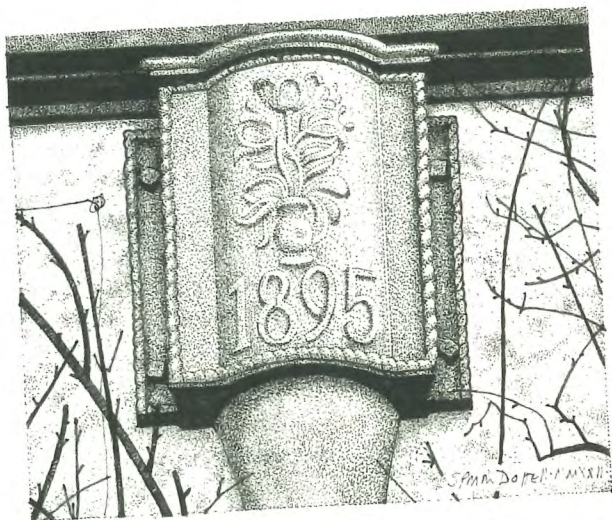


## *In Pursuit of Individuality*

PERRYCROFT, HEREFORDSHIRE

CATHERINE BEALE



The year 1894 saw a passing of the baton in the Arts and Crafts in Britain. One of the movement's founders, Philip Webb (1831–1915) completed his last, great, country house masterpiece, Standen, near East Grinstead in West Sussex [see *HORTUS* 134]; the same year, C. F. A. Voysey (1857–1941) was breaking ground on his first, Perrycroft, Colwall, on the west side of the Malvern Hills in Herefordshire. Both commissions sprang from the desire of the affluent middle classes of the late-Victorian period to escape from the hustle, press and grime of city life and recapture some of the bucolic idyll and fresh air lost to modernity and the factory chimney.

Former farm- and manor houses in the Cotswolds, like William Morris's own Kelmscott (recently reopened after renovation), supplied the ideal blend of pedigree, vernacular idiom, status (without the responsibility for tenants), and amenity acres for garden-making. However, such gems were in limited supply and of little relevance

if one's business was in Bradford, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester or Birmingham. The demand for homes in the Lake District, the mountains of North Wales or indeed the Malvern Hills created opportunities for architects to design their modern equivalent – the new house in the country. To succeed, these architects needed to distil, from the roots of previous ages, a modern spirit.

Among the first generation of Arts and Crafts domestic architects besides Webb were Richard Norman Shaw (1831–1912) whose best-known modern country house is Cragside in Northumberland (1885) and George Devey (1820–86) who, before Betteshanger Court (1856) and St Alban's Court (1874), both in Kent, had worked on the estate buildings of Penshurst Place, also in Kent, in the 1840s. The second generation of these architects included, besides Voysey, most notably Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944) whose most famous domestic works include Munstead Wood (1897) and Goddards (1900) in Surrey, Deanery Garden (1901) and Folly Farm in Berkshire, and Great Dixter (1912) in East Sussex; and M. H. Baillie Scott (1865–1945) who would build Blackwell (1898) in the Lake District, and reorder Snowhill Manor in Gloucestershire for Charles Wade in the 1920s.

Voysey worked for Devey in 1880–81, immediately prior to setting up in practice. From Devey, Voysey particularly learnt (besides an appreciation of vernacular architecture) the skill of producing his trademark watercolours that, when exhibited or published, did so much to market Voysey's style. Prior to that Voysey had been apprenticed to and worked a year for the ecclesiastical architect J. P. Seddon (1827–1906) whose moral approach to architecture, inspired by John Ruskin, appealed to the devout Voysey. At a time when British architects tended to fall into one of two camps, the Classical or the Gothic, form versus function, Seddon was firmly of the latter, believing that the human requirements of a building should determine its form as opposed to beginning with a Classical façade and accommodating the use behind it.

Of this, Voysey drank deep, advocating in *Individuality*, a statement of his own philosophy in 1915, that fitness for purpose was the foundation stone of good building. If a thorough understanding

of purpose were grasped, then combined with what he called 'moral sentiments', such as reverence, truth, honesty, candour, generosity, humility, order and directness, truly distinguished work might result. Of course, this might mean working against the diktats of fashionable style or 'modes'; to stand out from the crowd required of the architect considerable strength of character.

