



PENSHURST PLACE
AND GARDENS

Historic Houses Association 2021 Garden of the Year Awards

Walking through the 11 acres of formal gardens at Penshurst Place is truly transportive. Divided into 11 individual garden rooms divided by over one mile of yew hedging, the gardens carry an enormous variety of planting structure, design, and seasonal bloom.

2nd Viscount De L'Isle CVO MBE, inherited the Penshurst Place estate from his father, 1st Viscount De L'Isle VC KG in 1991, continuing the Sidney's stewardship who have been in occupation at Penshurst Place since 1552. The estate now consists over 2,500 acres of parkland, 11 acres of formal gardens, a manor house and a variety of grounds for adults and children to enjoy.

Upon succeeding his father as custodian of Penshurst Place, 2nd Viscount De L'Isle set about creating an arboretum in his father's memory. The arboretum features a variety of trees including Field Maples, Aspens, and Red Oaks. The trees were donated by a variety of Kent and Sussex residents, local businesses, and enterprises that 1st Viscount De L'Isle was involved in. Today, the arboretum still forms an incredibly important part of our Woodland trail, providing ample shelter for wildlife and shady spots for young children to explore.

The formal gardens at Penshurst Place have a very recognisable layout having been divided into individual garden rooms, the earliest room in this collection is the Italian Garden. Originally laid out in the 1560's by Henry Sidney the Italian Garden and the various other smaller rooms began life as kitchen gardens, hosting a variety of fruit trees and sink ponds. Sir Henry's layout has remained largely unchanged for the succeeding 460 years as shown in the Kip engraving (Fig 1).

In 2015 the Italian Garden undertook a major replanting, with 12,500 Jewel of Spring Tulips planted by our gardeners and a few volunteers from our office team and house stewards. The collection is now the largest planting in a single garden of this particular tulip, in the UK. In 2016, the new tulips bloomed for the first time and transformed the garden into an awe-inspiring sea of bright yellow flowers. (Fig 2)

As a family home first and foremost, the gardens at Penshurst Place serve as a fascinating horticultural family album, with many of the garden rooms featuring new planting to immortalise important events in 2nd Viscount and Viscountess De L'Isle's family.



In the Rose Garden two pear trees were planted to celebrate the 2014 wedding of 2nd Viscount and Viscountess De L'Isle's daughter Sophia, to her husband, Charles Maybanks, continuing Penshurst Place's legacy as garden brimming with fruit trees.

Visitors to the gardens will notice a collection of statues across the individual rooms, in the Magnolia Garden a Nyad statue stands amongst a crowd of beautiful Magnolia trees as a dedication to 2nd Viscount De L'Isle's mother.

Elsewhere visitors will find a further two statues created by 1st Viscount De L'Isle's grandson, Robert Rattray – most recently an archer at the end of the Demi Lune unveiled in 2009, and a little earlier in 2000, a Porcupine in the Flag Garden. The latter of which is now adjoined by an avenue of Laurel trees, planted in 2015 by the family and staff to mark Viscount De L'Isle's 70th birthday, and his son, the honourable Philip Sidney's 30th birthday.

The Flag Garden, though now home to this avenue of trees, is of course most well-known for its Union Flag design made of lavender and roses. In early 2017, it was becoming more apparent that the soil housing the Flag Garden's popular design was becoming Rose sick, and so the decision was made to remove the roses and replace with annuals in the beds to give the soil some time to recover. In 2019, 520 vivid red Times Roses joined the white Macmillan Rose alongside a new selection of lavender to create the design afresh. In 2020 the new planting bloomed in its first fully established year. (Fig 3)

Evidence of the family album throughout the garden can also be found on the Blue and Yellow Border. Officially opened in 2015, the border is a homage to the colours of the Sidney family crest and features two varieties of Iris; *Penshurst Yellow* and *Penshurst Blue*, that were especially bred for the estate by the late Olga Wells. Other examples of the heraldry of the Sidney's that can be found in the gardens include a topiary Porcupine and Bear next to the archer on the Demi Lune, that were first shaped by legendary topiarist, Charlotte Molesworth.

Penshurst Place adopts a "evolution over revolution" approach to all gardening decisions – we prioritise the organic development of the gardens and their design over radical changes. With a garden dating to 1346 that has been the life work for many a Head Gardener, we approach changes sympathetically, ensuring that any work does not sacrifice the longevity or the legacy of this historically important garden.

