SUSSEX GARDENS TRUST



Jottings

Edition No. 6 November 2022

Welcome to the latest issue of Jottings. To everything there is a season … winter may be approaching but we take a look back at some of the delightful gardens visited by SGT members this summer, including a surprising kitchen garden discovered in Kardamyli. There's also news of two very special SGT events: the Christmas lecture and afternoon tea on 13 December in Lewes, and the publication of our first Journal, coming to members at the end of November. And we remember the birthday of Gertrude Jekyll, born 179 years ago this month, a hard-working woman who always found jobs to do in the garden, whatever the season.

We hope you enjoy reading our November edition.

Things to do, places to be

A date for your diary!

SGT Christmas Event 2022 for members and guests

Tuesday 13 December at 14.00 at the White Hart Hotel, Lewes.

Please join us for this special SGT Christmas celebration at the White Hart Hotel on the High Street in Lewes. Our guest speaker is the renowned garden historian, award-winning writer and broadcaster, Caroline Holmes, and she will be introducing us to the fascinating history of the Wealden Oaks. Following her talk we shall have a traditional English afternoon tea, and a chance to win a prize in our ever-popular raffle! The White Hart is only a few minutes from the station, and Lewes in December is a lovely town for some early Christmas shopping.
https://bookwhen.com/sussexgtevents/e/ev-syjs-20221213140000



The **Gardens Trust** has started a programme of online training for 'Suffolk's Unforgettable Gardens Story'. Although set up for the Suffolk project, these free sessions are open to all and are relevant to anyone with an interest in designed landscape history, conservation and research methods. If you would like to take part contact Karina Flynn karina.flynn@thegardenstrust.org



Eric Ravilious. *Chalk Paths* 1935 watercolour on paper. Private collection. Bridgeman Images.

A new exhibition at The Pallant Gallery is celebrating Sussex as a place of inspiration for artists

Sussex Landscape: Chalk, Wood and Water

12 November 2022 until 23 April 2023

A few years ago, several SGT members enjoyed hearing about artists inspired by the Sussex landscape at a study day organised by the Sussex Archaeological Society. As well as Turner's views of Petworth and the garden at Charleston we also heard about the paintings by Eric Ravilious of the Downland landscape, including *Chalk Paths*, painted in 1935, with its long white tracks sweeping over the fields. Now there is a wonderful chance to see the original painting at a new exhibition at the Pallant Gallery, which promises to be a highlight of the year.

This wide-ranging exhibition includes depictions of the pond at Charleston by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, evocative images of the Devils' Dyke by Simon Roberts, the farms photographed by Lee Miller around her home, and the landscape of Whiteways, Rottingdean by William Nicholson.



Vanessa Bell. *The Pond at Charleston, East Sussex*. 1916 oil on canvas. Charleston Estate of Vanessa Bell.



William Nicholson. *Whiteways Rottingdean* 1909 oil on canvas board. Private collection.

A Winter Event at Denmans Garden

Festive Winter Watercolour Workshop



Thursday 24th, Saturday 26th, Sunday 27th November or Thursday 1st December from 10am to 1pm.

Join Jo Dowers for a festive inspired creative watercolour workshop in the Botanic Room at Denmans Garden. Experiment with a variety of watercolour techniques in a relaxed, friendly environment, suitable for all abilities.
https://www.denmans.org/events/festive-winter-watercolour-workshop-at-denmans-garden/

Borde Hill Gardens Christmas Market

Saturday 26 November 10:00 – Sunday 27 November 15:00 pm.



This November escape the rush of the high street and indulge in a spot of festive shopping at the Borde Hill Christmas Market, taking place at **The Stables**, the **Garden Gift Shop and Marquee** and **Green Tree Gallery**.

Hot off the press this month!

At the end of November, ***The Sussex Gardens Trust Journal*** will be coming through members' letterboxes! This new annual journal will be an academic publication of vibrant, scholarly writing to provide the opportunity to disseminate the findings of new research, notes on ongoing research and other Sussex-related topics and information on contemporary issues relevant to Sussex gardens and landscapes. The first issue includes articles on designed landscapes of the 'Sussex Riviera', Cowdray House gardens, Highdown - 'the hidden gem on the hill', Gilpin's tour of Sussex (Chichester to Brighton), horticultural education in West Sussex, the Borde Hill archive, the early development of Sussex University campus, and One Garden - an exciting new use for Stanmer Park's historic walled garden.

