



SCOTNEY CASTLE

A landscape of drama, romance, with a fairy-tale feel

You can't fail to fall under the spell of the Grade I listed parkland at Scotney Castle, especially in summer when the arches hang heavy with draping wisteria and the swathes of cloud-like Rhododendrons which stretch down a long slope to a romantic 14th-century Castle set in a mirror-still moat. The views from the winding path down the slanting gardens prepare you for the old Castle, but it's only when you walk around the turreted fort that its beauty truly hits you.

In recent years the wonderful Victorian Mansion, which overlooks its 770-acres of fairy-tale woodland characteristic of the Wealden landscape, has been restored and opened to the public. Look for the resident cat called Betsy and the Hussey family coat of arms over the door with its Latin

motto 'Vix ea nostra voco', which loosely translates as 'we scarcely call these things our own'.

It seems untouched by human hands and seems to have evolved from a series of paintings, vignettes even, created in the 18th-century. No wonder Scotney Castle is one of the top ten formal gardens in England.

"I'm a big fan of creating native wild meadows to replace the ones that have been lost over the years," explains Garden and Estate Manager, Paul Micklewright. "By doing this we're creating more habitats for insects, butterflies, and mammals. Although Scotney is classed as a garden there is no reason we can't garden and look after wildlife at the same time. I am proud of the green-winged orchids we have growing on our terraces and will ensure this scarce orchid



has a habitat that it can thrive in and spread out onto the wider estate. These wild meadows are vital for the food chain and supporting larger animals and birds so vital we do all we can to protect them.”

Speaking of conservation Micklewright describes what the National Trust is doing at Scotney Castle. “There are many areas in the garden that we manage for wildlife, and I am always looking for ways we can develop and enhance the habitats that we have. Last year we created several new ponds for Great Crested Newts so I can’t wait to see these develop. And it doesn’t cost much – a few years ago, we created several acres of wild meadow by simply moving a fence line and excluding the cattle from the area. We thought about buying a local wild seed mix and spreading this in the new meadow but decided to hold off to see what would come up. We were astounded how diverse the wildflowers in the meadow were, the seed bank was already there, we didn’t need to do anything, it’s surprising how robust nature is, if you just give it a chance.”

The picturesque style garden encompasses the natural landscape around the estate and some of its original 1870 elements, including the quarry, the Old Castle left to ruin, and some >>



» of the original sweet scented Ghent azaleas with yellow and salmon blooms, shocking pink rhododendrons, and ancient trees that were used to frame the views.

“My plan for Scotney Castle is that it becomes the Picturesque garden to visit,” Micklewright explains. “Not many are aware of the picturesque movement and its principles, so I’d love for people to visit Scotney Castle and leave with a better understanding of it. We’re currently restoring the garden into what was Edward Hussey III vision when he designed the garden back in 1840, if we continue to do this then I’m confident we’ll make our visitors understand the picturesque movement better.”

He looks to the horizon and explains that the last thing he does at the end of the day is take a walk around the garden. “I work till 6.30 most evenings so I am fortunate to be able to stroll through the gardens with nobody else around. When it’s quiet you can often see the Kingfisher flying along the moat, the Kestrels nesting in the trees, or the Heron perched along the side of the moat. I think when you work at a place like Scotney Castle you often forget how beautiful it is and how fortunate we are to be the caretakers of such a special place. It’s good to have the opportunity to appreciate it and connect with the garden.”

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www.nationaltrust.org.uk/scotney-castle

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Written and photographed by Cindy-Lou Dale

Just so you know

- In 1778 Edward Hussey bought Scotney from the Darrell family. Around 1830 his grandson, also named Edward, called in architect Anthony Salvin to create a new Victorian mansion at the top of the hill, looking out across the valley towards the Castle ruins. His descendant, Christopher Hussey, left the estate to the National Trust.
- When the National Trust came into possession of Scotney Castle in 1970 it rented out several apartments in the mansion. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rented the Belfry flat for a time during the 70s and 80s, when it served as a weekend escape from her Westminster life.
- The house appeared in the 1979 film *Yanks*, starring Richard Gere.
- The Castle grounds have played host to Shakespeare productions, notably *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, with the actors appearing from behind the bushes on cue.
- Scotney Castle was used as the location for the video to the Squeeze song ‘Some Fantastic Place’.