A SUSSEX GUIDE

20 SUSSEX GARDENS

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DEDICATION

For my very special mother, Blanche Harrison

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BATEMAN'S

BURWASH

The author Rudyard Kipling (*1865-1936*) fled with his family to live at Bateman's in 1902 when the intrusions into their private lives that they suffered at his former home at Rottingdean on the Sussex coast became too much (*see p.43*). At the time, he wrote of the 17th-century house, 'We have loved it ever since our first sight of it', a sentiment most visitors will feel some sympathy with today. This beautiful solid and sheltering mellow house was constructed in 1634 using local sandstone, quarried just across the lane, while the tiles covering the ample roof are made from Wealden clay. Kipling lived here until his death and the house, garden and surrounding Dudwell valley became a rich source for his work. In particular his collected children's stories *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 1906, and *Rewards and Fairies*, 1910, draw heavily on the immediate area surrounding Bateman's.

When the house was purchased in 1902 only 13 hectares accompanied it. By 1928 Kipling had pursued such an active policy of land acquisition that he was the proud owner of 121 hectares, creating an effective *cordon sanitaire* between him and the world outside. Within the privacy afforded by the high stone walls, the gardens were extensively developed and improved, under the close supervision of Kipling.

Overall this is a garden of restraint, exuding a sense of calm and timelessness. One feels a gentle autumn day would see it at its best; long shadows, leaves just on the turn, a slight chill in the air, the whiff of a

distant bonfire, all the things that conjure up an English country garden of the southern counties.

The garden is now entered through the Orchard. This was the former kitchen garden and a substantial area is still in cultivation, growing a variety of vegetables and flowers for cutting. Innovative ways of growing the winter squash 'Turk's Turban' were evident on my visit. These rampant trailers were being trained up and over an elevated frame. As the plants run along the horizontal supports the fruits hang down, their full exoticism displayed to its best advantage. Along the right side of the Orchard runs a very long herb border, full of both medicinal and culinary varieties, all well identified. The lawns are dotted with old fruit trees and are intersected by a rose-covered pergola. An informal hedge of rugosa roses screens some of the vegetables. Evidence of Kipling's not inconsiderable garden-design skills can be seen in the unusual Pear Alley or Arch. This aligns with the iron gates that lead to the enclosed walled garden beyond and consists of a long alley formed from the generous spread of iron arches. These support 22 espaliered pears including the varieties 'Conference', 'Superfine' and 'Winter Nelis', underplanted with groundcover. A wide brick path terminates in a very attractive seat with brickwork sides and arched back. Before proceeding through the iron gates (into which the initials 'RK' have been decoratively worked), note the row of simple small-flowered varieties of fuchsias that grow along the base of the walls on either side of the gateway – an excellent example of the restrained but effective planting that is such a hallmark of this garden.

Through the gateway lies the Mulberry Garden. Although Kipling planted a mulberry here in 1905, the tree we see today is obviously a much newer replacement although it is accompanied by much older pears and apples. Designed by Kipling, and formerly a wagon yard, this enclosed area now contains all the classic ingredients of a traditional walled garden; high brick walls, low box hedging and mixed herbaceous planting, much of it fragrant. The beds were redesigned for the National Trust by Graham Stuart Thomas. Old and worn mill stones have been set into the main path and a high yew arch marks the exit.

The house lies ahead and is well worth a visit, the interior being quite as inviting as its façade, as its former inhabitant noted 'a real House in which to settle down for keeps.' Tucked away just behind the house are two former oast-houses and dovecote (now home to the shop). As at Great Dixter (*see p. 35*) these buildings, along with the roofs and chimneys of Bateman's, lend a wonderfully romantic backdrop to the garden. A plain and simple formal lawn, with its sentinel Irish yews and hedges, stretches out before the front of the house to the entrance gate and to the lane beyond.

Leaving the house by the southern exit brings one into the most impressive and unique part of the garden at Bateman's. From a generous stone terrace a large expanse of lawn lies ahead with two rows of parallel pleached limes that run away from the house. These were planted in 1898, so predate Kipling's time here. The higher area is known as the Quarter Deck and is separated from the lower part by a low drystone retaining wall. This change in level acts as something of a flood defence against the sometimes encroaching River Dudwell.

Beyond the western row of limes is the Pond and Rose Garden designed by Kipling as a place for the children to boat and swim. The development of the area was funded by the proceeds of his 1907 Nobel Prize money (the then princely sum of £7,700). The rectangular pool is full of water-lilies, mimulus, water mint, irises and bull rushes and, now emptied of children, is very tranquil. A formally arranged Rose Garden is at the farthest end of the pond and behind a sundial is set into a semi-circular niche in the bordering yew hedge, with the Kiplingesque legend 'it is later than you think'. Directly opposite across the pond another niche echoes this but has a semi-circular wooden seat set within it.

