SUSSEX GARDENS TRUST



Jottings

Edition No. 1 June 2022

Welcome to our very first edition of Jottings. In this edition we bring you things to see and do in June, together with several stories and articles from our contributors. We suggest places to go in the far west of Sussex and also in the far east of the county – adding in London for those of you out and about. Something to interest everyone we hope – from mysteries solved by our Research Group to walks without your phone, from book reviews to the secret diary of a volunteer gardener.

There are different ways to view Jottings – either choose individual sections or articles on the web pages, or look at the pdf download – this can be viewed on your screen or alternatively downloaded to your own computer and looked at later. Either way you never have to miss an edition and you can pick it up later as all editions will be archived.



Image © Chris Dauncey

Things to do, places to be

The Garden Museum current exhibition - Fashioning the rose



The exhibition explores the use of roses, real and artificial, in fashion. A creative collaboration between guest curator Amy de la Haye and set designer Simon Costin, this exhibition will also draw inspiration from the Garden Museum collection and gardens to explore the tensions between wild and cultivated, natural and artificial roses within fashion apparel, image making and contemporary craft practices.
The exhibition is open until **19 June**.
Read more at
https://gardenmuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/wild-cultivated-fashioning-the-rose/

Time for a walk without your phone?

In the last Bulletin, Marcus mentioned some walks within the South Downs National Park (SDNS) that you could download onto your phone. As someone who doesn't look at my phone when waking in the countryside, I thought I'd look for an alternative. Here is what I found…

Hidden Landscape Trails in the South Downs.
Three special walks in West Sussex, not on your phone but downloadable leaflets to print and take with you. They are special because they use modern archaeological techniques to unearth stories from the past. Find out more here https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-active/on-foot/hidden-landscape-trails/

'The Downs – too much for one pair of eyes, enough to float a whole population in happiness.'

NGS Gardens for June

Each month we will be featuring a few selected gardens that are open under the NGS scheme – look out for ones near you. Thanks to the local NGS organisers for providing us with images and suggestions. From the Yellow Book for June:



Hollymount
Burnt Oak Road, Hurstwood,
Uckfield
TN22 4AE

Open 12 June & 16 July
No 74 in Yellow Book.

A new 7-acre garden on sloping hillside. Four large ponds, a stream, waterfalls, terraced beds, interesting planting, some tropical, large rhododendrons, wildlife: alpacas, chickens, ducks, fish. The garden has a great variety of trees, two greenhouses, shepherd's hut, summerhouse, gravel paths, kitchen garden and wildflower terracing. Very peaceful setting with great views. Refreshments and plants for sale. Read more:
https://findagarden.ngs.org.uk/garden/43784/hollymount

Centenary of Italian Gardens, Eastbourne

FRIENDS *of* MEADS PARKS *and* GARDENS



2022 sees the centenary of the Italian Gardens on the coast in Eastbourne. Thanks to the generosity of both the Friends and the Meads Community Association the stone spheres on either side of the stage structure will be reinstated with one being etched with the year 1922 and the other with the year 2022. A new interpretation board telling the story of the gardens from their beginning in the early 1900s to the present day will also be installed, funded by a grant from the John Jackson Trust. Work is now beginning on the design and manufacture of the board and should be completed by the early summer.

Your presence is requested…

The Friends group invite you to join them in the Italian Gardens on **Sunday 26 June at 2:00 pm** when both the spheres and the interpretation board will be unveiled by the local MP Caroline Ansell.

Since the Friends was formed in 2015 they have worked closely with the Eastbourne Operatic and Dramatic Society, the organisation that brings Shakespeare's plays to the Italian Gardens every summer. Musicians and singers from EODS will be performing a selection of arias from Italian operas and Neapolitan songs. Recorded music will also be played during the course of the event featuring tunes from the 1920s. If you would like to get into the spirit, they are also encouraging their guests to dress in the style of that era.

To find out more go to:
http://www.friendsofmeadsparksandgardens.co.uk/community/friends-of-meads-parks-and-gardens-10691/home/

The Secret Diary of a Volunteer Gardener: Behind the Scenes at the Prairie Garden

Paul Tosey

I have been volunteering at the Sussex Prairie Garden, near Henfield, for more than four years now and the time has come to spill the beans about what happens when the public isn't there.