The next issue in November 2023 could contain your contribution so please start researching and writing now! Research articles should be 3000-5000 words in length but notes on ongoing research or contemporary issues can be shorter. Guidance on format and help for new writers will be available. If you are interested in contributing, please contact the editor, Dr Barbara Simms, bs@gardentales.co.uk.



Cowdray House today. Photo: Susi Batty, September 2019

Do you recognise these two people in such spectacular hats?



SGT member, **Judy Tarling**, was sent this photo by a distant relative now living in Hove, saying it is a picture of their ancestors in a market garden, operating in Mile Oak, Blatchington, Hove. Judy says she has no further knowledge, but if you recognise either the man or the woman or perhaps know something about the market garden that once existed in Blatchington, she would love to hear from you. Email: judytarling@btinternet.com

A local contender for a community grant

Shoppers are being urged to help a community-based project reach maturity in Hastings. Three contenders for the latest Tesco Community Grants will receive up to £1,500 to help their initiative and the **Alexandra Park Greenhouse Group** is one of those bidding for an award. The other contenders are Ark Little Ridge Primary Academy in St Leonards, which is seeking funds to improve the school environment with therapeutic gardening and nature projects, and Rye Christmas Festival which is run by volunteers from community groups, schools and musicians. Voting will run until 15 January next year. The voting boxes are at six local Tesco stores in Hastings.

Italian gardens in Ireland – Powerscourt

By Pat Dauncey

On a dry, sunny day in August I visited Powerscourt estate in Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, just south of Dublin. The house was originally a thirteenth century castle which was then extensively altered during the eighteenth century, but a devastating fire in 1974 left it in ruins. It was renovated in 1996 and work was ongoing during our visit. The house, however was not my main interest on this visit – the borrowed view in the Italian Garden and the construction of the grass terraces was the main focus of my excitement.

The nineteen hectares of gardens we see today were created by Viscount Powerscourt in the mid-1800s. He had inherited the title and the estate, aged eight, in 1844. The top terrace on the south face of the house has a most astonishing view – a classic example of borrowed scenery, or *shakkei* in Chinese. Almost in line with the main axis of the Italian garden is Sugar Loaf Mountain. At just over 500m it dominates the skyline together with other peaks in the Wicklow Mountains. The fountain in Triton Lake takes your eye directly to the mountains beyond, in the same way that the main path and the terracing on either side directs your view to the lake. The grass terraces on either side of the axial path are symmetric and involve six different levels with parterres on the second level. Statuary and balustrading also help steer your eyes to the magnificent fountain in the lake.



Borrowed view of Sugar Loaf Mountain beyond Triton Lake and fountain



Upper terrace and parterres



Terracing on the western side with six levels

However, the view was not so wonderful when Mervyn Howard Wingfield, Viscount Powerscourt, inherited the estate in 1844 – there was a 'hillock' in the way that partially blocked the view of the lake. His father had made plans for the garden before he died and work had been carried out on the slope on the western side. Excavations were clearly needed to create what we see today – how did they do that I wondered?

Fortunately, the Viscount recorded descriptions of some of the work involved in his book, *A Description and History of Powerscourt*, written in 1903. Everything would have been dug by hand – it was not unusual in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for hilltops to be flattened for a new house, for example Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire, or for large lakes to be created (think of Capability Brown's work). Questions came to mind. How much soil was excavated? What did they do with the spoil? Where did they get the manpower from and how long did it all take?

Delving through the Viscount's book we can find some answers. Labour was very cheap during the 1800s and the Viscount recalls, 'there were a quantity of poor people on the estate up at Glencree who were wanting employment and we put them to work at about six shillings a week. I had up to 100 men on it at one time'.[1] The excavated spoil was moved to the pond (Triton Lake). They made a roadway down the middle of the terrace, before the flights of steps were built and carted the gravel down the slope and laid it over the whole bottom of the pond 'about two and a half acres, eight to ten feet thick'. This resulted in the pond then being six feet deep – it had been nearer sixteen feet deep when they started. The gravel bank leaked a great deal but fortunately they found some 'marly earth' (which contains a lot of clay) on the eastern side of the terrace which they moved to the bank to make it watertight. The rest of the excavated soil was moved to create the eastern raised terrace to match the other side.

