

# Royal Gardens by Cyril Ward

## Chapter III

### BAGSHOT PARK

Not long after the Norman Conquest, William I. fixed on Windsor as his principal residence. A vast tract of country to the south and south-west of the castle was retained by the Crown as a royal hunting park. Here and there in Berkshire, Surrey and Hampshire much of this land to the present day is Crown property, though large parts have passed by long lease, sale or gift into other hands. Windsor Great Park extends four or five miles south of the castle, and a little further on come Bagshot Park and Heath. The history of Bagshot Park as a royal domain, therefore, goes back to about 1070 and from then and till comparatively recent times it was a favourite hawking and hunting estate of English Sovereigns. It is probable that there was a royal lodge not far from the site of the present mansion for many centuries. At all events, in Stuart times there certainly was a hunting seat there known as Holy Hall. Bagshot Park with the adjoining heath made an estate covering fifty square miles, the whole of which was surrounded with high deer-fencing. It was probably joined on to the south of Windsor Forest, and thus constituted a very large and important royal hunting ground.

During the great Civil War in the reign of Charles I. it was disparked, and the fences were broken down and destroyed. For some years it lay waste and afforded shelter for numerous highwaymen, who took advantage of its desolate wildness to plunder travellers on the road from London to Winchester. After the Restoration, Charles II. replaced the fencing and once again stocked the park with deer brought over from France. A few months after the accession of James II., Evelyn and Pepys, the two immortal diarists of the seventeenth century, journeyed to Portsmouth together. They were both in charge of different departments connected with the Navy. Evelyn's account of the expedition says, "I accompanied Mr. Pepys to Portsmouth, whither his Majesty was going the first time since his coming to the Crown, to see in what state the fortifications were. We took coach and six horses, late after dinner, yet got to Bagshot (26 m.) that night. Whilst supper was making ready I went and made a visit to Mrs. Graham, some time maid of honour to the Queen Dowager, now wife to James Graham, Esq. of the privy purse to the King ; her house being a walk in the forest, within a little of a quarter mile from Bagshot town. There is a park full of red deer about it." The next month saw Evelyn again "dining at Mr. Graham's lodge at Bagshot ; the house new repair'd and capacious enough for a good family, stands in a Park." Although no direct statement to that effect is made by Evelyn, the facts of proximity to Bagshot village, of the house being in a park with deer in it, and the positions about court of Mr. and Mrs. Graham, all point to the conclusion that their house was the royal hunting lodge lent to them as faithful servants of the Crown.

Ever since the Restoration the estate has been enclosed, and being planted with trees of all kinds, especially pines and Scotch firs, is remarkable for the beauty of its forest scenery. It is situated on the extreme western border of county Surrey, about 9 miles south-west of Windsor. Nearness to Windsor no doubt partly accounts for Bagshot Park having been so long a favourite royal recreation and residential estate, though its own merits alone have given it attractiveness enough. The Stuart Kings were often there, and George IV., when Prince of Wales, sometimes resided in the hunting lodge. In 1816 the Duke of Gloucester, after his marriage to Princess Mary, daughter of George III, made it his home. For thirty years or so it has been the principal country residence of their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of

Connaught. Situated as it is, about half-way between Windsor and Aldershot, it certainly seems an ideal home for the royal Field Marshal.

Since Their Royal Highnesses have resided there a very great amount of building has been done. The present mansion has been erected and subsequently added to and improved; lodges, stables and drives constructed, the gardens entirely remodelled and the whole estate made into one of the most perfectly appointed and charming seats in the southern counties. The Bagshot soil is of a very peculiar sandy nature, so much so that it has given its name to the uppermost deposit of the London basin, which is known to geologists as "the Bagshot beds." This soil is most suitable for all kinds of flowering shrubs, and it is, therefore, not surprising to find the gardens famous for their magnificent rhododendrons and azaleas. Very few gardens in England can compare with Bagshot at the end of May and beginning of June, when thousands of superbly flowering trees and shrubs are in the full beauty of their rich and varied colouring.

The main entrance is from the London road at the northeast corner of the Park. It is guarded by fine wrought-iron gates, and flanked by a handsome lodge. Immediately on entering, the character of the place makes itself known. For the drive, leading in a south-westerly direction, goes between high banks of rhododendrons, set back some yards on either side of the broad roadway, and behind them are splendid oaks and other forest trees. After proceeding straight for three or four hundred yards, the drive crosses another which leads from the mansion to a second lodge facing the road to Bagshot railway station. The main drive crosses the Park and emerges there from at a third lodge not far from the village church. Close to the cross-roads just mentioned are the stables and home farm, on the left or east side of the drive. It was here or hereabout that the old royal hunting lodge was situated. Shortly before coming to the crossing by the stables, two paths leave the drive opposite each other. That on the east side leads through iron gates, a small garden and orchard, to the kitchen garden. This is enclosed by high brick walls well-clothed with trained fruit-trees of many best kinds, contains a splendid range of glass-houses, the residence of the head gardener, and other buildings. It is about six acres in extent, and is bounded on one side by the London road between the two entrance lodges first mentioned. Crossing each other at its centre are two long paths between double mixed borders, with rose arches overhead about every ten yards. The spot where the walks meet is marked by an interesting and beautifully designed well, which is encircled by a path with seats facing inwards placed upon its outer edge. The seats are backed and sheltered by clipped yew hedges.