The shocking truth is that most of these intervening months, from mid-October until the following June, are spent playing party games. These include gift-wrapping green banana plants; hunting the `weed of the week'; and stapling the label to the plant pot (a variation on pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey – there are no blindfolds but it's just as challenging due to the malfunctioning staplers). Indeed, there are so many games that the closed months are a veritable festival of fun.

By the way, if you are objecting that the green banana, *Musa basjoo,* is not a prairie plant, well done for staying alert. In fact, the Prairie Garden site also has an exotic garden that you pass through from the main entrance and just before you encounter the pigs. I'm not being derogatory about us volunteers, there are two real pigs each year whose job is to turn garden waste into bacon (unless they have the good fortune to be retired to an animal sanctuary).

Here are two of the most prominent games that take place on the prairie itself.

Trash and burn

One of the joys of volunteering in this garden is arriving to find the sun shining through head-height dried grasses on a crisp, clear autumn day. It is a privilege to witness portions of the prairie's life-cycle that are out of season yet so glorious.



The Prairie Garden in autumn. Photo courtesy of Sussex Prairie Garden.

Later, usually in January, a spectacular game marks the end of one cycle and the beginning of the next. Picasso claimed (allegedly) that every act of creation begins with an act of destruction. Personally I enjoy a spot of destructive gardening – with the longer-term creation in view, of course – and what could be more wickedly satisfying yet still legal than to trash and burn an RHS partner garden?

Of course, all the games have important health and safety considerations, this one in particular. Don't try it at home! Or in any public place! And don't blame me (or flame me) if you ignore this advice!

The objective of this game is to reduce the winter prairie of dried perennials to a flat, smouldering, ash-strewn plain. I'm told that this mimics what happens naturally on the North American prairies.

How to play: first, using hedge trimmers and other cutting implements, chop down the tall, dried plants close to the base; next, take pitchforks and rakes to assemble the dried plant matter into large heaps on the pathways through the beds (to avoid intense heat directly on top of over-wintering plants); then, take up the butane firelighter - its pop and whoosh are *so* satisfying! - aim the lighter at one of the heaps (having checked first that no-one is standing immediately down-wind), stand back and watch the flames devour it all!



The burning. Photo courtesy of Sussex Prairie Garden.

Mulch ado about nothing

On a beautiful, warm, sunny spring day in March, buzzards and a stunning red kite swoop and soar overhead. Paul McBride's big green tractor is parked on the grass next to one of the huge Prairie Garden beds, its trailer full of steaming, pungent compost, tipped up and ready to unload.

This is the setting for a game that involves two teams who are supposed to co-operate. Team A lines up three wheelbarrows behind the trailer and uses pitchforks to fill them with compost (the latest fleet of barrows are all named – Love's Poison Barrow, Sir Mo Barrah, Captain Jack Barrow – you get the idea - and decorated accordingly). Players wheel the barrows across the bed, tip their loads onto the ground then return to the tractor for a refill. Team B rakes the compost into a thick, even blanket of mulch. Members of Team B are allowed to order Team A to tip the barrowloads in specified places to ensure even coverage; orders which members of Team A can ignore if they are feeling mischievous or that Team B are being a bit too uppity. The workers make sure things don't get out of hand and stop the volunteers doing things they shouldn't, such as inadvertently covering young *Echinacea* seedlings. The workers also participate as team members, which is impressive multi-tasking if you ask me.

Perhaps the best fun in this game, sadly the exclusive preserve of the workers, is to sit at the controls of the tractor and jiggle the trailer in order to loosen the residue of sticky compost that sits at the top of the trailer and stubbornly refuses to come within reach. It takes real skill to avoid an avalanche that half-buries the players waiting by the wheelbarrows.



Prairie beds after mulching. Photo courtesy of Sussex Prairie Garden.