Powerscourt estate marketing material states that the work took a hundred men over twelve years to build. To test this out I re-visited JC Loudon's advised rate of hand excavation.[2] His rule was one labourer could excavate ten cubic yards in a day on soft ground, plus another labourer to move the excavated material. Using the data about surplus earth being moved to the lake suggests the total

[1] Viscount Powerscourt, *A description and history of Powerscourt* (London: 1903), p. 78.
[2] John Claudius Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (London: 1826), p. 378.

volume excavated was in excess of 40,000 cubic yards. With a hundred men at work, half digging and the other half removing soil, this would have taken over eight hundred days to complete, i.e., two and a half years. This does not look promising…

However, the Viscount writes: 'we did part of it, and then stopped on account of the expense and waited until the following summer and then began again'.[3] This would make more sense if they worked for seventy to eighty days each year during good weather. Remember this part of Ireland has an annual rainfall of 741mm (29.2 inches). You had to have a long-term vision in those days – fortunate then that the seventh Viscount Powerscourt lived until 1904 aged 58 – long enough to record the work done on the house and the gardens and to enjoy the results as well as posing in the image below. Not only was my visit in 2022 very enjoyable with stunning views, wonderful statuary and varied planting styles, it also led to a construction quandary to solve – happy days.

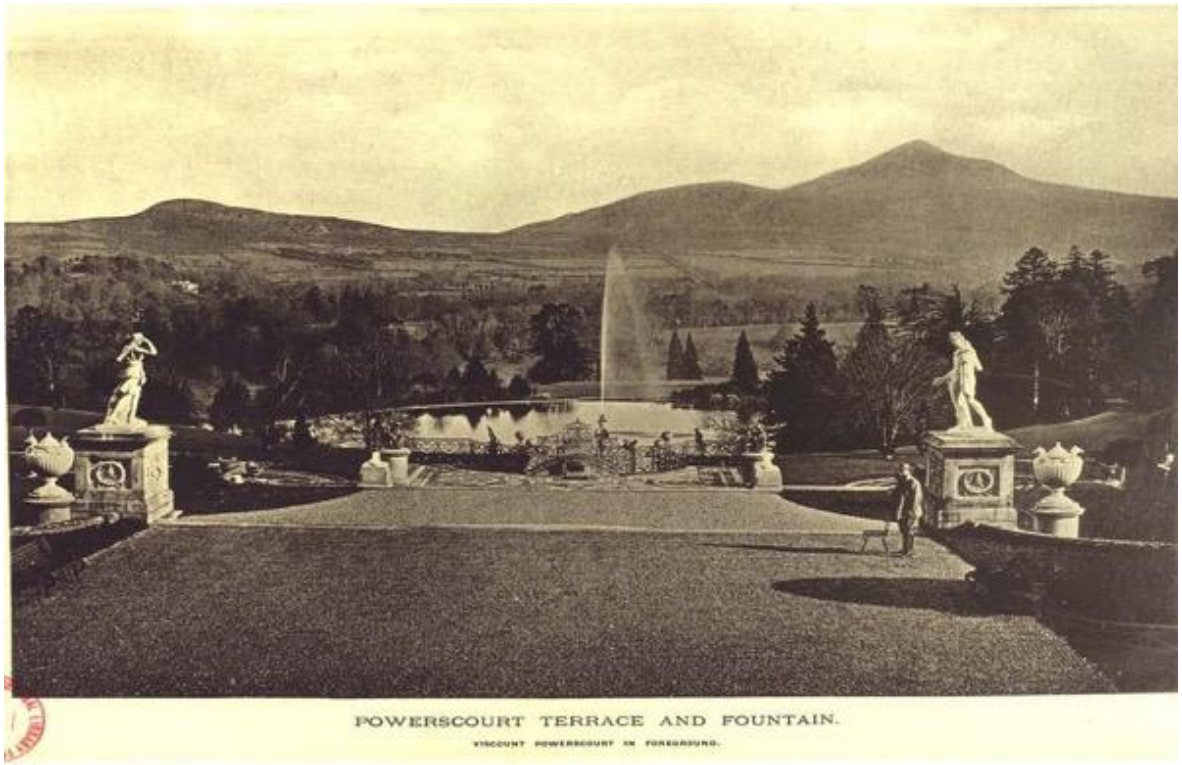


Image from *A Description & History of Powerscourt, 1903, p79.*

[3] Viscount Powerscourt, *A description and history of Powerscourt* (London: 1903), p. 80.

