

The Flowers in our Gardens

R. W. SIDWELL considers Garden

Conservation and looks at some fine examples

So far in this series we have considered the stories behind the plants themselves. We will now have a look at the gardens in which the plants are to be found. Those of us who are interested in this field of conservation frequently have to distinguish between the garden and its plant content.

A good example of this is the garden at Fairwater which was based on a design sketched by Lutyens. The plant content here is of no consequence but the layout of the garden is of great interest and it is regrettable that difficulties are being found in its preservation.

Gardens of historical interest fall into two main groups. The first is when the actual garden is restored to its original state. The second is a recreated period garden, not necessarily on an earlier site. It need not be a copy of any known garden but is merely in the style of the period. We have numerous examples of both.

One of the finest examples of restoration of an original garden is that of Westbury Court on the western side of the Severn. This was a Dutch style water garden of around 1700 and it had become totally derelict by 1960. Fortunately the foresight of Gloucestershire county council, helped by the generosity of an unknown benefactor, enabled the garden to be restored and turned over to the National Trust.

Account books of the period recorded the numbers of trees planted and work carried out originally, and accurate restoration

was thus possible. It is to the great credit of those responsible that all of the plants now in this garden were known to have been in Britain by 1700. We thus have an almost perfect living museum.

Sometimes restorers of old gardens have unexpected luck. At Kirby Hall in Northamptonshire the garden on the west side of the derelict mansion was just a heap of rubble. Bulldozers, however, revealed most of the stone edging to be intact. It has thus been possible to reconstruct the garden of the mid-17th century. It is unfortunate that the beds have been filled with modern roses and Leyland cyprus hedge planted on a boundary. I found *alyssum* and *lobelia* planted alternately along the edge of a rose border. Plant content is important when restoring old gardens to their supposed former glory.

Blenheim

Blenheim Palace presents a good example of the re-creation of a period garden. When the palace was built early in the 18th century Henry Wise, under the general direction of the architect Vanbrugh, created a formal parterre nearly half a mile long on the south front. About 50 years later "Capability" Brown swept all this away and brought grass right up to the palace.

After the First World War, the ninth Duke felt that the palace deserved a better setting than that

provided by Brown's grass, trees and lake and he laid out the present water terraces on the west front. They are in perfect accord with the original concept.

On a much smaller scale we have the recreated Tudor garden at New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. This was Shakespeare's last home. The knot garden must be one of the best we have, and it dates from the 1920s.

Much has been written about knot gardens and they have probably been over-glamourised. The fact is that the plants of the period were not neat and trim enough to maintain the tidy pattern of the knots. By the end of the 17th century coloured gravels and sands had replaced plants in many formal parterres.

Wisely, those responsible for the Shakespeare garden have accepted the limitations of Tudor plants and although the boundaries are appropriately planted with vines, figs, pleached apples and sweetbriar, the knots themselves are filled with plants that belong to the period of the second Elizabeth rather than the first. It is however, fully justified.

Hampton Court

Hampton Court also has recreated formal gardens of the 16th and 17th centuries and here also modern bedding plants are used. It would be good if both here and at Stratford a less formal garden could be devoted exclusively to Tudor plants.

In Worcestershire we have several gardens of historical importance both for their design elements and their plant content.

