in the next century, local authorities tackled this issue by employing horticultural instructors who gave lectures and demonstrations, ran domestic economy classes for women, and sold seed and fruit trees at wholesale prices. From as early as the 1850s school gardens were established as a way of teaching science as well as practical skills.

However, the First World War stimulated most interest in allotments, and in the work of the Vacant Land Cultivation Society which, inspired by developments in the United States, offered large (quarter- to half-acre) plots rent-free, but necessarily temporary, to casual labourers in Dublin on disused land. This was hugely successful, especially during the war years, and led indirectly to the formation of the Plotholders Union, which campaigned for security of tenure and compulsory purchase of land for allotments – and even post-war for cheap bus fares for men carrying their tools to their plots. The economic crisis of the inter-war years maintained some interest in allotments, but the next upsurge came with the Second World War. The contemporary upsurge in interest in 'growing your own' was spurred by the economic crisis of 2008 but has also been fed by concerns about health, sustainability and the wider environment.

Bell and Watson have turned up some fascinating sources. While most of the book deals with developments in what is now the Republic of Ireland, two articles from the First World War by college horticultural instructors W. H. Johns and G. H. Oliver supply detailed accounts of how the Belfast allotments were run by the Garden Plots Association (GPA), apparently a front for the Christian Civic Union. The GPA acquired waste land, paid for fencing and draining, and ruled the plotholders, many of them shipyard workers and policemen, with a stern hand: at least four different kinds of vegetable and a flower border had to be grown and no work was allowed on Sunday. However, gaps in the available published sources mean that there are gaps in the historical narrative. Chapters 2–4 deal with cottage gardens up to the beginning of the twentieth century, but there is no coverage of the years between the work of Martin Doyle and the government initiatives of the very end of the century. The impact on small vegetable plots of the potato famine and the Land League is therefore missing. Reliance on the *Irish Times* reports during the First World War means that the story of the Dublin allotments and the Vacant Land Cultivation Society in the First World War, studded with characters from the struggle for independence such as Jim Larkin, the socialist activist and trade unionist, and the socialist artist Celia Harrison, is rather weighed down by lengthy quotations from newspaper reports of committee meetings and letters. As the authors say in their Introduction, in Ireland, perhaps like nowhere else, the huge issues of Irish history have impacted on the mundane everyday life of working-class gardeners, but their account frequently misses the moments of impact, such as the land struggles of the later nineteenth century, the fight for independence or the late twentieth-century Troubles. The absence of the wider political context often makes it difficult to follow gardening developments, as in the case of the Vacant Land Cultivation Society: why were socialists particularly attracted to this cause at this time? Availability of sources may also account for Chapter 7, on women and gardening education, which, although interesting, seems, with its accounts of the 'lady pupils' at an upper-class Dublin girls' school or the women training to become professional gardeners, marginal to the book's purpose.

Bell and Watson set out to tell the story of poor gardeners, in the Irish countryside and in the cities – gardeners who could not afford seeds or tools, who might hold their little plots for no more than a year. As an introduction to this little-known topic, this book very effectively sets the scene, stirs the imagination and whets the appetite for more, particularly the voices of the gardeners themselves.

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Ethne Clarke, *An Infinity of Graces: Cecil Ross Pinsent, an English Architect in the Italian Landscape* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 191 pp., 150 black-and-white illus., £18.99 (hbk), ISBN 9780393732214

Ethne Clarke's new book on Cecil Pinsent brings to life an important, but elusive, figure who designed some of the most iconic gardens of the Anglo-American community near Florence. He belonged to the same generation as Harold Peto, Thomas Mawson and Edwin Lutyens, yet his life and career have slipped between the cracks due to lack of detailed information. In *The Edwardian Garden* (1989), David Ottewill awarded Pinsent a prominent place in the broad-based Italian School; while Benedetta Origo's *La Foce: A Garden and Landscape in Tuscany* (2001) and Katie Campbell's *Paradise of Exiles: The Anglo-American Gardens of Florence* (2009) provide glimpses of Pinsent's design genius.

Clarke, an American who lived in the Britain for many years, is well qualified to write this book. Her research, which began in the 1980s with her immersion into Florentine gardens, was capped off by an interview in 1990 with fellow expatriate Sir Harold Acton, who first encouraged her to seek out Pinsent. After contacting Pinsent's niece, she devoted years to pursuing his trail. She discovered that Pinsent's published writings were scarce and publication of his projects during his lifetime almost non-existent, as compared with Lutyens, for example. Following a symposium on Pinsent's life and work held at Villa Le Balze in 1995 that presented new information, Clarke published Pinsent's biography in *Garden History* in 1998.[1] In 2011, when her book was about

to go to press, Pinsent's grand-niece uncovered nine photo-albums showing Pinsent's family and projects that helped fit the final pieces together; many of those photographs now form the basis of the present book.

