

“THE RELUCTANT GARDENER”

The Athenaeum Society

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THE RELUCTANT GARDENER

Before I begin my presentation I am required by virtue of a non-revocable spousal agreement to provide the following disclaimer: I am not now nor have I ever been a knowledgeable, competent gardener. What little gardening expertise that I may have I have derived solely through the patient nurturing and tutoring of my gardening mentor and partner in life, Sarah Byars.

In July of this year my wife and I traveled to Europe with a group led by Fred and Jenny Wiche to tour gardens of England and France. Fred Wiche, as you may know hosts a syndicated radio/television weekly gardening show in the Midwest and Chicago markets. Fred's radio show is heard here locally Saturday mornings on WHOP.

Now some of you may well be asking yourself, what is George doing running off to England with a bunch of horticultural hedonist to slog through the British Bogs? What does George know about gardening anyway? Well, I am proud to say I know relatively little. George's limited involvement with gardening has been confined to the following menial duties: feeding the compost bin, dead heading, tilling and harvesting the vegetable garden, mowing and weedeating, lots of weedeating. Actually my weedeating activities were somewhat curtailed last summer because of my alleged inability to ascertain the difference between a weed and a flower. It seems that when I crank up my John Deere 110 G Turbo charged weedeater all living organisms are in great peril, including my wife's prized imported plantings. My wife is the gardener in our family, and my singular role on this gardening trip was to provide ballast for the plane and bus.

Our ten-day tour included visits to the following gardens: the Royal Horticultural Societies' Wisley Gardens, the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, Scotney Castle, Hidcote Manor, Kiftsgate Court, Barnsley House, Sissinghurst, Hever Castle, Chartwell, Parc des Moustiers and Giverny Gardens.

Due to our time limitations this evening, I am confining my program to only two gardens. Neither of these gardens are particularly elaborate or extensive. One is a modest formal English garden and the second a highly informal country French garden. These gardens are of particular interest to me primarily because of the intriguing individuals who made these settings their home, Winston Churchill and Claude Monet.

CHARTWELL

Chartwell was Winston and Clementine Churchill's home for over forty years. Having purchased the estate in September 1922, Winston lived there as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Leader of the Opposition and as Prime Minister.

Chartwell is located two miles south of Westerham in Kent county. The planning and overall design of the Chartwell Gardens were the province of Lady Churchill, ably assisted by Victor Vincent, head gardener from 1947 until 1979.

Maintaining the Chartwell Estates proved to be a massive task for the Churchills due to their limited financial resources. By birthright Winston's older brother inherited most all of the family wealth; thus, leaving Winston with only a modest income. During the war years Chartwell was closed and dust sheeted as it was felt that it presented too conspicuous a bombing target for German planes. After the war years and after Winston had lost his position as prime minister, the Churchills came frightfully close to losing their Chartwell home. In 1946 a group of Winstons's friends and admirers bought Chartwell and presented it to the National Trust, with the proviso that Winston and Clementine should live there for their lifetimes. With the future of Chartwell assured and with the income derived from the publication of Winston's was memoirs, Clementine was at liberty to develop and expand the gardens at Chartwell. At Winston's death in 1965, Clementine did not wish to continue living at Chartwell and so relinquished it to the National Trust.

A trust garden consultant, Lanning Roper, in consultation with the Churchill's youngest daughter, Mary Soames, suggested needed improvements and expansions of the

garden's plantings. The gardens suffered extensive damage in the hurricane of October 1987, but little of the plant devastation that occurred at that time is still evident today.

And now in the grand Travelogue tradition of Lowell Thomas and Wendell H. Rorie we will visit the gardens at Churchill's Chartwell through the magic of Byarsavision.