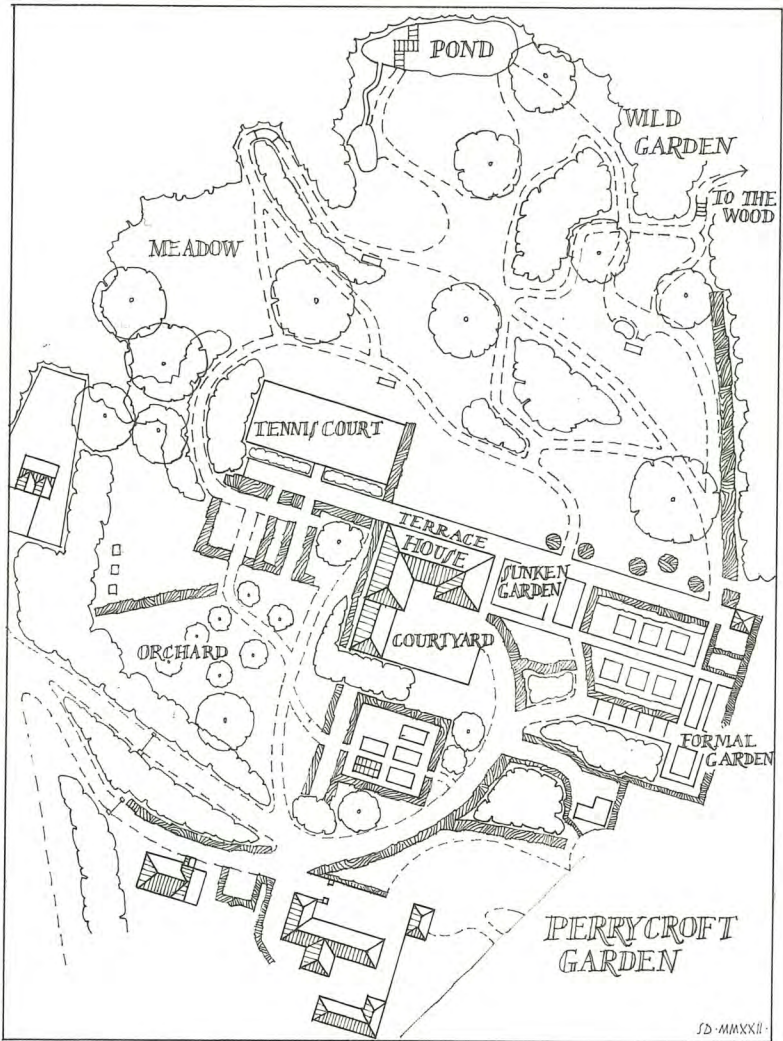
The truly distinguished are always those who act from an inner conviction of fundamental principles, and they must always be sincere individualists. They are acting from within outwards, more than from without inwards . . . [which is] quite outside the pale of collectivism . . . Sincerity is the quality most conspicuous in the distinguished [and] the least encouraged by collectivism.

Such bracing moral fare seems hardly compatible with the successful design of comfortable homes for relaxation and pleasure, yet it chimed with a generation keen to discard petty Victorian hierarchical snobbery, and with its dark domestic interior clutter. It also appealed to plain-living, non-conformist sections of society in particular, such as the Quaker Wilsons who commissioned Perrycroft from Voysey.

More promisingly, in *Individuality*, Voysey repeats, almost as often as his moral sentiments, the word 'repose'. This quality he sees as consistent with simplicity; too many different textures in a room create busyness and distraction and are inimical to repose. It is a quality key to his architectural style.

When the sun sets horizontalism prevails, when we are weary, we recline. What, then, is obviously necessary for the effect of repose in our houses, [is] to avoid angularity and complexity in colour, form or texture, and make our dominating lines horizontal, rather than vertical. A well-balanced mind is reposeful, so a well-designed house must be reposeful too.

At Perrycroft, the clients in need of repose were John and Florence Wilson. John William Wilson (1858–1932) was a partner in the chemical company Albright and Wilson, founded in 1856 by his father



A plan of the garden at Perrycroft by Simon Dorrell.

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John E. Wilson and his uncle Arthur Albright. The company specialised in the production of potassium chlorate and phosphorus for the match industry. (Wilson was later a director of Bryant and May.) In time it would become one of the largest chemical companies in the UK, second only to ICI. The works were in Oldbury, near Birmingham, from 1885 to 1918, part of the North Worcestershire Parliamentary constituency of which Wilson was to be Member of Parliament from 1895.

