



Perfectly crafted

In the spirit of its founding fathers, the Arts-and-Crafts design of Weirs Barn, Hartley Wintney, Hampshire, has been brilliantly brought back to life as a family garden,

reveals Tiffany Daneff
Photographs by Mimi Connolly



TO own a garden designed by the Scottish Arts-and-Crafts architect and keen gardener Robert Weir Schultz might well be felt to be a weighty responsibility. All the more so when its original layout and key elements (including no fewer than 15 topiary peacocks) remain largely intact and may, in all likelihood, have been designed with the help of his friend and sometime work partner Gertrude Jekyll.

Such a living museum must surely be curated with exactitude and vigilance—and not a little anxiety that one is doing the right thing. Happily, this is not at all the impression one gets from Terence and Jane Lyons, who live at Weirs Barn, the home that Schultz converted from a barn in 1900 and where he remained until his death at the grand age of 90 in 1951. Instead, since they moved here in 1986, the garden has been thoughtfully maintained and renovated with a gentle hand that has always held the past in mind.

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That there is no extant planting plan means that, although Jekyll’s input cannot be confirmed, keen plantsman Mr Lyons has been able to interpret the original scheme, rather than reproduce it slavishly. The result is a thriving family garden with a magnificent Arts-and-Crafts structure and with softly billowing planting in the spirit of Jekyll.

During his long career, Schultz—or Robert W. S. Weir, as he became known after changing his German-sounding name in 1915—designed many houses and gardens. He may have first come to Hampshire in 1898 to lay out a formal garden at West Green

House, which stood 2½ miles away from where his friend Ernest Newton had built a cottage at Hazeley Heath in 1897. Schultz had met the architect, a founder of the Art Workers’ Guild, when Newton had been working for Norman Shaw and, in 1899, Schultz, with two friends, bought 26 acres of land at nearby Phoenix Green. He kept 10 acres for himself, which included two 16th-century barns and an old oak tree, and later built each of his friends a grand house nearby.

As a devoted member of the Art Workers’ Guild—he was Master in 1920—Schultz naturally put his beliefs into practice in his own garden, where he developed a passion for horticulture, returning after a day’s work to put in the hours outdoors until dinner. ‘For those who believed in the Arts-and-Crafts Movement,’ David Ottey notes in *The Edwardian Garden*, ‘it was almost a religious duty to design the whole environment in which they lived, and The Barn,

Hartley Wintney, Schultz’s home for 50 years, was a prime example of this’.

In one of the earliest recorded barn conversions, Schultz turned one of the buildings into the house where the Lyons now live. He laid brick and old Yorkstone paths from the simple front gate, under a small brick and timber pergola (happily colonised now with lovely open single blooms of the apricot rose ‘Keith Maughan’) and around the black weather-boarded house to the Sunk Garden at the back, which was laid out in 1901.

It may have been when Schultz and Jekyll were collaborating on creating more gardens for the Rand millionaire Lionel Phillips, at Tynley Hall in Rotherwick, five miles away, that Jekyll dropped by at The Barn to see how the work in the garden was progressing. The timing certainly fits: the Tynley Hall project ran from 1901–05.

Over the years, Schultz added further enclosures, each separated by hedges and

filled with features that would be used by the architect and his wife, Thyra Macdonald, whom he married when he was 52 years old. He included everything that one expects to find in a Jekyll garden: a covered skittle alley led to the tennis lawn, now a croquet lawn, and behind the Hoop Border lay the orchard, a Nuttery and a Green Walk, beyond which were the vegetable beds and working parts of the garden. ‘The components of this garden and the manor house at Upton Grey [designed by Jekyll] are identical,’ notes Mr Lyons.

From the topiary peacocks perched above the white-painted entrance gate, there is no mistaking this for anything other than an Arts-and-Crafts design. The Sunk Garden, which sits snugly between the two back wings of the house, is so well preserved it makes the new visitor stop dead in their tracks. The 120-year-old topiary is the first surprise, but, surrounding the square lawn, are the Jekyll-esque raised brick beds still backed with the

Preceding pages: The back of Weirs Barn, converted in 1900 by architect Robert Weir Schultz. His friend Gertrude Jekyll is thought to have influenced the design of the garden. Typical of her schemes are the little brick planting pockets at the front of the border. *Above:* The Sunk Garden

original box hedging. A closer look at the front of the beds reveals what Mr Lyons has totted up to make a total of 90 little brick planting spaces, some no more than a couple of handspans in width. It is this intimate detail that makes the heart beat faster and the past suddenly come alive.

Today, many of these brick pockets are brimming with hardy geraniums, but, when the current owners moved in, the soil was solid with ground elder and marestail and the garden had become unkempt, the shrubs and trees overgrown and most of the beds lost to weeds. The wheel of crescent-shaped ►



The yew hedges survived under Patricia Keith, Schultz's cousin, who lived here after his death and kept them clipped, although much of the rest of the garden became overgrown. When the present owners moved here in the 1980s, Schultz's topiary shapes were still in situ

rose beds that spiralled outwards from the mulberry on the lawn behind the Sunk Garden had likewise become infested.

