rooms, each enclosed by low stone walls or clipped hedges. The ingenious series of interconnecting areas, ranging from formal near the house to informal farther afield, was undoubtedly inspired by John Sedding's book, *Garden-Craft Old and New*, first published in 1890 and considered the bible of garden making of the era. The gardens also encompass most of the dominant theories of garden design of the time, from William Robinson's notions of wild gardens to Gertrude Jekyll's planting advice for more formal areas. At Rodmarton, the





individual garden areas range from more formal near the house, such as the Winter Garden and Topiary Terrace, while areas farther afield, such as the Shrubbery and Daffodil Paddock, are treated more informally. From the Topiary Terrace and the vine-covered rustic stone pergola below, the garden melts into the surrounding meadow. For most visitors, one of the most memorable vistas is the long double herbaceous borders with a stone summerhouse at the end of the vista, a ‘signature’ detail that pops up in many Cotswold gardens.

At Cotswold Farm, a seventeenth-century house in Duntisbourne Abbots, Sidney Barnsley added two wings in 1926. He was followed by Norman Jewson, a former worker in Gimson’s office, who made further improvements to the house, including the addition of broad terraced gardens on the hillside, with a characteristic stone summerhouse in the lower garden. On the upper terrace, overlooking the

unspoilt valley, a group of columnar box topiaries lend the house and garden its unmistakable Cotswold character.

Jewson, who chronicled the work of Gimson and the Barnsleys in his autobiographical memoir, *By Chance I Did Rove*, worked in the traditional Cotswold manner, refurbishing a number of old houses including Owlpen Manor, a Tudor manor house near Uley which he purchased in 1925. Jewson carefully repaired the house of medieval origins, with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century additions, adding plasterwork ceilings and traditional furnishings. He also revitalised the old garden in the foreground that overlooks the valley in the distance. Over the years, the garden has been admired by many travellers, among them Gertrude Jekyll, who praised ‘the wealth of incident crowded into an area of little more than half an acre’. The square Yew Parlour, which in Jekyll’s day was nearly twenty-five feet high and varying from six to ten feet wide, was probably planted



Frederick L. Griggs, *Owlpen Manor*, etching, 1931.
From *Gardens of the Arts and Crafts Movement* by Judith B. Tankard.



Ancient dovecote at Snowhill Manor.
 From *Gardens of the Arts and Crafts Movement*.

in the eighteenth century. Although the garden is not large, its form and planting is both dramatic and perfectly in tune with the old manor.

Several other period architects were renowned for their work in the Cotswolds, most notably Edwin Lutyens at Abbotswood and Miserden Park, as well as the artist Alfred Parsons in the Broadway area. Lutyens, of course, is well-known for his more exceptional gardens, such as Hestercombe in Somerset, Marsh Court in Hampshire, and Folly Farm in Berkshire, designed in collaboration with Gertrude Jekyll. Among the other architects, M. H. Baillie Scott's Snowhill Manor is one of the best surviving Arts & Crafts gardens in the Cotswolds, an immaculate, but simple garden of 'rooms' set out on a sloping hillside in the tiny village of Snowhill. The derelict manor house had been rescued by Charles Paget Wade, an antiquarian who devoted much of his life to restoring the manor as a showcase for his large collection of antiques, artefacts, and



Topiary birds at Hidcote Manor.
From *Gardens of the Arts and Crafts Movement*.

whimsies. Baillie Scott successfully merged the old stone farm buildings, including a medieval dovecote, into a series of interlocking compartments below the rambling old manor house. From the top terrace, one looks down on the various walled enclosures, including an Armillary Court and Well Court. Baillie Scott's ingenious layout still stands out today among the attractive plantings added by the National Trust.

Unquestionably, Hidcote Manor on the edge of the Cotswolds is one of the National Trust's most famous gardens. Although the old manor house is enveloped by the numerous garden rooms, Hidcote is a striking example of a complex, more modern garden, in dramatic contrast with the simplicity of Gimson and the Barnsleys' approach to garden making. In 1907, when American-born Lawrence Johnston began creating a intricate garden from bare ground, one wonders if he envisaged the result we see today. Guided by books and his far-flung travels, as well as his expertise as a horticulturist and dedi-

cated plant collector, Johnston created a masterpiece that draws millions of visitors today. *Country Life* quipped that his cultural knowledge and faultless taste combined the talents of John Tra-descant, William Robinson, André Le Nôtre and Harold Peto. Over the decades (with a generous budget) he expanded and fine-tuned his grounds with both formal and naturalistic features, drawing inspiration from gardens around the world. The inner core of garden rooms – the Stilt Garden, Pillar Garden, Circle, and White Garden – skilfully offset the naturalistic areas, such as the Stream Garden and the Wilderness. The Long Walk slices through the composition in one direction and the Theatre Lawn in the other. Although Hid-cote is a grand creation that draws in part on the Arts & Crafts philosophy, it goes well beyond its original tenets of intimacy and simplicity. However, there's scarcely a gardener or designer who has not drawn inspiration from this remarkable garden.

Garden plans by Simon Dorrell from the author's
Gardens of the Arts and Crafts Movement (revised edition 2018).

HORTUS is planning a Cotswold Arts & Crafts garden tour
for September 2020. Details follow in HORTUS 133.