Both the Albrights and the Wilsons were from the tight-knit Quaker community of Birmingham. John E. Wilson and Arthur Albright had married sisters Catherine and Rachel Stacey. The wives' father George Stacey was a leading Quaker and abolitionist; their mother Deborah was a Lloyd of the banking family. Wilson junior had been educated close to his mother's home in Tottenham, London, and at the University of London before going to Germany to learn his trade. He had married in 1883 Florence Harrison, also a Quaker, from Essex. (In another 'double' marriage, Wilson's cousin and business partner George S. Albright married Florence's sister Isabella the same year.)

The newly-wed Wilsons settled in Westbourne Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham (location of Birmingham Botanical Gardens, and coincidentally the childhood home of Unitarian James Beale who commissioned Standen from Webb). Florence, however, suffered badly with asthma, and it was on account of her delicate health that a home in the countryside was needed. On the west side of the Malvern Hills, the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887 was marked by the creation of a new road, snaking north/south along the foot of the slopes. From Jubilee Drive, spectacular views opened up west, over the whole county of Herefordshire towards the Black Mountains of Wales.

Malvern had a reputation as a health resort. The qualities of its spring water had been recognised since the seventeenth century. It was bottled from 1850, first marketed at the Great Exhibition (1851) and would receive a royal warrant four years later. The town was also known for being the summer home of celebrated soprano Jenny Lind, 'the Swedish nightingale'. Lind had bought, in 1883,

Wynds Point, a large cottage ornée, built in a former quarry at the southern end of Jubilee Drive. After her death in 1887, it was acquired by Birmingham Quaker George Cadbury (of chocolate and Bournville renown).

Wilson had begun to buy plots of land here from 1885. His acres included woodland called Perry Croft Coppice. Having the incentive, the means, and the location for a new home, it is unclear precisely how the Wilsons alighted upon Charles Francis Annesley Voysey as their architect. However, Voysey had already worked in the Malvern area. From 1890 he had drawn up and executed plans for Walnut Tree Farm (afterwards Bannut Tree House) in nearby Castlemorton, for Henry Cazalet.

Walnut Tree Farm displays several features that Voysey would develop for the Wilsons at Perrycroft and which he would continue to use in varying degrees at, for example, Greyfriars and New Place in Surrey (1896 and 1897), Broadleys and Moor Crag on Lake Windemere (1898), and his own Orchard in Hertfordshire (1899). The L-shaped house displays his characteristic white roughcast walls, battered buttresses and chimneys, broad and low casement windows with wooden mullions, recesses at ground level in the external walls, ground floor bay windows supported on brackets, jettied upper storey, and guttering supported on sprung brackets.

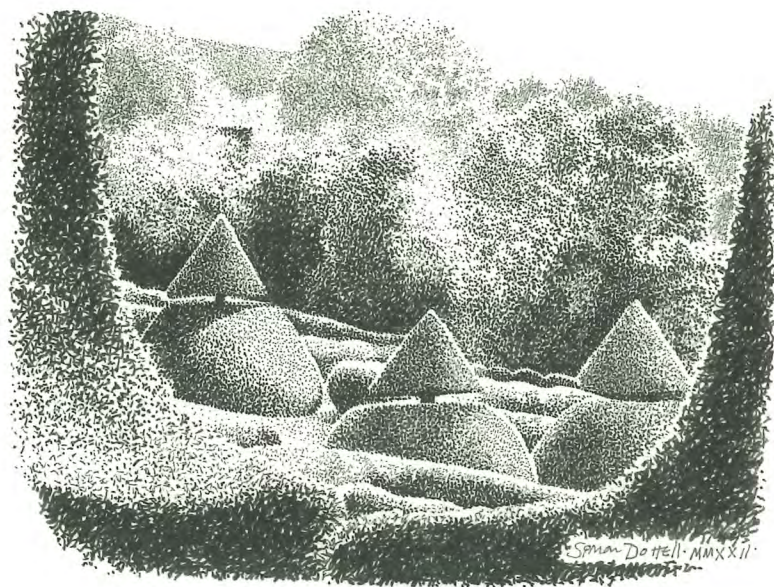
Characteristically Arts and Crafts detailing is clear in, for example, the ironwork of the hinges, brick detailing, small-paned lead casement windows, outsized water-butts and gable-end dovecote. As at Perrycroft, three principal rooms (at Walnut Tree Farm the best parlour, living room and morning room; at Perrycroft the drawing room, smoking room and dining room) run west to east along the south front, with, most strikingly similar, the incorporation of a pentagonal window on the south-east ground-floor corner, which was suggested in the initial plan (subsequently altered) for Perrycroft's south-west corner. A south porch opens on to the garden from the living room. On the north entrance front, the tiled roof swoops so low that it seems to rest on the water-butt at the west end.