On that basis, whilst planting and designs do change, the structure certainly less so. For instance, the Herbaceous Border which used to sit either side of a central path towards to exterior garden wall, was in 2012 updated with the help of Chelsea Flower Show award winner George Carter, and renamed the Jubilee Walk to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The border now showcases a selection of summer flowers, with each bed featuring a different colour on the spectrum in a "hot to cold" colour design.



George Carter, a close friend of the family now also has a garden named after him. The George Carter Walk replaces the Lanning Roper Border which was originally planted in the 1970's. Planted in 2018, The George Carter Walk features 4 weeping standard Roses that were gifted from the private collection 2nd Viscount and Viscountess De L'Isle and Buddleia senecio which were grown from cuttings of the Lanning Roper Border, among a myriad of other pastel-toned plants.

In comparison to the formal gardens of some countryside manor houses, Penshurst Place's 11 acres could be viewed as small, but this makes them no less special. The care and attention given to the gardens by Head Gardeners, the Sidney family and now 2nd Viscount and Viscountess De L'Isle has been imperative to their ongoing evolution. By moving the gardens forward whilst remaining connected to their past, the gardens at Penshurst Place display a planting structure like that of no other, and with the sympathetic approach that has been employed by our Head Gardeners, they will no doubt be here for many centuries to come.

Fig 1 – The Kip engraving

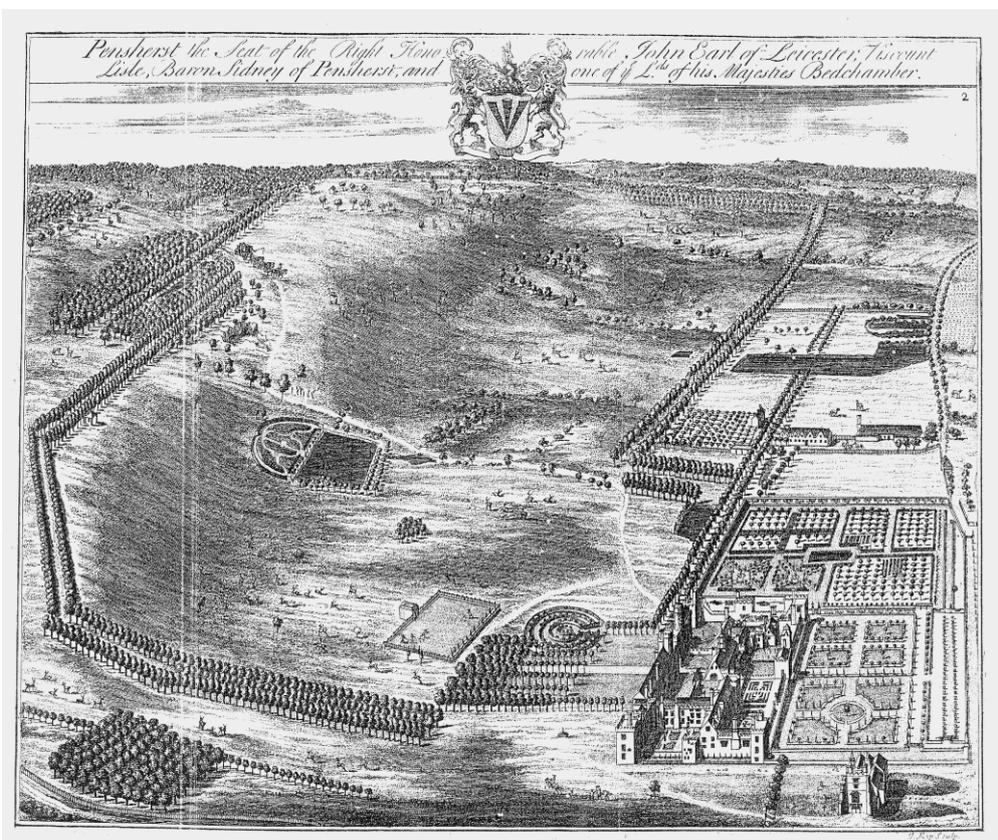


Fig 2 – Head Gardener, Tony Wiseman, tending to some of the 12,500 Jewel of Spring Tulips
Photography credit: Ollie Dixon



Fig 3 – The Union Flag Garden