To call mulching a game hardly does it justice. It goes on for weeks and epitomises that football cliché of the season being a marathon not a sprint. Indeed, it lasts for so long that it is no good wishing for the end to arrive. Just like the Olympics, it is all about the taking part. I even wonder sometimes why we do it. Is it truly beneficial for the garden? Is it a grand metaphor for life, with its relentless routines that we continue to perform in the hope of some future reward? Is it merely a ploy to `disappear' the huge pile of compost that sits in the next field?

Whatever the answer, it still feels miraculous to realise that these sparse beds will be bursting with a multitude of tall, thriving plants in just a few weeks' time.

Party food

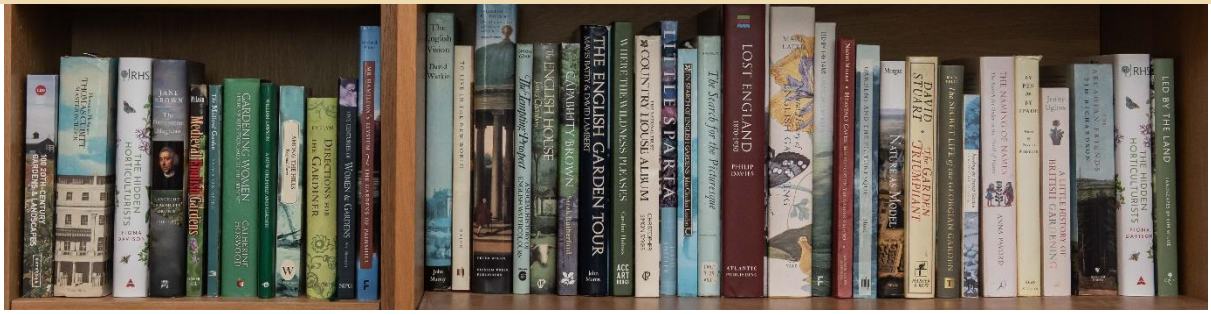
Some people, rather unkindly I feel, have questioned the idea that these activities are games. They dare to suggest that they are `work' or `chores' or even `hard labour'. Well, I can prove that they are wrong; everyone knows that parties have cake and, guess what, we *always* have cake at coffee time. The cake could be lemon drizzle, coffee and walnut, lemon and blueberry, rhubarb and ginger, chocolate.... the list goes on. All delicious, served by Pauline McBride and her Mum, Pat, then eaten around the log burner or on the terrace while sipping tea or coffee and chatting with all the lovely people who gather to work, I mean

play, there. What bliss. Which just goes to show that, by volunteering here, you *can* have your cake and eat it too.

Sussex Prairie Garden opens for 2022 on Wednesday 1st June. For full details see: https://www.sussexprairies.co.uk

The Garden Bookshelf

Sally Ingram



Do you have a favourite indie bookshop in Sussex? While the online giants such as Amazon can attract the book lover with large discounts and fast home delivery there is nothing to beat browsing the shelves of an independent, family run bookshop, talking to the owner, discovering surprises and coming away with something unexpected. As well as books, the independent bookshops also provide a focus for their community: giving readings, holding book events and inviting guest authors, even becoming Instagram-friendly, which might suggest why the number of independent booksellers in the UK has risen for the fifth consecutive year.



https://www.steyningbookshop.co.uk/

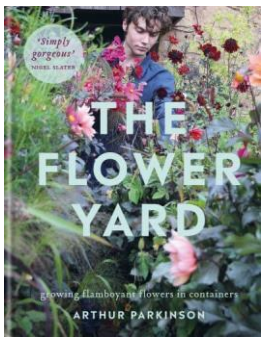
The Steyning Bookshop has its home in an eighteenth century house in the High Street, Steyning, West Sussex, and was established by Sara Bowes, and her husband Robin, in 1984. This lively village bookshop holds community events with visiting writers as well as arranging book fairs and author visits for local

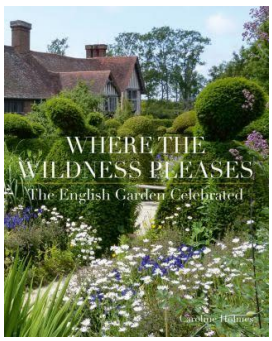
schools. They specialise in children's books and local interest books, maps and guides.