The book is loosely divided into two sections: a biography (including those of close associates) and a discussion of several key projects. It includes a list of projects as well as extensive notes and sources. While there are numerous small black-and-white photographs from Pinsent's albums, the only colour ones appear on the book jacket. One wonders why such an important figure as Pinsent did not deserve a large format, well-illustrated book such as recent volumes on Mawson, Peto, Lutyens and other contemporary garden architects. Instead, this small book with fewer than 200 pages is the size of a short paperback novel.

Cecil Ross Pinsent (1884–1963) was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, and when he was five years old his family moved to Hampstead in North London, England. Along with his older brother and cousins, Pinsent matriculated at Marlborough College. Determined to study architecture (against his father's wishes), he attended the Architectural Association (AA) and was articled to several architects, including William Wallace. In 1905 he was a student at the Royal Academy of Architecture and soon was working as a draughtsman in a London office. Here he became immersed in English renaissance formalism and rural vernacular. His training and early experience coincided with 'The Battle of the Styles' era (formalism versus naturalism) and Reginald Blomfield's influential theories. At the AA he also came under the influence of Clough Williams-Ellis and, in 1906, won the AA's prestigious Banister Fletcher Prize that financed his first trip to Italy. After a year of travel, he returned to London to work as a draughtsman in the offices of Charles E. Mallows, who opened his eyes to the art of garden design and planning.

Pinsent received his first commission from Jane Houghton, a family friend who provided the key to his future work in Italy. Jane's brother, Edmund Houghton, and his wife, Mary, were fringe members of The Souls and part of the expatriate community in Italy.[2] The Houghtons introduced him to potential clients, such as Bernard Berenson, who asked his advice at I Tatti and became a lifelong friend. Through his wife, Mary Berenson, he met his future business partner, Geoffrey Scott. As Pinsent wrote in 1911, 'ours was a partnership of opposites, complementary gifts. ... Scott is intellectual, literary and brilliant, with the gift of words, and I practical, inventive, with aptitude for things visible to the eye, but dumb' (p. 65). It was an unlikely partnership, which lasted until Scott's death in 1929, but through Scott, Pinsent was introduced to many of his clients and never looked back. Through Scott he received a commission to design and build Le Balze, a villa and garden in Fiesole, for the American expatriate, Charles Augustus Strong. Scott, of course, went on to fame with the publication of *The Architecture of Humanism* (1914). In 1915 came a commission from Lady Sybil Cutting at Villa Medici (Sybil was the mother of Iris Origo, Pinsent's later client at La Foce). And the rest is history.

Through his work designing and altering buildings, interiors, and gardens, Pinsent perfected the Anglo-Florentine villa aesthetic. After the magical era in Florence ended, his career had its share of ups and downs due to changing times, aesthetics and economies. Not surprisingly, he eschewed modernism. In 1933 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). His career wound down in the early 1950s when he moved to Switzerland, where he died in 1963. At the height of his career, Pinsent's clients included not only Berenson, Strong and Cutting, but also Sir George Sitwell, Mrs George Keppel, Lady Sybil (Cutting) Lubbock, King George of Greece, Queen Helen of Romania and Prince Paul of Yugoslavia.

Pinsent outlined his philosophy of garden design in a brief essay, 'Giardini moderni all'italiana' (published in 1931), which is included in the Appendix. Order and symmetry, he wrote, are the first characteristics in the modern stylized garden. The size should be modest so as to be 'in harmony with modern life, which is more intimate than in the past' (p. 174). Another characteristic is that the main elements 'must give a sense of permanence, so that in summer and winter the structure of the garden will appear complete' (p. 175). Due to the brevity of the book, only four gardens are discussed in any detail: 20 St Anthony's Road, Bournemouth (1907); Villa I Tatti, Settignano (1907); Villa Le Balze, Fiesole (1912); and La Foce, Chianciano Terme (1924). Unquestionably, La Foce is Pinsent's most enduring project and, as the author states, stands today as the best testament to his values and beliefs as an architect and landscape designer.

The author concludes with a brief discussion of Pinsent's lasting appeal based on his sensitivity to the landscape and his ability to respond to the wishes of his clients. Giorgio Galletti, an authority on Italian gardens who has been involved in the conservation of Pinsent gardens, noted that what one sees today are largely reconstructed. Pinsent worked with a light hand, causing the least possible disturbance to the landscape: 'Pinsent had understood that the insertion of architecture within the Tuscan landscape was not a matter of camouflage, but of a continuous relation with the history of landscape' (p. 160).

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[2] The Souls were a social group of distinguished politicians and intellectuals who met for discussions not concerned with the political issues of the day, particularly the Irish Home Rule debate.