From the point of view of the garden at Walnut Tree Farm,

already discernible is the Arts and Crafts desire to blend house and garden. The recessed and projecting ground-floor walls and windows enable the sitter to be in the garden yet almost recessed into the room behind, while, conversely, projecting bay windows thrust internal window-seats out into the garden space. All around the main elevations runs a slip of border, enabling climbing plants to put their roots down at the foot of the walls and scramble up to the windows above, making a bower of the downstairs window seats, bringing the garden into even the upstairs rooms, and anchoring the house into the soil on which it stands. Voysey's ground plan for Walnut Tree Farm (published in *The British Architect*, 14 December 1894) indicates for the garden a broad terrace walk parallel to the south front of the house, terminating in seats east and west, and sloping away south to grass. To the east of the house is drawn a level grass lawn, for bowls or tennis.

Voysey's earliest plans for Perrycroft are dated 1893, the same year that he designed the launch cover of *The Studio* magazine, which was to do so much to promote his designs. (His cover incorporated a simplified version of Morris's most famous motto: 'Useful and Beautiful'.) Voysey set the Wilsons's new home on a platform eight hundred feet above sea level. It is reached down a drive that descends from Jubilee Drive in a 180-degree left-hand curve. Arriving at the entrance court, formed of a retaining wall of Malvern Hills stone and the north front of the L-shaped house, the eye is drawn to the lead-roofed water tower topped with a weather-cock and ornamented by a bell (with Voysey's trademark facial profile on the bracket). The imposing front door, recessed beneath a square flat-roofed porch, displays hinges with characteristic heart-shaped ends and spectacular ironwork decoration in the form of trees.

The full glory of Perrycroft's location – the extraordinary views south and west – are not revealed until one passes around the west end of the building where, at the end of the path between hedge and house, is framed the Herefordshire Beacon, also known as British Camp, an iron-age hill fort whose stepped slopes are silhouetted against the sky. The harmony of garden and location is immediately evident in the way that the garden to the west of the house



is sensed to step down in terraces to the right in a direct echo of the hill fort. (Voysey must have been beguiled by the location; he designed an unexecuted home for himself below Perrycroft, in Colwall, in 1897.)

Passing around to the south side of the house, the visitor emerges onto a stone-paved terrace walk along the front. South of the path, beyond a row of box balls, a grassy slope swoops steeply away, edged to the east by an original yew hedge into which have been cut buttresses like those of the house. It is too narrow to step back far for a large view of the sun-drenched south front, but Voysey's hallmarks make themselves at once apparent: roughcast white-painted walls, broad, battered chimneys, wooden benches built into recesses formed by bay windows, and a quarry-tiled verandah, opening directly out of the Smoking Room in the middle of the south front, fitted with a full-height settle and bench.

Just as Voysey intended, the long and low shape of this, his first major country house commission, is conducive to repose. His 'horizontalism', combined with the triangular shape of the battered



buttresses, is subliminally suggestive of the Elizabethan miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard's landscape portrait of Henry Percy, or his pupil Isaac Oliver's Edward Herbert of Cherbury, reclining on flowery meads, propped up on one elbow. This suggestion of the past brings some of the manor-house pedigree to the new home. This is reinforced by Voysey's use of a jettied (overhanging) upper storey, a familiar feature of Herefordshire's Tudor vernacular buildings. Furthermore, one of the upper windows gives the illusion of being supported by corbels with ornate mouldings (again allegedly showing the architect's profile). This, combined with the overhanging eaves, could feel heavy, but the gutters are supported on delicate iron-work brackets – reminiscent of carriage springs – that lighten the load.