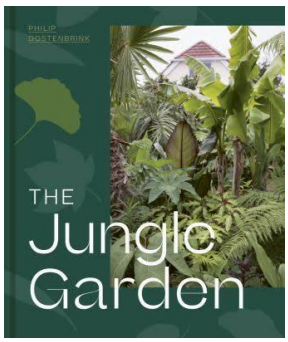
What are garden lovers in West Sussex reading?

Best sellers at The Steyning Bookshop:

- *The Flower Yard: Growing Flamboyant Flowers in Containers* by Arthur Parkinson, Blackwell, 2021, £14.99.
- *Gardening for Bumblebees: A Practical Guide to Creating a Paradise for Pollinators* by Dave Goulson, Penguin, 2021, £16.99.
- *Where the Wildness Pleases: The English Garden Celebrated,* by Caroline Holmes, ACC Art Books, 2021, £25.00.
- *The Kew Gardener's Guide to Growing Trees : The Art and Science to grow with confidence* by Tony Kirkham, Frances Lincoln, 2021, £12.99.
- *The Jungle Garden* by Philip Oostenbrink, Filbert Press, 2021, £25.00.
- *Beth Chatto's Green Tapestry Revisited: A Guide to a Sustainably Planted Garden* by Beth Chatto, Steven Wooster and Julia Boulton, Berry & Co., (updated edition 2021), £30.00.







Caroline Holmes will be known to many of us for her series of online talks organised by SGT in conjunction with The Gardens Trust earlier this year, when she explored the gardens of the High Weald, an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Her new book, *Where the Wildness Pleases*, celebrates this legendary landscape with castles such as Hever and Scotney, country houses like Batemans and Borde Hill and Wealden homes such as High Beeches. SGT members will have the opportunity to visit some of the wonderful gardens featured in Caroline's book as part of our summer programme of events.

If there's an independent bookshop that you enjoy visiting please let us know - especially if it has an interesting and unusual range of garden-related books. Contact us here.

Winchelsea Secret Gardens – an NGS visit

Judy Tarling

Having terrified myself by reading about the notorious Hawkhurst and Mayfield gangs of smugglers in Alex Preston's recent historical novel *Winchelsea*, I was tempted to set out on Easter Saturday to visit Winchelsea's Secret Gardens (aren't all private gardens secret?). Although the weather was promising, concerns about Easter traffic chaos, a possible fuel shortage and lack of car parks on the town map lurked at the back of my mind, and I was quite prepared to turn around and head for home should any of these anticipated problems arise.

The A259 from Hastings runs high above the Pett levels giving glorious intermittent views of the sea, and I soon arrived without incident at the turning to Winchelsea and immediately the stress levels fell away as I entered a magic world of peace and tranquillity. I needn't have worried about the lack of car parks as the wide streets were restriction-free with not a single yellow line in sight, and I arrived 15 minutes before the gardens' opening time.

Set high on a cliff and with the sea which made it one of the Cinque Ports to be now only glimpsed in the distance, the residents of Winchelsea are to be envied for their well-preserved sense of history which can be observed in the variety of houses lining the grid of streets, newly laid out in 1292 after the old town became eroded by the sea. Rows of cottages rub shoulders with grander Gothick and Georgian mansions in a spacious townscape, some of these no doubt funded by the historic illegal trading. The magnificent church set in its wide surrounding churchyard forms a central reference point, and a visit inside should not be missed, as it houses several spectacular funerary monuments and is lit by glorious stained glass. Tours of the smugglers' underground passages are available.



Douglas Srachan stained glass windows



Not so secret allotments



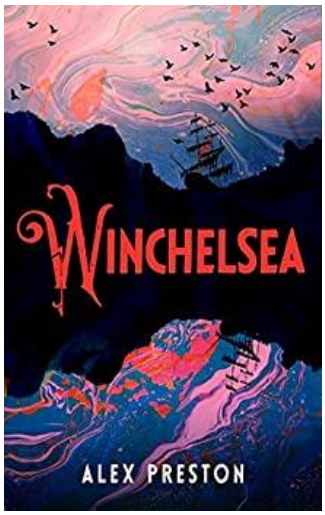
Periteau House Winchelsea with ancient yew

Four of the open gardens were enclosed within the village, two adjoining so that one could peek over the garden fence into the neighbour's, and two were situated on the town's outer eastern edge. Within the central area most were expanded courtyards shaded by ornamental flowering trees and shrubs, seating and small areas of lawn jig-sawed together in village fashion.

