

## Books

# The best of Gertrude Jekyll

Charles Quest-Ritson admires a scholarly tribute to the great garden designer

### Gardening

#### Gertrude Jekyll and the Country House Garden

Judith B. Tankard (Aurum Press, £30)

THIS is a splendid book, and COUNTRY LIFE is warmly to be congratulated, both for making it possible and for choosing Judith Tankard to write it. The result is much more than just another book in the series 'from the archives of COUNTRY LIFE'—it is a stand-alone title that will be the last word on Gertrude Jekyll's gardens for years to come.

COUNTRY LIFE championed Jekyll throughout her career as a garden-designer and plants-woman, and did much to establish her style of gardening as the gold standard by which English gardens are judged even today. Mrs Tankard sums it up: 'Without Jekyll, the history of garden design in general and COUNTRY LIFE in particular would certainly have been poorer.' Her COUNTRY LIFE books and articles turned Jekyll into a media star.

Mrs Tankard makes a very good job of describing Jekyll's own garden at Munstead Wood, the principles that guided her



Jekyll's restored borders of cannas, gladioli and *Bergenia cordifolia* at Hestercombe, Somerset

and how it developed and changed in Jekyll's own lifetime. She shows that Jekyll's interest moved away from the woodland parts, which she laid out early on, towards the collection of plants in the walled garden that she used for her clients' planting schemes. It was here that her ideas on form and colour developed and matured. Jekyll had a good eye for design, and understood the importance of relating the garden both to the house and to the wider, wilder landscape outside. And her sense of colour never left her, even in old age when blindness closed in.

Mrs Tankard uses old COUNTRY LIFE pictures to explore the gardens where Jekyll worked. The clarity of Charles Latham's 100-year-old photographs is superb, and his classic pictures of Munstead Wood are complemented by modern colour plates. Where possible, other gardens such as Hestercombe and Le Bois-les-Moutiers are given the same then-and-now treatment. The houses and gardens themselves make one yearn for the

confidence and certainties of the England our ancestors knew. The chapter titles take the names of Jekyll's books. Colour in the Flower Garden is superbly illustrated at The Manor House, Upton Grey; Garden Ornament begins by juxtaposing a picture of Harold Peto's overlaid garden at Iford with Jekyll's comment: 'Many a garden of formal design is spoilt by a multiplicity and variety of garden ornament.' It is here that Mrs

Tankard shows the depth of her scholarship; she is especially good at charting the development of Jekyll's ideas, noting how a feature that had worked well in one of her client's gardens, or in her own, would be reworked and improved for the garden of a later client. It is clear that the author has read almost everything written by or about Jekyll's work, and has visited almost all the gardens where she advised.



Gertrude Jekyll in old age

#### The Lost Album: A Visual History of 1950s Britain

Basil Hyman, edited by Anna Bennett (Booth-Clibborn Editions, £25)

This affectionate portrait of 1950s Britain comprises a 'lost album' of photographs by Basil Hyman, whose ninth-birthday present of a Baldinette camera sparked off a lifelong interest in photography, plus souvenirs, from newspaper clippings and ration books to Coronation memorabilia and theatre tickets, all inserted into one of the more original mementos produced in this 60th-anniversary year of the Festival of Britain.