The current owners and gardeners of Perrycroft are Gillian and Mark Archer, who bought the property in May 1999, just over a century after it was built. It had for thirty years been used by the Birmingham Boys' Brigade as a holiday retreat. Gillian brought her experience as a former conservator for the National Trust to bear on the house, which had been little altered. It was well-documented; the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) holds more than eighty drawings by Voysey of Perrycroft, including the stables and granary (1894 and 1903), and lodge (1894 and 1914) which, though not part of the Archers' original purchase, have since been taken back into the fold. (RIBA also holds a photograph of the Park Keeper's Lodge, originally called 'Florence Lodge', that Mrs Wilson commissioned from Voysey in 1899, for Bury Hill Park – gifted by her husband to Oldbury town for the 1897 Diamond Jubilee.) The Archers at once saw to it that, externally, the black wood- and ironwork were restored to Voysey's characteristic pea green colour (as he called it, on a plan for Perrycroft Lodge) revivifying at a stroke the charm of the house.

The garden, however, was a different proposition. There was very little documentary evidence and almost nothing visible on the ground. The summerhouse had survived, being a favourite barbeque area for the Boys' Brigade, at the extreme west end of the terrace walk, significantly below the house. Otherwise, paths and beds had

become entirely grassed (and brambled) over, and early gardening involved as much archaeology as horticulture. Furthermore, despite his wallpaper and textile designs drawing heavily on stylised plants, birds, fruits and trellises, Voysey was not known for his garden plans beyond (as at Walnut Tree Farm) a broad outline of the alignment of paths or lawns, with an occasional sundial or dovecote. For the beds he offered few specifications more detailed than 'tall plants'.

Voysey generally worked alongside a garden designer or landscape architect. At Moor Crag (and possibly at Broadleys) he called in T. H. Mawson (as Baillie Scott did at Blackwell), and although he designed some garden features such as low stone walls at Prior's Garth in Surrey (1900) Gertrude Jekyll undertook the planting. The plans for New Place in Surrey, which he designed in 1897 for publisher and keen gardener Sir Algernon Methuen depict his most extensive garden layout, but few planting details. Thankfully, his watercolour elevations typically showed, in keeping with the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, English countryside native plants growing in the borders at the foot of the walls: hollyhocks, foxgloves, sunflowers, coniferous shrubs, and always roses, honeysuckle, fruit trees and other climbers coating the walls.

So, what to do when you acquire the gardening of a Voysey house? Closest to the house, Gillian decided to follow where Voysey led. Besides the green paintwork, Voysey often used highlights of red in his watercolours, so she hung red curtains behind the green woodwork of the casement windows. She reinforced this by growing up the south and west fronts *Vitis coignetiae* which cloaks the walls in green all summer, then obligingly turns red as autumn comes on. This is typical of her respectful, yet at times playful, approach to creating a garden for such an important house.

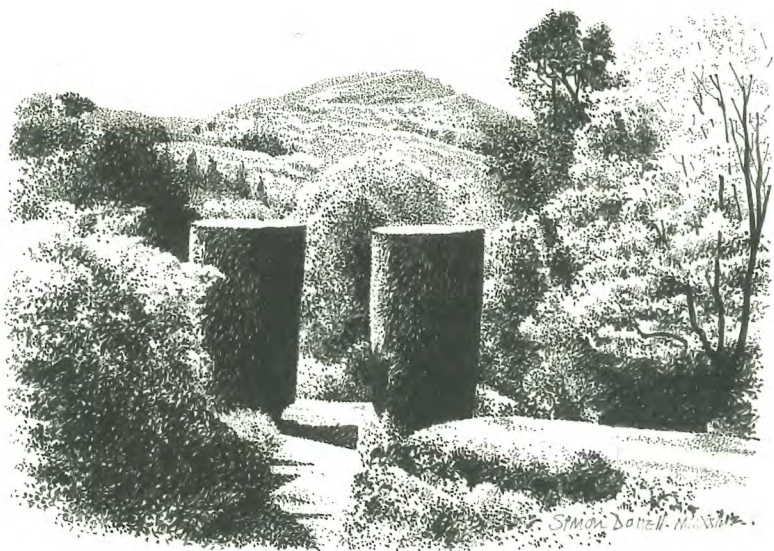
A tour of the garden from the west end of the house begins with a set piece of the Arts and Crafts, a square sunken garden almost the width of the house, paved in stone, with a central birdbath enclosed within box hedging and topiary. A slender border running around the foot of the walls is planted with rosemary and lavender. The deeper border enclosed by the path reflects the colours of the

house: square blocks of red *Sedum spectabile* 'Autumn Joy' alternate with *Santolina chamaecyparissus* and the green of the box. It is a respectful nod to the architect's aesthetic and works well so close to the house. Gillian had experimented with rue (*Ruta graveolens*) here, but found it frustratingly untidy over winter. Ironically, at New Place, Voysey suggested rue to Lady Methuen, but she too gave up on it and called in Jekyll to design a rose garden.