Hidden within the stretch of hedge which forms the southern boundary is access to the Wild Garden. This is romantic and shaded providing a contrasting change of mood from the bright and open geometric order around the house. Formally the site of old grass tennis courts, meandering paths have been mowed through trees and sweet-smelling and flowering shrubs. Early in the year spring bulbs and wild flowers precede the blooms of rhododendrons and azaleas. Hidden in one corner is a

small collection of graves of former Kipling family pets. The River Dudwell runs through the Wild Garden and the largest gunnera I have ever seen growing in this country thrives in its shallow waters. A bridge leads to a path that takes the visitor to the working watermill. In Kipling's time it was used to power electricity, now flour is ground here from local corn.

Kipling and his family left The Elms at Rottingdean partly because it was so full of memories of his young daughter Josephine who died of pneumonia aged six. Sadly their time at Bateman's was not to be unmarked by tragedy as in 1915 their son John was reported missing at the Battle of Loos. Both Kipling and his wife Carrie were profoundly changed by these tragic losses and perhaps something of this sadness still pervades this lovely corner of the Sussex Weald.

Getting there National grid ref. TQ671238

- Burwash, Etchingham, East Sussex, TN19 7DS.
- National Trust, tel 01435 882302, website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- Limited bus service to Burwash from Heathfield and Etchingham.
- Two miles (three kilometres) from Etchingham Station.
- **Other gardens nearby:** Great Dixter (*see page 35*), Merriments (*see page 53*), Pashley Manor Gardens.

BORDE HILL

HAYWARDS HEATH

The gardens, park, woodland and lakes of Borde Hill occupy 80 hectares of prime Sussex countryside overlooking the High Weald and provide the garden visitor with interest whatever the time of year. The varied façade of Borde Hill House looks southwards over rolling lawns, beyond the ha-ha to the South Park while the North Park, with its ambling woodland walks, lies behind. The woodland and lakes offer the visitor a wide range of activities but the extensive gardens alone certainly repay a visit and are something of a treasure trove for any self-respecting tree spotter.

Borde Hill House is a Tudor mansion dating back to 1580 although it was substantially altered in the 19th century. Colonel Stephenson Robert Clarke purchased the estate in 1893 and was responsible for developing much of what we see in the garden today. An avid naturalist and keen patron of many of the great plant hunters of the period, Clarke fully utilised the newly introduced plant varieties from the intrepid collectors' expeditions to such diverse habitats as China, Burma, the Himalayas, Tasmania and the Andes. All the great names contributed to the stock at Borde Hill including Ernest Henry Wilson, Reginald Farrer, George Forrest, Frank Kingdom-Ward and Dr. Joseph Rock, while Harold Comber, son of James Comber the head gardener at nearby Nymans (*see p. 59*), introduced Andean and Tasmanian plants in the 1920s. Clarke's descendants still own and run Borde Hill

and subsequent generations have continued to restore, develop and improve the grounds. The garden became a charity in 1965 overseen by representatives of the Royal Horticultural Society, the Forestry Commission and the Royal Botanic Gardens, so its exotic treasures are certainly in safe hands.

The gardens at Borde Hill are many and varied, each with its own particular emphasis and atmosphere. Yet the scale of the grounds and landscape balance this diversity and each area adds to rather than detracts from the whole. This is deep rhodo country and spring brings wonderful displays of rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and magnolias, all of which look stunning in this natural setting. In sharp contrast is the Jay Robin's Rose Garden. This is an example of a traditional English rose garden at its best yet was only designed (by Robin Williams) and planted in 1996. It has been created in the style of the original rose garden that featured in a 1902 *Country Life* article. A central circular fountain provides the focal point while low box and lavender hedging, brick paths and tall yew topiary delineate the layout. Over 100 varieties of David Austin English roses fill the beds in a profusion of colour and scent. Alongside the Rose Garden runs a long herbaceous border with a Shady Garden beyond, also designed by Robin Williams. Here, sheltered by the old fern house, is a marble statue known variously as the Veiled Lady or the Bride, *c.* 1800. The work of Milanese sculptor Antonio Tantardini, it used to stand, appropriately, in the Italian Garden. Something of a period piece, her rather baroque swooning excesses are probably not much suited to many modern tastes. In contrast the serried rows of light blue obelisks that support white climbers strike a more contemporary note. A smaller area has been developed as a White Garden, providing a cool foil to the multi-hued roses.

More blue trelliswork, this time in the shape of a supporting arch, leads into the delightful Mediterranean Garden. This is a really successful space, its boundaries formed by the old walls of a Victorian greenhouse. Paving stones are laid in gravel from which architectural plants such as phormiums, artichokes and a large Japanese plum (*Eriobotrya japonica)* grow. A lovely collection of Grecian pots contain

plants such as agave, sage, fennel and agapanthus. Large specimens of Chisan palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei)* and Italian cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens)* complete the southern theme.