CHARTWELL

- Japanese maple (red, drooping)
- Roses on rear balcony
- Deep pink roses - wild - not hybrid
- Clematis - blue on wall
- Rose garden
- Blue delphiniums in rose beds surrounded by borders
- Heliotrope - deep blue low borders with pink phlox
- Croquet lawn
- Lavender walk - clothes brush the lavender Mediterranean climate that England has because of prevailing winds - lavender grows taller and much more lush than in U.S. They clip it as hedges.
- Croquet lawn built over sand base for quick drainage - They could play 30 minutes after a rain.
- Border behind croquet lawn made up of roses mixed with hollyhocks and malva
- Artist studio and work space - Churchill would sneak back to Chartwell during war years and paint there - would not use the house.
- Secret Garden - for grandchildren to play
- Border of herbs climbing roses on retaining wall
- Another border of roses and wild flowers
- Close up of gloxinia (coppery color)
- Purple whirled

- Brick wall covered with blue butterfly lush
- Rose walk with golden tree roses and the lavender walk again in forefront - Gift from Churchill Children for 50th anniversary (Golden)
- Agapanthas (blue) - grow profusely in England - people grow them in pots here - very popular in California
- Pink roses around studio with house up above
- Yew clipped hedge with pink hydrangeas
- yew hedges
- Purple - blue Mahonia holly berries
- Largest known existing Juniper trees - miraculously survived the hurricane of 1987
- Brazilian Rhubarb (Shop of Horrors) Wanda by water garden - Churchill's Chair
- Heated swimming pool of 1940's

MONET GARDENS

For over forty years the French impressionist Claude Monet and his family lived and worked in the countryside at Giverny, France.

In 1883, Monet then forty three years old and a recent widower, moved his eight children and married Mistress Alice to Giverny. Monet, while having to struggle financially, did not have the money to actually purchase this country home until seven years after moving in. Claude paid some 22,000 Francs for his home in 1891. In 1892, Monet married his mistress, Alice, after the death of her husband, and the following year Claude purchased the land for his famous lily pond (across the road from home).

In his later years Claude Monet would reflect upon the importance of his lily pond when he said, "It took me time to understand my Water lilies ... I had planted them for my pleasure; I cultivated them without ever thinking of painting them ... A landscape doesn't permeate one's being in one day ... And then, suddenly, the magical world of my pond was revealed to me. I took up my palette. Since that time, I have scarcely had any other model."

After Monet's death in 1926, his second son, Michel, inherited the home and gardens. The actual care and upkeep of the house and gardens was shouldered by Michel's sister-in-law Blanch. After Blanch and the head gardener Leb'et both passed away, the gardens gradually fell into neglect.

In 1966, upon Michel's death, the gardens and home were left in his will to a charitable French Gardening foundation. In 1977 Gerald Van Derkemp was appointed

curator of Giverny and was charged with opening Monet's estate up to the public and bringing the gardens back to their original state.

MONET'S GARDEN

- Red poppies and blue bachelor buttons

Informal country French garden.

He planted and grew flowers to paint.

- Yellow and pink tree roses interspersed in the flower beds
- Deep pink cosmos
- Pink and rose white pitcher plant
- Pink rose with blue clematis - no qualms about mixing color
- Shasta daisies
- Lilies - all colors together
- Gloxinia - yellow with brown center
- Gloxinia - with lilies
- Pink poppy with orange lilies - mix would never be seen in an English garden
- View of the front garden from Monet's bedroom
- Impatiens at base of an apple tree
- Shrub by front door - fuchsia - about 5 feet tall!
- Blue Malva
- Blue campanula - Canterbury bells
- Orange blanket flower
- Poppy seed pods with white lilies
- Gloxinia

- House - aqua green - blue
- Lily pond - boat he painted from when he did his famous water lilies
- Ageratum growing right up to water's edge
- Weeping willow - over water
- Famous Japanese bridge - he painted his daughters and his mistress on this bridge
- Red rose growing wild by water
- Astillie - pink - relatively hard to grow but Monet didn't seem to have a problem
- Duck through willows in lilies
- Canterbury bells with white daisies in background
- Pond with weeping willows right and smoke tree on left of picture
- Impatiens at base of trees
- Lilies are what he painted
- Yellow potentilla
- Ageratum
- Purple cosmos
- White water lilies
- Lavender and yellow - Lily of Peru
- Apricot mum
- Blue Agapantha
- White Agapantha
- Orange and red lantanas
- White cosmos

- Pink Dahlias
- Monet's turkey
- White sweet peas

CONCLUSION

In concluding my paper I must tell you that this trip had a decided influence in assisting me in overcoming my adversity to gardening. In fact my wife and I have already planned a second trip. In March we plan to travel with the Wiche's to Pennsylvania to visit the Philadelphia Flower Show and the Winterthur Gardens at the Dupont Estate. Upon my return I should have hours and hours of enjoyable video tape to share with each and every one of you.