Below the sunken garden, a pair of borders runs north/south (planted with *Euphorbia wallichii*, yellow hemerocallis, *Phlomis russeliana*, *Geranium* × *johnsonii* 'Johnson's Blue' followed by *Aster umbellatus* and *A.* 'Little Carlow' in the autumn), terminating in two fastigiate yews which again frame a view of British Camp. The lower of these borders is backed by an original yew hedge which by 1999 had become wildly overgrown. The Archers cut back hard over successive seasons and having restored order, are now enjoying some fun.

Voysey was, by the time he designed Perrycroft, far better known as a designer of wallpaper, textiles and furniture than as an architect. Among the most popular of his textile designs of c. 1920 was *Alice in Wonderland*, displaying, besides Lewis Carroll's familiar characters, primroses, cornflowers, roses, bluebells, lilies and tulips. In a nod to this, the top of the yew hedge has been clipped into shapes from *Alice*: teacup and saucer, top hat, the head of a White Rabbit, and crowns (a new one for this year's Platinum Jubilee) stand out against the sky. It is a winning note of Voysey whimsey.

Passing through a gate in the yew hedge brings the visitor into Perrycroft's principal formal garden room. Enclosed on three sides by yew hedges, it slopes downhill simultaneously from east to west and north to south. Gillian has subdivided it into six box beds, the central gravel path edged with more topiary (reminiscent of pawns on a chessboard) terminating in a gate in an arched opening, beneath a pergola. The box hedges are not clipped to a rigidly uniform shape, but undulate softly. Gillian explains her belief that hard pruning may predispose box to blight, so she has taken a gentler approach to clipping. With candour she also admits that she and Mark do all the topiary trimming (she on the ground, he up the ladder) so minimising effort is also practical.



The planting within these beds is statuesque, billowy, and herbaceous, perhaps at its best in late summer, when *Aster*  $\times$  *frikartii*, *Echinops bannaticus*, lavender, veronicastrum, phlox and goldenrod sway. At the highest northern boundary of this garden room, one long border runs the length of the yew hedge. In winter, this replicates a striking effect seen at the garden of Lutyens and George Dillistone at the National Trust's Castle Drogo in Devon. At the back of the bed is planted a row of red *Berberis*  $\times$  *ottawensis* f. *purpurea* which Gillian trims into a wave formation, the silver stems shining in the low winter sun against the dark yew; behind the flat-clipped yew, a row of beech stands proud, again the grey stems gleaming against their own glaucous green backdrop of Corsican pine. The yew, beech and pine are much used at Castle Drogo; the berberis was inspired by a planting at Penshurst Place in Kent (a delightfully unconscious nod to Voysey's mentor, Devey). The overall effect is of a room with much to anticipate, in both summer and winter.

The fourth side of this room is created by a stone wall that Voysey returned to design in 1904. The wall steps down the slope

from north to south, and is punctuated by an arched gateway beneath the pergola which leads into the woodland beyond. The underside of the arch and the top of the gate form a circle reminiscent of the windows that pierce the walls of the garden that Voysey designed in 1913 for Emslie Horniman in Kensal Rise, London.

The southern end of the garden wall terminates in the summerhouse which is also aligned with the main east/west terrace walk. The wall and summerhouse were built in local Malvern Hills stone, the summerhouse roofed in oak shingle with lead detailing and finished with a flat-topped oak finial. Adjoining the summerhouse the Wilsons asked Voysey to lay out a rose garden. Detailed plans for this survive, colour-coded for different materials, and dated 5 September 1904. But it seems that the Wilsons and Voysey made alterations – ‘bed’ having been written over part of a gravel path, and an annotation reading ‘It is a pity to have two parterres adjoining like this . . .’