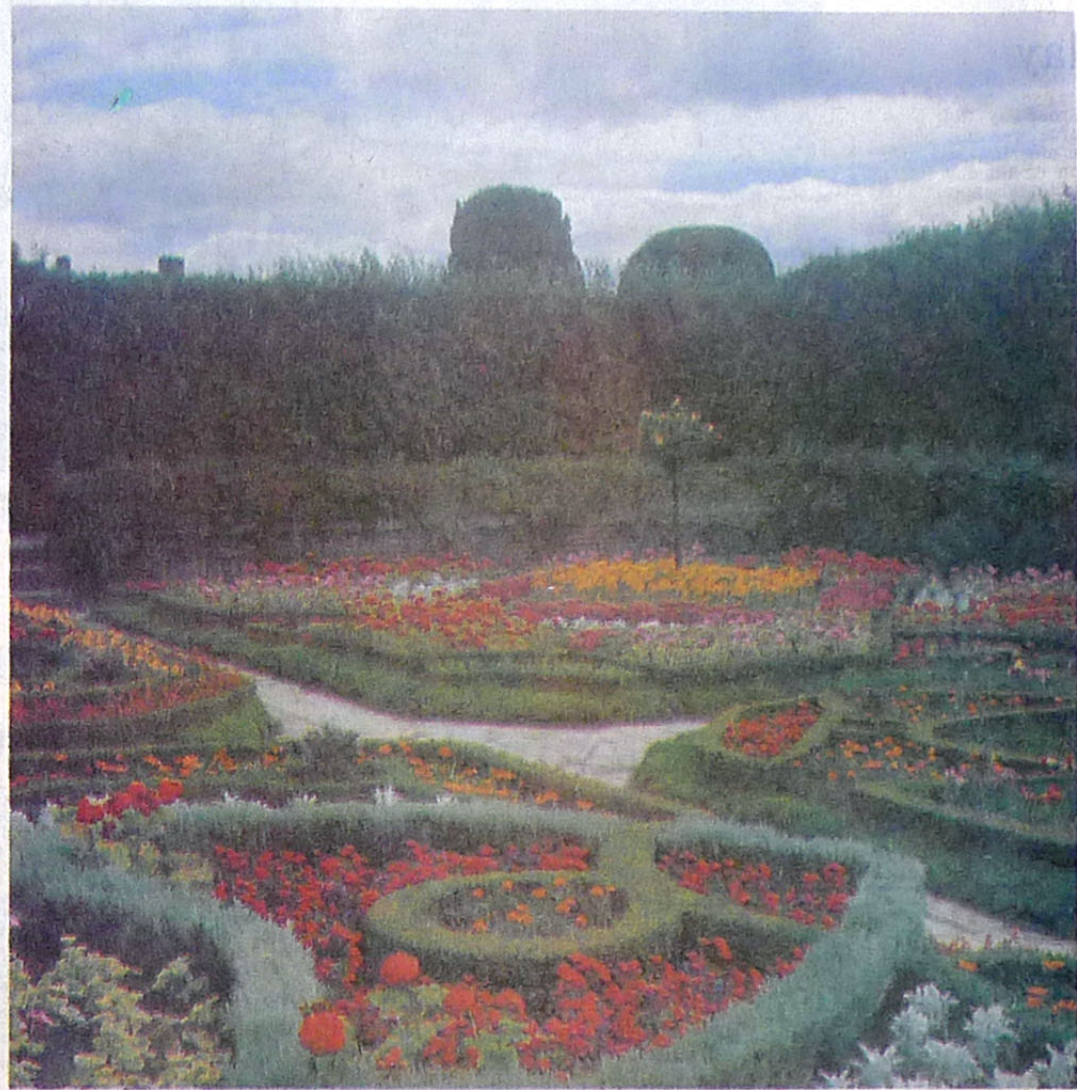
One of these is Spetchley Park. Starting in the 1890s, one of the finest plant collections in Britain has been built up. It is not however, a pure plantsman's garden. There are design features of importance. The attractive fountain garden was substantially the work of Ellen Willmott and it is one of the few remaining examples of this lady's work.

Although this style of garden is difficult to maintain today, new trees and other plants are still being added and we must hope that it will long continue as a garden of great importance.