Vegetable Garden in Old Kardamyli

By Alan and Jennie Starr

Having visited the Peloponnese before Covid we were interested to revisit sites we had not been able to get to before. We had read *Mani- Travels in the Southern Peloponnese* by Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915 - 2011) and particularly wanted to visit Kardamyli, where Leigh Fermor had lived with his wife Joan. They bought land in 1962 and started building their home in 1965, with a team of local workmen under Nikos Kolokotronis, a master mason. (Whilst I was rereading the book in the Kolokotronis hotel Nikos Kolokotronis's grandson came over to tell me about his grandfather and their family connections). After the death of Leigh Fermor, and his wife, the house was left to the Benaki Museum and it is possible to visit out of the main tourist season. We explored the area of Kardamyli that Leigh Fermor had written about and the discovery of a vegetable garden in old Kardamyli presented an opportunity to share some history.



Kardamyli village seen from the Tower.



The tower and house at Kardamyli.

Kardamyli, a coastal village in the Peloponnese, has been much loved by writers. It is mentioned in Homer and holds the scattered ashes of Bruce Chatwin. Leigh Fermor wrote of 'houses, resembling small castles built of golden stone … The mountains rushed down to the water's edge with, here and there among the whitewashed fishermen's houses near the sea, great rustling groves of calamus reed ten feet high and swaying together in the slightest whisper of wind'. Today it is a small town with a thriving tourist industry, overlooked by the Tower of the Mourtzinos-Troupaki family.

The tower is part of a fortified house: a set of buildings, including its own church, established in the seventeenth century by an ancestor of the Mourtzinos-Troupaki clan, a man called Michael Palaeologus. His name recalls the last of the Byzantine emperors, and local families have claimed imperial forebears.

Although this part of the Peloponnese, which is known as the Mani, has astonishing scenic beauty, it has always been a harsh environment. In recent

centuries it was controlled by a group of patriarchal clans, headed by the Mourtzinos-Troupakis. In 1821, the heads of the Mani clans met at the house in Kardamyli and were determined to liberate the peninsula from the Turks. They were successful.

To be effective, a fortified house needed to be self-sufficient. The house in Kardamyli had its own underground cistern, forge and olive press. It also had its own garden, to provide vegetables for the family.

During the excavation of the site, we are told, it was discovered that the walled garden had traces of vegetable planting. We do not know what vegetables were grown, and all we have now is a derelict space, nine metres by twenty-three, nestled close to the south side of the tower. The garden is surrounded by stone walls, and inside a few olive trees. The house has been renovated and is used to exhibit installations by modern local artists.



The vegetable garden in 2022

All photos © Jennie and Alan Starr

Windmill Hill and Dimple Hill

By Alan Starr

'Women . . . were the great garden-lovers, and indeed they inhabited gardens, while most men, until old age, only visited them'.

Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957) wrote about gardens, about men and women, and about the direction of society and became known as a modernist novelist. In 1918 the critic and novelist, May Sinclair, used the term 'stream of consciousness' when reviewing Richardson's first novel, *Pointed Roofs*, published in 1915. This was the first time the phrase had been used to describe fictional technique, so Richardson (who hated the term) earned a place in literary history.



Dorothy Richardson. Date unknown.

Pointed Roofs was the earliest of thirteen semi-autobiographical novels in a sequence called *Pilgrimage*. Although some of her works are still in print and she has a devoted following, her popularity has waned; the definitive biography is entitled *The Genius They Forgot*, written by John Rosenberg in 1973.

Her literary career began in a Sussex garden, in 1907. At the age of thirty-four, her future must have seemed grim. Some years before, her mother had committed suicide and her father had gone bankrupt. Dorothy Richardson lived in a rented attic room, supporting herself as a receptionist at a dental surgery. She was involved with London's radical circles, where she met H G Wells; the result was a pregnancy, a miscarriage and a breakdown.

Seeking peace, she moved for a time to Windmill Hill, near Herstmonceux, on the southern edge of the Weald, with a view across the marshes to Pevensey Bay. She was a paying guest of the Penrose family, Quaker farmers who owned a property called Mount Pleasant. She found peace in the garden of Mount Pleasant and in the lives of the Quakers. She described this time of her life in her 1938 novel, *Dimple Hill*.

Mount Pleasant had been developed as a ‘pleasure farm’. The sales particulars from 1898 give details of the ‘carriage sweep’ and the house, and describe the property as ‘a most complete little pleasure and poultry farm’. A pleasure farm was a farm which need not produce an income, and was ideally suited to a retired city gentleman. Throughout the nineteenth century, the pleasure farm became a prominent feature in the Wealden landscape.