Returning to the place where the two paths leave the drive; that on the west is the entrance to the pleasure grounds and garden. Almost at once the walk enters a most beautiful curving pergola. It is rather less than a hundred yards in length, and is exceptionally well covered with numberless climbing plants, especially wistaria, and many varieties of clematis and rose. Alongside this pergola on the right is a lovely herbaceous border, whose flowers are seen to great advantage by reason of a background of clipped yew, with flowering shrubs and trees still further behind. On the left are more flowers, then shrubs in groups; and between them lovely glimpses of the distant park under outspread branches of nearer trees. At the west end of the long pergola, a strikingly handsome iron gate admits to the garden proper. Two paths diverge from this point. One leads indirectly to the mansion. The other crosses a lawn under magnificent beech trees, passes through a circular Blue Garden, and joins the drive to the south of the house.

Before describing these paths and what they lead to in detail, it will be well to see what lies to the right of the pergola gate, and attempt to give some impression of one of the garden's most charming set of features. Through a narrow gap in a bank, or wall, of rhododendrons a short grass path leads to an open glade. In its turf carpet, placed quite irregularly, are several

splendid specimen shrubs. Among them a superb white azalea, which is probably the finest of its kind in England. In the centre of the glade a round dome-shaped arbour covered with roses stands on a little mound. To one side there is a shrub whose flowers are of the most brilliant scarlet, and the contrast between its fiery flame colour and the snow-cold purity of the white one just mentioned is extraordinarily vivid. In this exquisite little offset or 'pocket' garden, there are also two or three beds filled with delicate herbaceous peonies of exceptionally good varieties, and all around are masses of rhododendrons, above which countless beautiful trees peep into the charming and secluded pleasance. There are two more paths leading away from here. One goes back to the shady lawn, and the other passes through a tunnel under shrubs to the next of the series of 'pocket' gardens.

This is especially noteworthy for a new and most interesting addition—a feature unique in an English garden which will probably give its name to this part of the Bagshot grounds. A perfectly appointed and exquisitely finished Japanese house was presented to H.R.H. Prince Arthur of Connaught by the Government of Japan in recognition of his connection with the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition, and was erected by native art-workmen in this portion of the garden. The selection of this site for the house is extremely happy. The trees behind it—cedars, cypress and Canadian hemlock, among many others—the lawn in front planted here and there with magnolias, and above all a most lovely wistaria pergola over the path leading to it, seem to fit the house into its surroundings admirably, and make it, so to speak, at home. Laying out a part of the lawn close to the house, either as an exact replica or on the model of a famous landscape garden in Japan, is under contemplation, and if carried out, will still further help to make the illusion complete.

A short path branches from that beneath the wistaria pergola and leads, under a rose arch, to the Lily Garden. This also is surrounded by rhododendrons, and has three ways into it, one of which again leads back to the lawn already mentioned. The Lily Garden is described in Notes on Garden Design (see Chapter XII.). The third path out of this delightful little retreat leads by tortuous windings past a small but charming rock garden to the fourth of the series—an 'American,' or flowering shrub, garden. Here again is a turfed glade shut in by banks of rhododendrons. It is planted with a most superb collection of shrubs, has a remarkably fine magnolia in its centre, and is in every way one of the most striking and beautiful features in the whole garden. The gorgeous colour here in early June is almost incredibly brilliant. Returning to the gateway at the end of the long pergola. Of two diverging paths, that to the left winds beneath several splendid beeches and enters the Blue Garden, which is made in an open place in a large lawn. A big circular bed is planted with none but blue flowers of varying shades. It has a narrow edging of turf. Next comes a path in annular form, and outside this again are segmental borders also adorned with blue flowers. The outmost ring of all is a very narrow bed planted with old-fashioned 'cat-mint,' and rising from the midst of this mist of cloudy blue, are iron pillars about four feet high whose tops are connected by hanging chains. On the posts and chains are blue and white climbing plants. The garden is entered by three paths, each of which passes under a rose arch in line with the pillars and chains. A fourth arch is directly in front of a very picturesque old thatched arbour. The effect of the filmy cloud of blue seen through these rose arches is most fascinating, and the whole idea and design of the garden is extraordinarily well thought out.

As said before, one of the paths out of the Blue Garden, soon after leaving it, crosses the main drive to the mansion. On the far side of the drive, it passes two or three big groups of fine shrubs and trees, and enters the largest expanse of lawn in the grounds. Here there is a 'spiral' garden. Sunk below the level of lawn, it has for centre an exceptionally interesting and uncommon sundial. A path winds down to this and has beds planted with dwarf rose-bushes and violas on either side. From this point one of the best views of the mansion can be

obtained. It is built of red brick, with ornamentation in stone, and is a handsome specimen of modern domestic architecture, with well-balanced proportions and a varied, finely composed sky-line. The west end of the house contains the more important apartments, and is consequently treated in an ornate and imposing manner. Behind, but clear of the house, in this direction, a slight elevation of the ground is covered with noble forest-trees, evergreens and flowering shrubs of numberless kinds beyond an upward sloping lawn. At the other end, the house is partly seen and partly hidden by many splendid trees coming close to its walls. By these means, and with the help of its grand terrace, the mansion appears both in form and colour to blend most agreeably with its surroundings.

