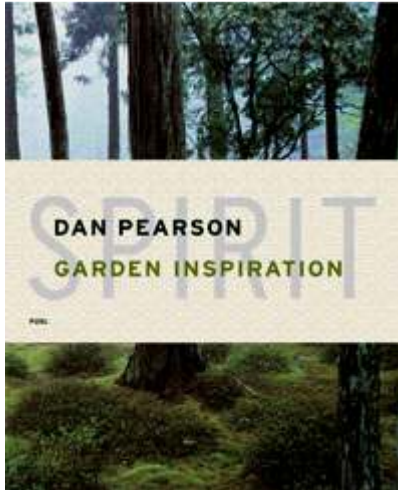


BOOK REVIEWS January 2010

Newly-published books (green) and others that the reviewers just like, and want to recommend (purple):
Plus a piece on book-hunting.....



Spirit

Dan Pearson

With a Foreword by Beth Chatto

Hardback illustrated throughout
208 pages
ISBN: 978-0-9558620-8-3
RRP £25.00

Published Winter 2009
Murray and Sorrel FUEL, London

I heard Dan Pearson talk at a Society of Garden Designers conference a year or so ago, and was electrified by his pictures and inspired by his words, so I was really looking forward to this book. So I was rather disappointed when first looking through the book at the quality of many of the pictures: quite dull and some that were hard to make out exactly what was represented. . No comparison with the brilliance of those on the lecture screen. Although there are among them pictures which respond to this matt treatment and are stunning in their atmosphere, so perhaps it was my eye, accustomed to the Fuji film colour of most garden books, that is at fault. I approached the words with a little trepidation.

I need not have worried. There are so many felicitous and delicious phrase that I could fill the whole website with them – you might as well buy the book! But I will quote two, which are an example of Pearson wrapping himself on the atmosphere ...which is why, presumably, his book is called *Spirit*....

At Ryoan-ji, Japan: “The minimalism within the enclosure allows your mind to settle and before long you start to notice detail; th lichens on the stones and the particular angles at which they had been juxtaposed. After a time, you can feel the energy of the stones, how they push from the gravel or tilt to reveal a particular weight. The monks had set the stones there in the fifteenth century, and their power in their juxtaposition is just as powerful, if not more so today, for having survived the evolution of the culture around them”

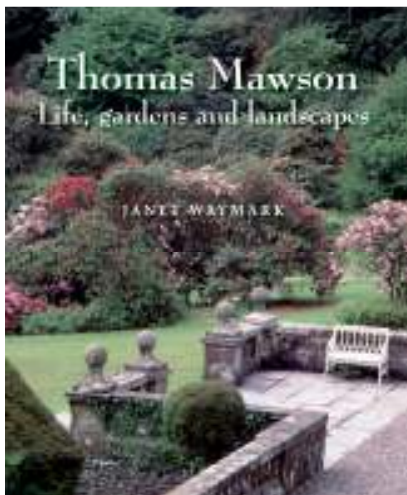
In the Parthenon, in Rome: “I passed through the columns and the immense doors, which opened into the gloom. The dome was empty, and there was high save for the hiss as a column of rain passing through the oculus high above hit the marble floor. I followed the column of light-filled water with my eyes and imagined it connected to the clouds high above the city and then on beyond that...The mass of the dome was dark and heavy, the only source of light the window to the sky. The concept of the

building, it's simplicity and the way to made m feel connected to the heavens is potent and unforgettable.”

These are passages of connection through man-made structures – high artifice and craftsmanship by artisans – to invisible and indefinable feelings and being wrapped up with them.

On a personal note, with my interest in Italian Gardens, I rushed to the chapter on the Villa D'Este and found “ People enter these tight enclosures (the caverns behind the fountains)and often leave at a pace with the whites of their eyes showing because the commotion and the volume inside is so exhilarating”. - Yes!

The book has pieces about people too, making gardens for themselves (bonsai attached to walls in Japan),or in groups, (the Liz Christy Community Gardens in New York) making connections with the plants and with each other. The words are why you should buy the book – the pictures which the words conjure up in your mind make the experience. *BD'A*



Thomas Mawson: Life, gardens and landscapes

Janet Waymark

Hardback,
240 pages , illustrated throughout
ISBN 13: 978 -0-7112-2595-4
RRP £40.00