The house and garden are described in great detail in the novel.
‘The place was not in the least like a farm. A white five-barred gate, fastened back, a sweep encircling a bed of evergreens, grass-bordered, a square plaster house, two-storied, bleak. . .’.



Mount Pleasant in 1890. With permission of The Windmill Hill Trust.

By 1907, Mount Pleasant was changing from a pleasure farm to a working farm. We see Richardson ‘settled in the decrepit deck-chair under the chestnut tree … Left alone, she listened to the swish, swish of the hedge-cutter, a busy accompaniment to the lazy, ceaseless coo-rooing of the doves, and heard it cease. A moment later, pushing a barrow of weeds, Alfred Roscorla came through the gap in the hedge, turning the barrow as if to cross the lawn immediately in front of her’.

Richardson loved gardens and the novel includes a five-hundred-word description of a delphinium clump in the grounds of Mount Pleasant, a vestige of the older days. A garden was not only a place of aesthetic delight and spiritual calm, it was a place created by human effort.

‘Somewhere away down the far slope, the men were at work, part of the world-wide army ceaselessly toiling through the centuries, without whom secure,

smooth-lawned enclosures would never have come into being. Why were some exempt? Why such armies to support the exempted? Why, of these few, almost none worthy of exemption?'.

Interestingly, she struggles with the idea of a garden as anything other than a place of privilege and leisure. She has an insight into domestic gardens which might come as an enlightenment:

'The sensitive creatures by whom she was surrounded were certainly alive to the beauty of their gardens. A treasured superfluity. Like the proletarian parlour so cruelly condemned by commonsensical half-wits. A temple undesecrated by the presence of the implements of toil. Kept always swept and available. Rarely used, but always operative, a refreshing harbour for the mind'.

At Windmill Hill she began to write short semi-fictional sketches of Sussex life, and in 1914 published a history of the Quakers. After achieving recognition as a writer, Richardson often returned to Mount Pleasant.

Sadly, the garden at Windmill Hill is not just lost, but obliterated. Sixty years after Dorothy Richardson first visited Mount Pleasant, the bulldozers moved in. To understand the garden there, you will need to read *Dimple Hill*.



The site of Mount Pleasant today. © Alan Starr.

All quotations from *Dimple Hill* (Dent & Sons, 1938)

Professor Scott McCracken of Keele University curates a Dorothy Richardson website: https://www.dorothyrichardson.org/ which is recommended if you would like to know more. The image of Richardson is from his website.

November in the garden: knowing a fag-hook from a hand-bill

By Sally Ingram



Now, in the third week of November, the most pressing work is the collecting of leaves for mulching and leaf-mould. The oaks have been late in shedding their leaves, and we have been waiting till they are down. Oak-leaves are the best, then hazel, elm, and Spanish chestnut. Birch and beech are not so good; beech-leaves especially take much too long to decay.

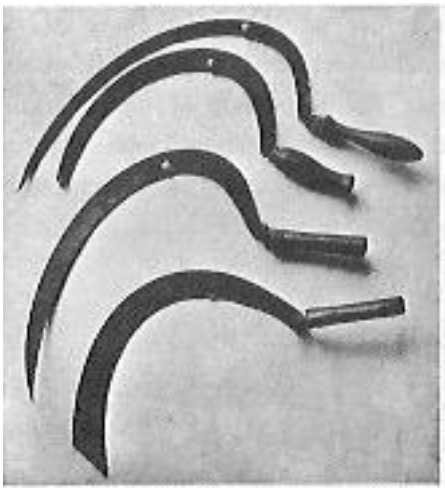
Gertrude Jekyll, *Wood and Garden*, 1899.

Gathering fallen leaves in late autumn is a familiar task for gardeners; when the bare trees signal the approach of winter it's time to start storing nourishment for plants in the spring. Gertrude Jekyll, born 179 years ago this month, describes in *Wood and Garden*, going out with horse and cart and three workmen into the lanes near Munstead Wood for several days in late November, returning home with a great load of leaves that are thrown into a collection of pits. The large pits or 'pens' in the garden yard were made from 'stout oak post and rail and upright slabs' and the leaves then stored for almost two years, until they had rotted 'into wholesome plant-food'. She tells us the leaf-mould was for protecting the beds of 'Daffodils and choice bulbs and Alströmerias' with the rest put aside for potting and other uses.