Continuing past an exceedingly graceful group of chestnut trees, the path from the Spiral Garden has a straight length in front of the main terrace. This is a nobly proportioned and extremely handsome feature of Bagshot Park. It is built of red brick with a very finely moulded balustrade. The wall below is clothed with alternate blue and white wistaria, and wide flower borders lie at its base. At intervals .., along the parapet, vases planted (in spring) with Forgetmenot are placed. These vases, instead of being perched up on pedestals above the top, stand on footings only a few inches above the base of the balustrade, which is cut away and suitably finished and ornamented to receive them. This arrangement brings the top of the vases only slightly above the level of the parapet, thus breaking the line without creating a feeling of restlessness, and is extremely effective. The terrace, too, is interesting for another reason. It is a double terrace. That is, there are two levels. First, the house level, which finishes in a sloping turf bank, with flights of stone steps leading down to the terrace proper. The upper level is treated formally with sunk gardens, yew hedges, vases on pedestals, and geometrical flowerbeds. The lower terrace has also pattern beds with box edgings in the Italian style, and is ornamented with a fountain, statues, seats and several beautiful old lead cisterns filled with flowering herbs. In plan, the great terrace has two straight wings parallel to the front line of the mansion, with a grandly bold semicircular projection in the middle. From this a very handsome double flight of steps leads down to the path described before.

On the south of this path, facing the terrace across a large expanse of beautiful turf, there is a magnificent antique statue in porphyry, far larger than life-size, of Pallas Athene. This, of course, is an absolutely unique feature, and is of overwhelming interest. Behind this superb statue a yew hedge acts as a background to flowers and as a fence between garden and park. The lawn is also enclosed on east and west sides by hedges with flower borders in front of them ; and both its two corners furthest from the terrace are furnished with large quarter circular seats of white wood.

At the east end of the main terrace, steps lead down to a straight path across part of the lawn containing the Spiral Garden. This path terminates in the Diamond Garden, described in Chapter XI. Beyond the west end of the terrace there was until recently a large tennis lawn, but since the enclosure of the still larger expanse of turf in front of the house, an Italian water garden has been made on its site. Beyond this again the garden westwards mainly consists of lovely stretches of turf sloping up to the hill before mentioned, with many rare and beautiful specimen trees, exquisite groups of flowering shrubs and forest trees in countless variety. As it extends in this direction it becomes more and more wild in character, until at last it merges almost insensibly into the natural woodland around. This part of the garden has been greatly improved lately by judicious clearing of overgrown and common shrubs, and planting masses of choice azaleas and many other varieties. And everything has been carried out with such skill and knowledge that the sought for effect of cultivated wildness has been most successfully attained. The main entrance to the mansion is in its north front. And the forecourt is embellished with a gracefully designed well-fountain, and is encircled by borders of beautiful flowers, with shrubs and trees behind them for shelter and protection. The wild

garden approaches this side of the house more nearly than any other. Opposite the entrance portico a long and rather narrow lawn slopes upwards from the house. Fringed on both sides with exquisite flowers and shrubs and many most varied trees, it affords fine vistas both to and from the mansion. The further end of this lawn opens into one of three avenue-like grass paths. They are planted respectively with azaleas, rhododendrons and evergreen trees, and converge to the top of a slight eminence. At the further side of a small sloping lawn there stands a charming old summer or garden house, to the walls and roof of which cling wistaria and clematis. Fine Scotch firs and other trees of the wild woodland beyond are its background. One of the three avenue paths leads back to the American Garden, thus completing the circuit of this large and yet most exquisite garden.

In walking through the grounds of Bagshot Park it is impossible not to be immensely impressed by the wonderful variety of the interests they excite. The garden as a whole has been laid out to make the utmost use of all its many natural advantages. It is full of surprise and mystery. No sooner is one feature left behind and the thought arises that nothing more can remain to be seen than a new and totally different aspect is presented. It is impossible to speak too highly, for instance, of the charming variety there is in the series of four or five small 'pocket' gardens. They are quite distinct from- one another ; each has a character of its own ; there is just enough formality in some of them and just enough irregularity in others to make the effect of the series well-nigh perfect in charm and beauty. They are cut off from each other and from the rest of the garden by high and thick banks of rhododendrons, but, being entered by at least three different paths, they still belong to the general scheme. Then, again, the size and quality of the lawns, the superb and stately beech trees and oaks, the multitudes of splendid shrubs, the wonderful collection of conifers, and above all the skill and knowledge with which everything is cultivated, all tend to make this garden a place of superlative and enchanting beauty.