Today this feature survives although the Archers have had to make repairs: the pergola was rebuilt in 2020, as well as a low stepped wall. Today the rose garden is home to mainly pink and crimson Gallica and Damask shrub roses underplanted with London pride (*Saxifraga × urbium*) and self-seeding red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*). In an adjacent border euphorbia and alliums, and yellow kniphofia and hemerocallis jostle with blue veronicas, *Centaurea montana* and campanulas. The summerhouse is cloaked in the rose ‘Paul’s Himalayan Musk’, on the tall stone wall (after an old label was discovered) is the rose ‘Félicité-Perpétue’, and on the pergola ‘Mme. Alfred Carrière’.

On leaving the formal west ‘rooms’, a glance back up the terrace walk towards the house reveals a row of Irish yews, part of the original planting. Beneath and between these Gillian and Mark have added a new border – a lockdown project during the Covid 19 summers of 2020 and 2021, when they were unable to open the garden to the public. They have welcomed visitors since 2015, in May/June and September/October, which has influenced Gillian’s planting choices. In this bed, a spring show of *Pulmonaria* ‘Blue Ensign’ foretells of late-summer borders that will include *Aster*

'Little Carlow', *Helenium* 'Moerheim Beauty', *Achillea* and *Polemonium caeruleum*, combined with *Pblox paniculata* 'Fujiyama'.

A curved walk now swings south-east down the slope to the Wild Garden, beneath a mature oak and between rhododendrons, until a view back up to the house (perhaps fifty feet above) is framed by a weeping birch and a beech aligned on the centre of the house. The year here begins with native daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) which naturally throng, and primulas which Gillian has encouraged to self-seed. The south-facing lawn below the house is left to grow long, and knapweed and devil's bit scabious thrive, besides common spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*). In summer it is alive with insects, especially bumble bees, grasshoppers and butterflies, and in autumn, finches descend on the seedheads.

Towards the foot of the slope, after *Rhododendron ponticum* had been tamed, Mark and Gillian discovered two original ponds, supplied by a natural spring on the east side of the little dingle. They had probably been drained for reasons of Boys' Brigade safety, but are once again full of water and of life. Tiny white stars of water hawthorn sparkle all season around a pink waterlily. A period-correct Japanese garden element is suggested by a good stand of two or three varieties of bamboo, before which froths *Filipendula palmata*. The adjoining naturally-boggy ground, besides hosting ferns, kingcups and iris, has been planted with *Darmera peltata* and *Primula pulverulenta*. The mossy rills that join the ponds are thronged with the yellow skunk cabbage, *Lysichiton americanus*.

As we pause to catch our breath on the steep pull back up the eastern slope, Gillian explains that, far from loathing the rhododendron, she finds that its glossy leaves have merit for shining in a relatively dark part of the garden, and the flowers are, in colour, so unlike anything else in the garden, that they provide a refreshing change. Furthermore, they thrive in her difficult acid clay soil, so she has planted this slope with more *Rhododendrons* (including *R. fortunei*, 'Cunningham's White', and *R. decorum*) and azaleas. On the eastern fringe of the property is a small pinetum, including several wellingtonias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) which must be original Wilson plantings. A century on, their trunks soar skyward,

but their branches effectively screen the grounds from Jubilee Drive and serve to set the house down into its grounds instead of leaving it potentially exposed on its platform.

Weaving through a laurel shelter-belt, the visitor emerges back at house level, into a pair of yew-hedged garden rooms created by Gillian about five years ago. The first, besides *Narcissus* 'Geranium' (with a good scent) has more late-garden delights in hotter colours, such as helianthus and monarda, crocosmia and helenium. The second is designed for early summer interest, with *Narcissus* 'Actaea' followed by *Geranium*  $\times$  *oxonianum*, *Galega*  $\times$  *hartlandii* 'Lady Wilson' and *Sanguisorba* 'Pink Tanna', mixing with self-sown foxgloves and opium poppies. Besides pinks and whites, she is experimenting with new Piet Oudolf-style tall perennials and grasses which all get chopped back in January and February.

Back on the eastern end of the terrace walk, a tennis court opens up on a platform of its own, south-east of the house. Originally a grass lawn, this must be where John Wilson MP entertained his



party leader, Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman and his niece Miss Campbell to a game of bowls, on 18 May 1907, while the PM was staying in Malvern to recover from the exertions of the Imperial Conference. Three months later, towards the end of August, ninety-two of the constituency's Liberal executive descended on Perrycroft and sat for lunch in a marquee. There were speeches and a walk to British Camp while 'The remainder of the party enjoyed themselves in the woods or in playing at bowls in the grounds at Perrycroft', to the sounds of the Colwall band.