Pens for storing dead leaves. Gertrude Jekyll, c.1899. *Wood and Garden*

At this time of year there was much to do in the woods surrounding Munstead: cutting and thinning the birch trees, grubbing up the stumps of Scotch fir, felling old oak and chestnut trees. Jekyll appreciated the rural crafts of the farmers and woodsmen in this part of the country, photographing the copse cutter, the mower, the hurdle maker, and their tools, to record a local way of life which she knew was passing away. Writing in *Old West Surrey* of the hand-tools once in use she recalled how as a child, 'biggish … strong and delighting in any bodily exercise' she would have a day in the harvest field and she included her own reaping-hook – or rip-hook as it was called – in this photograph of hand-tools.



Reaping-Hooks and Fag-Hook. Gertrude Jekyll. c1904.
From Old West Surrey. Jekyll's rip-hook is third from the top. The fag-hook is lowest in this photograph.

Another of her photographs shows ‘felling and grubbing tools’ which, she advises in her practical manner, must be well prepared for the winter’s work.



Felling and Grubbing tools. Gertrude Jekyll, *Wood and Garden* 1899.
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/36279/36279-h/36279-h.htm#Page_144

With works of wood-cutting and stump-grubbing near at hand, we look over the tools and see that all are in readiness for winter work. Axes and hand-bills are ground, fag-hooks sharpened, picks and mattocks sent to the smithy to be drawn out, the big cross-cut saw fresh sharpened and set, and the hand-saws and frame-saws got ready.

Some years ago, Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris wrote a book in response to the removal of everyday nature words from a children’s dictionary because they were not used often enough. *The Lost Words* was a protest against parts of the natural world, such as: ‘acorn’, ‘bluebell’, ‘kingfisher’ disappearing from our lives. Something similar has happened to many of the words for the hand-tools familiar to Jekyll, such as the hand-bill and the fag-hook, that appear in *Old West Surrey* written in 1904. She had seen for herself the change from hand labour to machine work in agriculture and commented that a whole variety of horse drawn implements had replaced the three tools that a labourer would have hanging in his kitchen: the scythe, fork and wooden rake. These words remain familiar, but the ‘felling and grubbing’ tools perhaps only to the enthusiast.

A fag-hook, Jekyll explains, was quite different to a rip hook, with a ‘square crook or step’ to protect the hand and is used with ‘a slashing action’ making the work quicker and easier than with the rip-hook. She wonders why the process of ‘fagging’ is not used more often, but older people tell her the corn ‘isn’t picked up so close’ and repeat an old saying that in fagging ‘a man leaves his wages on the ground’.

Which brought to mind another reference to a hand-tool mentioned by Jekyll, when Shakespeare's Hamlet suggests to Guildenstern 'I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw'.

'Hand-saw' in this instance has been attributed to a bird – a heron or 'hernshaw' with Hamlet hinting he is not truly mad because he knows the difference between the two birds, but Shakespeare scholars and lovers of his wordplay have disputed this meaning, suggesting a hawk could also be a heavy cutting tool like a mattock, creating a contrast to the lighter handsaw. Whether there was in Elizabethan England a cutting tool called a hawk remains questionable, and there's plenty of argument left in this etymological puzzle.

Without wading too deeply into Shakespeare's wordplay, another hand-tool appears in the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, when a riot develops and a citizen in the crowd calls out for a 'bill' – an old word for a chopping tool – to arm themselves. A hand-bill however, is shaped more like a pruning knife, and also known as a billhook, or in some parts of the country as a brushing hook and broom hook and now used mainly by thatchers, coppicers, and hedgelayers. Jekyll used the hand-bill for cutting birch tops into pea-sticks, making a slanting cut to create stakes for dahlias and hollyhocks – an important job for this time of the year she tells us for 'by the plan of preparing all in winter no precious time is lost'.

As a woman of countless talents, and who appears never to have wasted a single moment of time, let's remember her birthday: 29 November 1843.



The Woodman. Gertrude Jekyll, *Wood and Garden* 1899

Gallery

The SGT Events Team has already started planning a programme of visits for 2023 to unforgettable Sussex gardens, and here's a reminder of some of the wonderful gardens that we had the great pleasure of visiting this year. If you are new to SGT and have not joined us before, please come along in 2023 – you can be sure of a very warm welcome, as well as tea and superb cakes!



Borde Hill



Luctons



The Priest's House



High Beeches



Woolbeding



Sedgwick Park