All the gardens were immaculate and beautifully manicured for this, their big day. All were designed to encourage exploration, an important element even in a small space. Mercifully gimmick and knick-knack free, tastefully arranged pots, arches and gazebos abounded, but I thought it strange that none of the gardens had vegetable plots. The allotments I noticed near the town centre seemed to be well used so I assume that these owners preferred to keep their small private plots for pleasure rather than utility.

The first garden I visited, Periteau House, boasted a yew which, it was claimed, could be 300 years old. Clipped in a massive boule, the owner assured me it was possible to climb up inside, although this opportunity was on this occasion wisely blocked to visitors.

At Rye View, worth the short walk down the hill outside the walls to marsh level, a collection of ferns at the front door was followed by other colour-themed arrangements. A winding perimeter path traced changing areas of a garden full of interest, arriving eventually at the boundary canal where the view to Rye across the marshes was the epitome of a picturesque landscape. The owner assured me that the marsh drainage was controlled by a nearby sluice to avoid flooding the garden. Climbing back up the hill, a similar view could be had from the garden terrace of King's Leap, set high on the cliff edge overlooking the marshes.





Painstaking detail at King's Leap Winchelsea

The featured NGS group openings provide an appealing opportunity for collections of small gardens to make a special event for the visitor. In this case all the gardens merited a visit, were well signposted and, except for the one outside the walls, within a short walk of each other. Four were designated wheelchair accessible. Teas and toilets were available in the town. The six gardens open on Easter Saturday for £5 are to be joined on **18 June** with five more (for £8), making the journey truly worth-while and certainly safer now the dangers of the Hawkhurst gang have been confined to history. Or there's always next year…

For more information see:
www.ngs.org.uk www.winchelsea.com www.judytarling.com

Tales from the Research Group: How art helped solve a mystery

Pat Dauncey

The research group recently went to Manor Gardens in Eastbourne for a site visit. The site, originally farm land, then became the gardens of The Manor House in the late eighteenth century. In the 1920s it was bought by the Council and opened as a public park. Today the gardens contain a mix of twentieth century additions, such as the sunken garden and the pergola, but also some features from the original gardens made over 200 years ago. One features we pondered over is called “Horse Mound”.





Images © Pat Dauncey

The plaque next to it says “Restored in 2013 in memory of ….”, a clue to the fact that it was there before 2013. It is a grass-covered mound with twelve steps leading to the top on which is currently a stone bird-bath, table top or toadstool? It is about twenty foot high. What was it originally?

Our first thoughts were maybe an ice house, popular in eighteenth century manor houses and estates – but there is no sign of an entrance way. How about a look-out position? A medieval mount? Interestingly there is a nearby rockwork feature in a depression which would have involved significant excavations – was the mound created with the excavated material? The plaque is inset into a large rock, not dis-similar to those found in the dell. But what was the mound for?

After a few Google searches we discovered that “Horse Mound” referred to the previous landowner’s favourite horse and was its final resting place – was it buried standing up? Why is it so tall? If it is a burial mound, there is a precedent here as there is a grave stone nearer the entrance to the garden which commemorates the family’s dog named Duke. When was it created?

Another search led to a rather surprising discovery and an interesting connection. A blog by Robjn Cantus in 2020 showed an image of Ravilious’s triptych called The Tennis Match – see below.



Eric Ravilious, *Tennis* (triptych) 1930. Image Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives 189005.

It started to look vaguely familiar. Then there was another image of a woodcut by Ravilious from 1925 – entitled Horse Mound.