Heritage Lottery money has generously funded the restoration of a number of the Victorian greenhouses that, along with the potting sheds, were once at the working heart of this garden. Before World War II, Borde Hill employed 27 full-time gardeners, now there are six. Exotic species, many originating from Africa, inhabit the largest of the greenhouses including a collection of aloes, a splendid *Strelitzia* and many pots of *Streptocarpus* in an impressive array of gradations of blue. A towering *Cyperus papyrus* stands in a pot by the door displaying its beautiful fronds. From late summer to autumn the collection of nerines, originally developed by Mrs Stephenson Clarke in the post-war period, can be found in flower while peaches grow happily in the smaller greenhouse. Outside in this area several apple trees grow in large pots. Their obvious health, vigour and prolific fruiting should encourage anyone with only a small garden or terrace to attempt to produce their own crop in such a way.

The Long Walk follows the southern boundary created by the ha-ha and is a delight to stroll along in any season with its mixed and varied planting. Some of the most intriguing enclosed gardens at Borde Hill are accessed from here, lying just to the north of the Long Walk. What is now the Italian Garden was once home to the family's tennis court. The rectangular central pool was introduced in the early 1980s and the Italian theme has continued to be developed. Wide stone and brick paths surround the water-lily-filled pool and a small basin fountain provides the gentle sound of trickling water. This is augmented by the rill that descends from a semi-circular pool down several steps and feeds into the main pond. This is one of the best designed modern rills I have seen and has been extremely well executed. Low box hedging and tall cypresses add to the Italian atmosphere bringing something of the Campania to the Sussex Weald.

After the open geometric order of the Italian Garden the gothic delights of the Round Dell offer a sharp change of mood. A meandering

set of stone steps (uneven in places so suited only to the sure-footed) takes a circuitous route around a central pool which in summer is almost obscured by giant rhubarb (*Gunnera manicata*). This densely planted area creates a micro-climate hospitable to many sub-tropical herbaceous perennials and exotic trees such as palms and bananas. Rustling bamboos add to the sensory delights. A fine bronze statue of a young female figure lifting her arms up in joy to the sun and sky nestles in among the cannas, astilbes and miscanthus.

At the end of the Long Walk are the Old Potting Sheds. What was once an extensive collection of interconnected working brick sheds is now home to many tender species of plants common to the southern hemisphere. In what is an unusual variation on the walled garden, only the part-ruined walls of the old potting sheds remain, their roofs removed and the gardeners' working paraphernalia replaced with raised beds, integral seats and stone sinks planted with alpines. While a table made from an old millstone adds a domestic note in one of the 'rooms'.

Heading northwards from the sheds lies the Long Dell, a former stone quarry planted with trees and shrubs from the Sino-Himalayan region. Beyond here is the area that will be of particular interest to aficionados of rhododendrons, as many unusual and rare specimens thrive at Borde Hill. The official guide book is unusually fulsome in its listing of the various species. To the north west of the house is the Garden of Allah. Dating from 1925 its name was coined by Colonel Sir Ralph Stephenson Clarke who considered the area so tranquil that one might have 'met Allah around the next bush'! More unusual rhododendrons flourish here, many introduced by Kingdom-Ward (two of which flower in summer). There are also mature survivors of seeds originally sent by Forrest and Rock from South-West Yunnan and the borders of Burma and Tibet. Several of Borde Hill's champion trees also occupy this peaceful spot and an elevated gazebo, known as Becky's Bower, provides a sheltered seat from which to enjoy the peace. Signposted woodland walks into the parkland can be started from here. To the east of the house are the Azalea and Camellia Rings. May is the time to enjoy the impressive

collection of azaleas, predominantly of the Knapp Hill strain, although there are many fine and interesting shrubs and trees in this area so there is always something to enjoy.

Many of the plants and particularly the trees at Borde Hill are of considerable horticultural merit, several are the original or oldest living specimens in the country. This longevity can be attributed to their having been planted in the most appropriate and favourable habitat, rather than having been grouped with other varieties simply for visual effect. Borde Hill has a range of soil conditions, from heavy clay to the more auspicious light loam. The gardens also boast an impressive collection of over 100 champion trees; that is, measured specimens that are either the tallest or the widest of girth in Britain today. A comprehensive list of the trees and their measurements can be found on the website and a very helpful free leaflet identifies and describes the Plant Hunter's Woodland Tree Trail in Stephanie's Glade and Warren Wood.

All in all a very full, informative and enjoyable day can be spent at Borde Hill Gardens.

Getting there National grid ref. TQ324264

- Balcombe Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 1XP.
- Tel 01444 450326, website: www.bordehill.co.uk
- Nearest station Haywards Heath.
- **Other gardens nearby:** High Beeches Gardens, Nymans Garden (*see page 59*), Sheffied Park Garden, Wakehurst Place.