In 1910 the Wilsons acquired a new neighbour on Jubilee Drive; Miss Julia Holland (1873–1955), the daughter of the vicar of Evesham, for whom Voysey's contemporary and fellow founding member of the Art Workers' Guild, the architect Ernest Newton (1856–1922), had designed a new house: Brand Lodge. Miss Holland's mother was a member of the Biddulph banking family, which had, *c.* 1600, commissioned the nearby five-gabled Ledbury Park, which may have fuelled Voysey's half-timbered gables for Walnut Tree Farm. (Pevsner lauds Ledbury Park as 'the grandest black and white house in the county and the only one to vie with the houses of Shrewsbury.')

Sadly, the friendship afforded by this little circle was broken when, 'somewhat suddenly' in February the following year Florence Wilson died, while the couple were in London for the opening of Parliament. Of Perrycroft without her, John Wilson observed, 'it seemed as if the soul of the place had departed'.

During the First World War Miss Holland opened Brand Lodge as a Red Cross Auxiliary Hospital. Among the volunteer nurses was Isabella Bannatyne, whom John Wilson took as his second wife in 1919. They married quietly at Little Malvern Priory, their wedding breakfast hosted by Miss Holland at Brand Lodge. We know little of Perrycroft after this date. John W. Wilson died in 1932. In April 1939, Mrs Wilson opened Perrycroft gardens to visitors for an afternoon, in conjunction with Brand Lodge, by then in new ownership. Mrs Wilson sold Perrycroft and moved to West Malvern in 1949. During the 1950s and 1960s, elements of the property were sold off individually by the three successive owners. The house was listed in 1970 just as the Boys' Brigade purchased it.



Gillian Archer manages their ten acres with only one man to mow and to haul waste back up from the foot of the Wild Garden. She has adapted her plans, she says, to what is feasible with limited assistance. She has also learnt to observe which plants like best the conditions at Perrycroft. She admits that where she formerly would have pulled out those that strayed (such as the bronze fennel in the Rose Garden) she is now more content to let them stay. In short, since arriving, she has 'listened to' her setting and done what she feels to be right where she finds herself, rather than imposing any pre-conceived plan.

It cannot be easy to assume responsibility for a garden to a landmark house. I asked Gillian about her influences. Before moving here, she was always drawn to the gardens around the little manor houses of Somerset and Wiltshire where she formerly worked – ideal territory for honing for an Arts and Crafts aesthetic. She admires particularly Margery Fish (1892–1969) and the 'grand cottage-garden on a domestic scale' (now listed Grade I) that this influential writer/gardener created in the post-war years, with very little help, at East Lambrook Manor near Yeovil. That was her starting point. 'Keep your vision,' Gillian advises. 'I think that's the important thing. To have the vision and keep it.' This is consistent with Voysey's insistence that personal style should come from within, from heeding the needs of the humans (and the plants) that occupy a place. I can't be sure, but I might have heard Voysey cheer.

★

Perrycroft (house and garden) Jubilee Drive, Upper Colwall, Malvern WR13 6DN will be reopening to visiting groups in 2022. For full information, please go to [perrycroft.co.uk/visit](http://perrycroft.co.uk/visit)  
Email: [info@perrycroft.co.uk](mailto:info@perrycroft.co.uk) or telephone 07858 393767.

Drawings by Simon Dorrell.

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Tankard, Judith B.: *Gardens of the Arts & Crafts Movement* (Timber Press, Oregon) 2018  
Voysey, C. F. A.: *Individuality* (Chapman and Hall, London) 1915 (seen online at [babel.hathitrust.org](http://babel.hathitrust.org))

### Online Information

- Website of the Voysey Society: [voyseysociety.org](http://voyseysociety.org)  
German website dedicated to Voysey: [voysey.gotik-romanik.de](http://voysey.gotik-romanik.de)  
Website of RIBA (at the Victoria and Albert Museum) [Ribapix.com](http://Ribapix.com)  
British Newspaper Archive: [britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)  
Perrycroft's own informative website: [perrycroft.co.uk](http://perrycroft.co.uk)