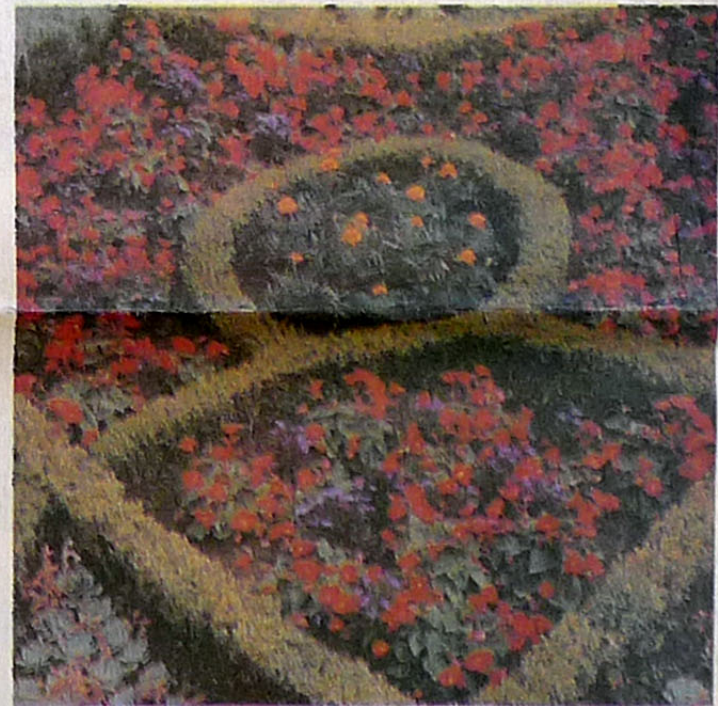
Madresfield

At Madresfield Court we have a fine garden dating from the mid-19th century. Most of the layout was completed by the First World War. Since the last war rising costs have led inevitably to a decline in standards of maintenance but much remains as it has been for around a century. Fine avenues, masses of spring bulbs, autumn crocus and cyclamen — and the "rocks".

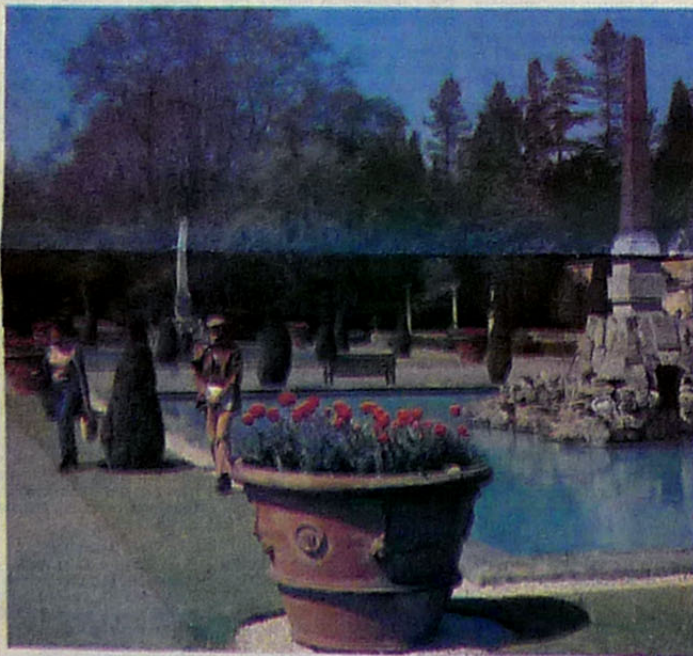
The rocks at Madresfield are an interesting piece of history. They pre-date the modern rock garden by



New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon: the main area of the Knot Garden, with colourful modern bedding plants.



Detail of the Knot Garden at New Place.



Blenheim Palace: a 20th century addition in a style of 250 years earlier.

some 30 or more years. The stone is synthetic, having a hard core centre and an outer layer of cement, finished to appear remarkably natural. The units are massive and the effect quite imposing. Pulham of Roxbourne carried out this work in 1878-79 and it is one of the best examples in the country.

I was interested to read Ben Judd's reference to Mary Anderson in the *Journal* of September 1. This great lady, America's foremost actress, created a garden at Court Farm, Broadway in the last ten years of last century. She had help from the Broadway artist Alfred Parsons who also had a hand in designing several other notable gardens.

The garden has not been altered in any significant way in the last 80-odd years. It consists of some formal areas with topiaries and streamside woodland in which lilies, anemones, colchicums and other plants are naturalised. Whilst one can detect a certain Wm. Robinson influence in the design, it is somehow different and one feels that it does not belong to any accepted style but that of the actress herself. For my part I never visit the garden without feeling that its creator is not far away.

So far the garden is in no danger. It is preserved with great care. Let us hope that the future will be kind to it.