There had been simply too much for its previous owner Patricia Keith to manage. She had nursed her cousin Robert here at the end of his life and stayed for 35 years after his death, but, although she employed a man to trim the hedges and the topiary, much of the rest had had to be left to its own devices. 'The lawn was pure moss,' recalls Mr Lyons, 'and the Hoop Border filled with brambles.' The brickwork bank behind the croquet lawn had collapsed and had to be rebuilt and planted with new shrubs. Yet, without the late Keith as guardian, the garden would most likely have been wiped out in a 1960s/1970s fashionable revamp.

When she sold The Barn, Keith kept back the land beyond, including the Nuttery, which had become impenetrable. Over the years, Mr Lyons has not only recouped many of the lost acres, but has brought them back into use

—a task that required taking down more than 200 trees, mostly self-seeded, and the restoration of a fully outgrown beech hedge.

With only a shadow of what was here previously, the object was to re-create 'the essence of the place'. The hazel has been coppiced, creating windows that let in enough light to

◀ Clematis, honeysuckle and roses clamber through the hoops, with daylilies and iris below ▶

sustain an under-planting of fritillaries, forget-me-not, euphorbias and hellebores, which are complemented by 5,000 narcissus and swathes of bluebells that bloom each spring in the cleared and replanted orchard.

Some of the original trees in the Green Walk have reached stupendous heights; a pear

tree easily tops 50ft. Under mature ash and wild cherry, Mr Lyons has planted a fernery and foxgloves and restored the remains of Schultz's box edging. This is a wilder spot, a green hiatus between the more manicured garden and the back end of things, where we find Schultz's generously proportioned worksheds and log stores standing in the shade of some handsome old laurels.

Although the brick beds in the Sunk Garden were retrievable, the crescents have been returned to lawn, the grass still haunted by their ghosts. The great oak collapsed in 2016, taking the north end of the Hoop Border with it, but this has been rebuilt using the original iron hoops and extended by two more. With damaged shrubs replaced, the hoops provide a satisfying end to the border. *Akebia quinata*, clematis, honeysuckle and roses clamber through the hoops with daylilies and iris alternating below, including the ruffled double *Iris sibirica* 'Kaboom'. Alliums, hesperis and pulmonaria bring the whole scheme to



The entrance gate with its original facing pair of topiary peacocks, two of 15 that survived since Schultz's time. Beyond the gate, the narrow brick path leads around the barn to the Sunk Garden, which the present owner Terence Lyons has nurtured back to life

life in the spring, in advance of this herbageous border filling out in the summer.

In front of the Skittle Alley is part of the collection of 100 peonies (including many of the rarer *Itoh* variety) that Mr Lyons has been gathering. Below these stands a row of *Iris germanica* providing a first flush of deep purple. The Sunk Garden is backed by a hedge of chaenomeles, which is cut immediately after flowering and tipped to keep it in order.

Mr Lyons is full of enthusiasm and, not content with having reinvigorated the Sunk Garden using a mixture of cottage-garden plants and roses, he has also created a new *Camellia* Walk that flows around the outside of the yew hedge, leading behind the croquet lawn to the Nuttery. This part of the garden is planted with *Camellia japonica* x *williamsii* and sasanqua to provide blooms from December onward and is underplanted

with 2,000 white *Anemone blanda* and 2,000 English bluebells. As well as a generous annual mulch, plants are kept in good condition with doses of Epsom salts and liquid seaweed, plus handfuls of Growmore.

In 2019, Weirs Barn, as it is now known, opened to local horticultural societies for the first time. Let us hope it will be in a position for more visitors to experience its wonderful secrets this year. 🐾

Robert Weir Schultz (1860–1951) – a brief outline

1860 Born Port Glasgow

1876 Trains in Edinburgh under Sir Robert Rowand Anderson

1884 Moves to London as assistant to Norman Shaw, where his colleagues included William Lethaby, Ernest Newton and Edward

Schroeder Prior, who, that

same year, set up the Art Workers' Guild

1886 Starts work at the London office of Harold Peto and Sir Ernest George

1890 Joins the Art Workers' Guild; sets up his own practice in Gray's Inn. He is helped by the 3rd Marquess of Bute, for

whom he completed many works, including his first garden project at St John's Lodge, Regent's Park in 1892

1897 Makes a formal garden at West Green House, Hampshire

1898 Buys land at Phoenix Green near Hartley Wintney,

Hampshire, and begins creating his future home and garden

1906–12 His career highlight: the building of the Anglican Cathedral in Khartoum, Sudan

1911 Designs a series of enclosed gardens at Cottesbrooke Hall, Northamptonshire

1912 Marries Thyra Macdonald