

# Lavant Horticultural Society

## 'The Arts and Crafts Movement and its Gardens'

Wed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024

### *Stephen Harmer*

Stephen has a master's degree in Garden History and teaches at RHS Wisley. His favourite subject is the history of the Arts and Crafts garden, and he has incorporated some of its principles in his gardening at [Tonbridge School](#), where he is Head Gardener.

The gardens inspired by the Arts & Crafts Movement were supposed to be the closest to the traditional English garden; however, this was something that never really existed. Influenced by Italian renaissance and Persian gardens, they rejected the formality of the typical Victorian garden and its reliance on blocks of bedding plants. Following Ruskin's lead that nature should be used as the inspiration, the Arts & Crafts movement rejected shoddy Victorian mass production; it was generally anti-industrial, focussing instead on hand made craftsmanship and preferring simplicity to the over-elaborate decoration of the day.. Its leading light was William Morris and much of his influence can be seen in his favourite residence, [Kelmscott Manor](#).

What is outside the garden is just as important as what is inside it. Carefully placed "windows" should give views out into the surrounding countryside.

William Robinson, the influential gardener and writer, with his popular and influential books "The Wild Garden" (1870) and "The English Flower Garden" (1883), described how this style of garden should look. The garden should look absolutely natural. Exotic plants could be used, but on condition that they could survive unprotected in an English garden throughout the year. Planting should be so dense that by mid-May no soil should be visible. This can be seen as the start of the modern mixed border.

The garden must surround the house, with flower gardens to be overlooked by family rooms, looking south. The garden must have:

- wild flower meadow (any flowers that would naturalise could be used);
- a sports lawn;
- different levels and terracing;
- strong hedges;
- a formal forecourt;
- symmetry, with a vista;
- use local materials;
- timbers, especially oak;
- old fashioned flowers and vegetables;
- old gnarled fruit trees;
- a nuttery.

Robinson put his principles into effect by purchasing [Gravetye Manor](#), near East Grinstead, and transforming the garden.

Notable exponents of the Arts & Crafts style were Gertrude Jekyll and Sir Edwin Lutyens. Prime examples of their own designs: [Munstead Wood](#), Gertrude Jekyll's own house and garden; [Upton Grey Manor](#), designed by Jekyll and Lutyens; this garden subsequently fell into complete neglect, but has been faithfully restored by current owner, Rosamund Wallinger.

Arts and Crafts elements lived on even after the real Arts and Crafts period had finished, e.g. Sissinghurst (and Vita Sackville-West and Howard Nicholson's previous experimental garden, Long Barn) and Great Dixter.

Steven explained that 1916 marked the end of the Arts and Crafts gardening movement; the huge number of First World War casualties, exemplified by the Battle of the Somme that year, meant that the manpower needed for the upkeep of such gardens was no longer available.