Published Summer 2009
Frances Lincoln

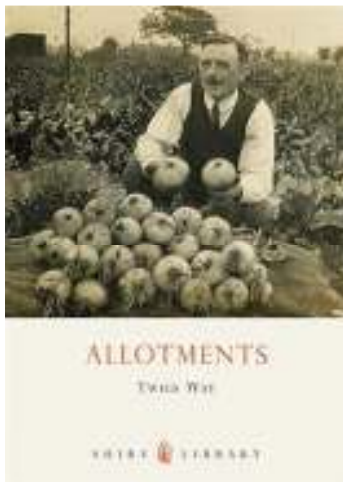
This book is a very valuable addition to the libraries of people who are interested in designers of the early twentieth century. There has been a previous book about Thomas Mawson by Elizabeth Kissack (Aug 2006), which is a good introduction to the designer, but this is a fuller account with a great many pictures, done in the usual immaculate style of the publisher, Frances Lincoln. To accommodate all this, it is a big book – and I do quibble at its size and weight as I can't read it in bed – however.....

Unlike the other 'greats' of the period such as Lutyens and Peto, Thomas Mawson had no formal training at college or in an architect's office. He learnt horticulture and building by doing it as a young man, one who had to support his family after the death of his father. After his marriage, and th failure of a promised partnership to materialise, he decided to stay and form a business nest Lake Windermere; a good decision as he built up clients among the self-made men, industrialists and rich families having a second –home in the lake district. The firm, Mawson Brothers operated form new-built office and a nursery called Shrublands.

Mawson was a practical man, becoming a designer with a firm belief in the garden linked with the house. He also beloved that a garden should “be ruled by art and not merely an imitation of nature”, and was a designer with the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement, where the landscaping and planting showed the best of craftsmanship. He was also ambitious. It was a sign of his professionalism that clients such as Lord Waring and Baron Lever continued to commission him throughout their gardening lives- and introduced

him to other clients including royalty. He opened an office in London, and travelled to Canada, France and Germany, working mainly in town planning. The Housing and Town Planning Act after WWI in 1919, procured planning work for him. Almost 20 projects, at a time when the patronage of individual and wealthy clients was drying up. A huge scheme for the city of Athens was drawn but lost through war and politics.

Janet Waymark tells all this in a way that is constantly interesting, leading the reader through his work and his family life. For it was a family firm, with Mawson's children helping to run the business and working with him. Mawson wanted to be a Landscape Architect, not a gardener, and his wide range of design work shows his ambition to achieve. Waymark shows that his career was in tune with the development of the times; from private commissions to public design. Shrublands even branched out into a restaurant alongside plants and seed selling- long before the development of garden centres in the last twenty years. *BD'A*



Allotments

Twigs Way

Paperback 56 pages
ISBN: 9780747806813
Shire Library 469
RRP £5.99

Published July 2008

Shire Books

When I was a child in the 1950s, holidays were spent at my Nan and Grandpa's house in Melksham. I remember my Grandpa always being 'down the allotment', from whence he brought back piles of vegetables, but I was never taken there. I found out why in Twigs Way's book: "by the 1950s the wartime spirit of community had largely been replaced by the image of 'men and sheds' and women no longer felt welcome. Martyn Hall, writing in Allotment Gardening in 1951, commented that 'whilst some women may make quite a good job of the allotment' many more women were valuable only to 'help their husbands in the lighter tasks of hoeing and weeding" So that was why: my Nan certainly would not have wanted to do even that – and ex-milliner, she was a bit posh for mud.

The book traces the history of allotments from around 1765, when after the enclosures, some people noticed that the poor were badly affected and started to put aside small plots of land for their own growing. (Not too much mind., or they might be selling for profit...) The allotment came into its own in urban areas where housing had little or no garden space. Wars meant that growing – Dig for Victory - was very important (done by as many women as men I suppose...) but the 1960s, swinging away, did not bother to grow food which was readily available in the shops. Then in the 1980s came worries: about pesticides, herbicides and the amount of allotments being turned over for 'development' – housing with 10x10metre square gardens. Now, demand for allotments has grown, with long waiting lists – and women are the main demanders. So the book is not just about allotments, but about the history of women as family growers and providers...

The book is not only enlightening in its text but in its pictures – from the man on the cover with his huge onions to plans of allotments at various times and photographs of Polish ‘allotments’ which look like small gardens with attractive summerhouses – *dachas*, I suppose.

A super little book to be read in an hour or two with great enjoyment.

BOOK HUNTING

I have been collecting garden books for some time. Mostly those published in the 19th/early twentieth century, but others as well. Many of the books are found though www.abebooks.co.uk, and quite a lot then arrive from the USA – the excitement of finding the book is equalled only by the excitement of receiving a parcel with the custom declaration form on it! However, there are two booksellers in the uk who consistently come up with books that I want: **Mike Park**, Sutton, Surrey, and **Christopher Arden** at Hay-on-Wye. Details below. Try them!



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