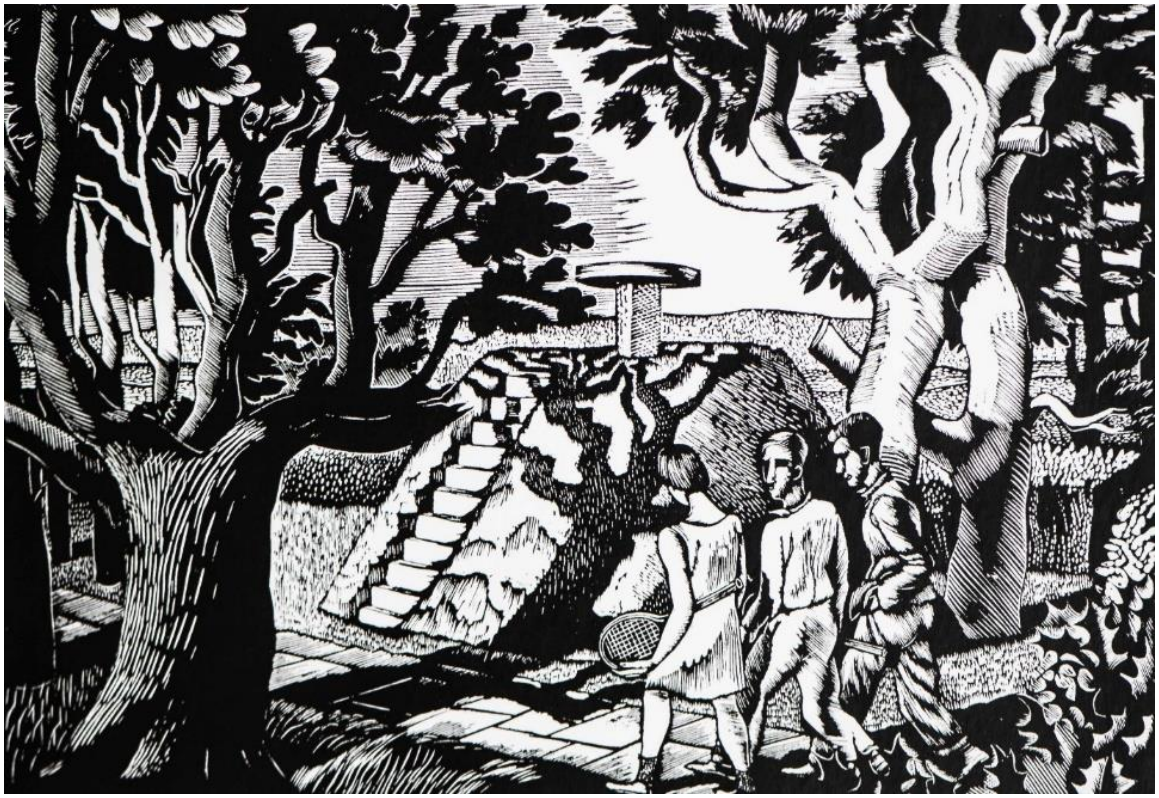


Image: Eric Ravilious 'Manor Gardens, Eastbourne, wood-engraved print, 1927.
From: Ravilious Wood Engravings, James Russel

Bingo – this really is our mysterious Horse Mound in Manor Gardens!

Perhaps this shouldn't have been such a surprise as the Manor House had housed the Towner art gallery from 1923 until 2005, when the house was sold and the new Towner Gallery built near the seafront. The key element of their collection was and is the work of Eric Ravilious who had studied and taught at Eastbourne School of Art.

So mystery partly solved – we now know that the Horse Mound was there in 1925 when Ravilious sketched it. Now the challenge is to solve the rest of the puzzle. Having made our discoveries we left the site and on the way out saw a well-fed leucistic squirrel watching us from the grass – maybe another tail to follow!

Image Gallery













Photos by Chris & Pat Dauncey
Woodcut from Bernard Reynolds in *Most Happy Husbandman,* Ethelind Fearon, 1946

"Life begins the day you start a garden" ... *Chinese proverb*

We hope you have enjoyed our first edition of Jottings. It will come out every month from now on. We would love to hear your feedback and any suggestions for articles to add. Please email us at jottings@sussexgardentstrust.org.uk.

If you would like to be reminded every month when the next edition is ready, please use the **Ask button** on the home page of our website at https://www.sussexgardenstrust.org.uk/.

We look forward to seeing you all next month.