

Constructed, as ever, in the form of a small peasant structure, it was in fact entirely covered with gold, and golden utensils were provided to make tea in it. The Shogun used it once to serve tea for the Emperor and then showed it off to visitors, impressing them with his imperial connections, his wealth, and his elegantly rustic taste.

Considering this despotic magnificence, it is not surprising that sooner or later the Shogun would find fault with the independently-minded Rikyu. In 1591, the tea master was condemned to ritual suicide on a trumped-up charge, but his legacy continued to flourish in the hands of aristocratic tea masters like Oribe and Kobori Enshu. The use of 'borrowed scenery', or *shakkei*, has been attributed to Rikyu, but the extant Japanese examples are all to be found in gardens of the first half of the seventeenth century. The borrowed scenery consisted of an interesting view, such as a mountain in the distance, which would be framed by a wall and then incorporated into the garden by the placement of similarly-shaped stone or tree formations. Although the 'borrowed' element is entirely natural, its use is just as contrived as the picturesque views popular in eighteenth-century England. A famous example, probably by Enshu, is at the Entsui-ji temple, which was originally built as a villa for retired Emperor Go-Mizunoo. Deprived of any real power by the Shoguns, the Emperors were relegated to the role of cultural and spiritual icons. Filling his ample free time with poetry and tea parties, Go-Mizunoo made frequent visits to the countryside. Recently made safe by the nation-wide rule of the Tokugawa Shoguns, the country represented a novel experience to Kyoto courtiers. Their enjoyment of it was inevitably filtered by urban aesthetics and protocol: when Go-Mizunoo's uncle Toshihito visited the melon fields at Katsura, he did not admire a real slice of nature, or even of agriculture, but rather a carefully arranged display of horticultural curiosities. Go-Mizunoo himself made trips to Nagatani, just north of Kyoto, with the purpose of gathering mushrooms and admiring the view. Thirty palanquins would accompany him on such occasions and boxed lunches were provided to be consumed in specially-built rustic pavilions.²⁷ Here we have come full circle: the countryside had inspired the town, but now the town was imposing its values on the country. Or had it always been thus?

PERFECTION OF THEIR KIND: NOTES ON SIR PHILIP SASSOON'S GARDENS AT TRENT PARK

By Barbara Simms

The beautifully-proportioned red-brick house, the blue bathing-pool surrounded by such a profusion of lilies that the scent at night became almost overpowering, the flamingoes and ducks, the banks of exquisite flowers in the dressing-room, the red carnation and the cocktail on one's dressing table before dinner, were each and all perfection of their kind.¹

Between 1912 and 1939, Sir Philip Albert Gustave David Sassoon, politician and wealthy 3rd Baronet, created a lavish, theatrical landscape at Trent Park, a landscape which reflected the exotic tastes of his merchant prince ancestry more than those of a country gentleman, to whose ranks he aspired to belong. (fig. 49) During this troubled period in England's history, the house and gardens of Trent Park were the venue for extravagant house parties for royalty, politicians, film stars and artists – invited by Sir Philip, it has been suggested, to further his political and social ambitions.²

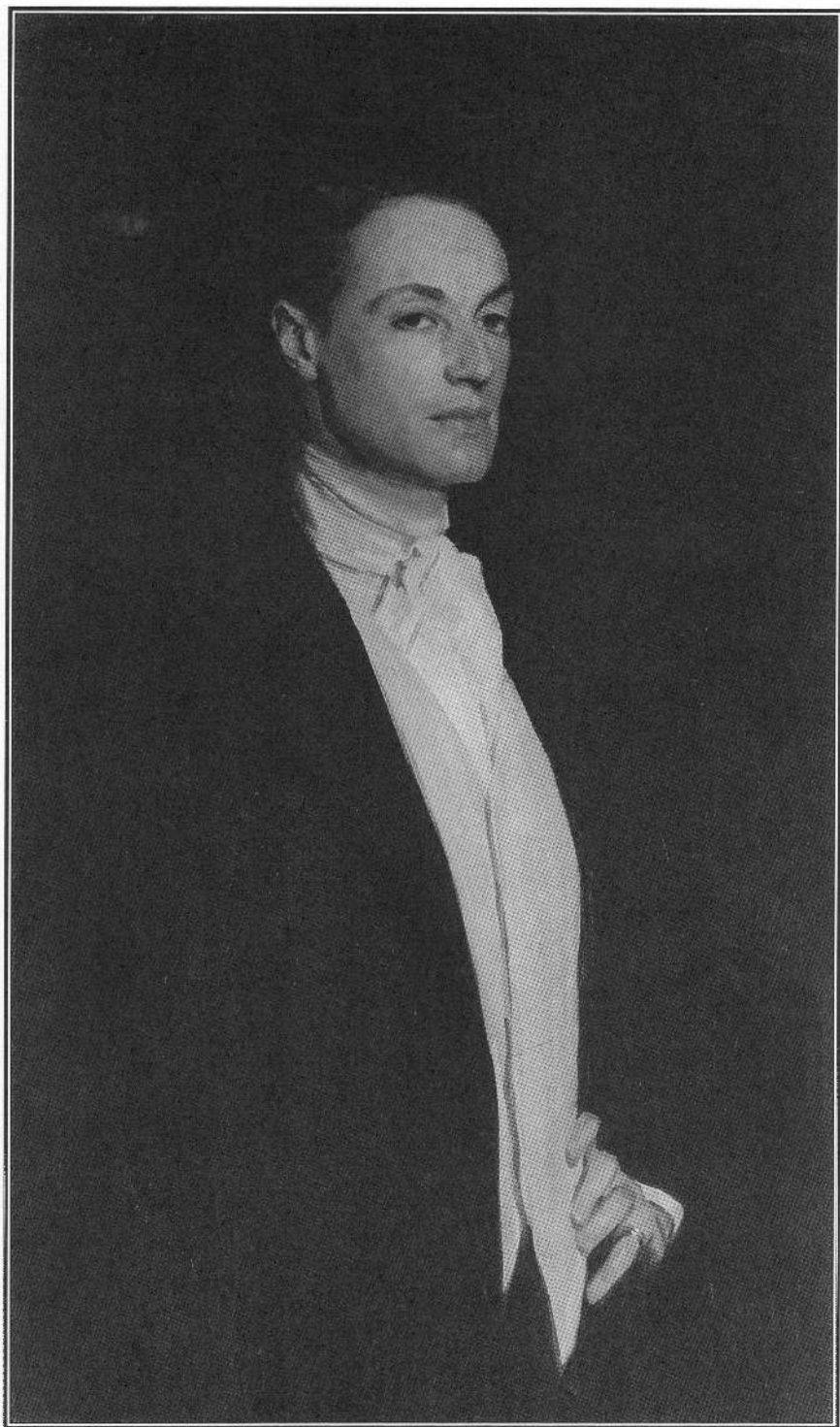
Sassoon's canvas was Duchy of Lancaster land, originally part of the ancient Forest of Middlesex on Enfield Chase and granted by royal favour to Richard Jebb, the King's physician, in December 1777.³ The early villa and its landscape were to undergo substantial alterations during the 1800s, the garden attracting attention at the turn of the century for its architectural terraces and horticultural excellence.⁴ A few years after these 'improvements',

1. R Boothby, *I Fought to Live* (1947).

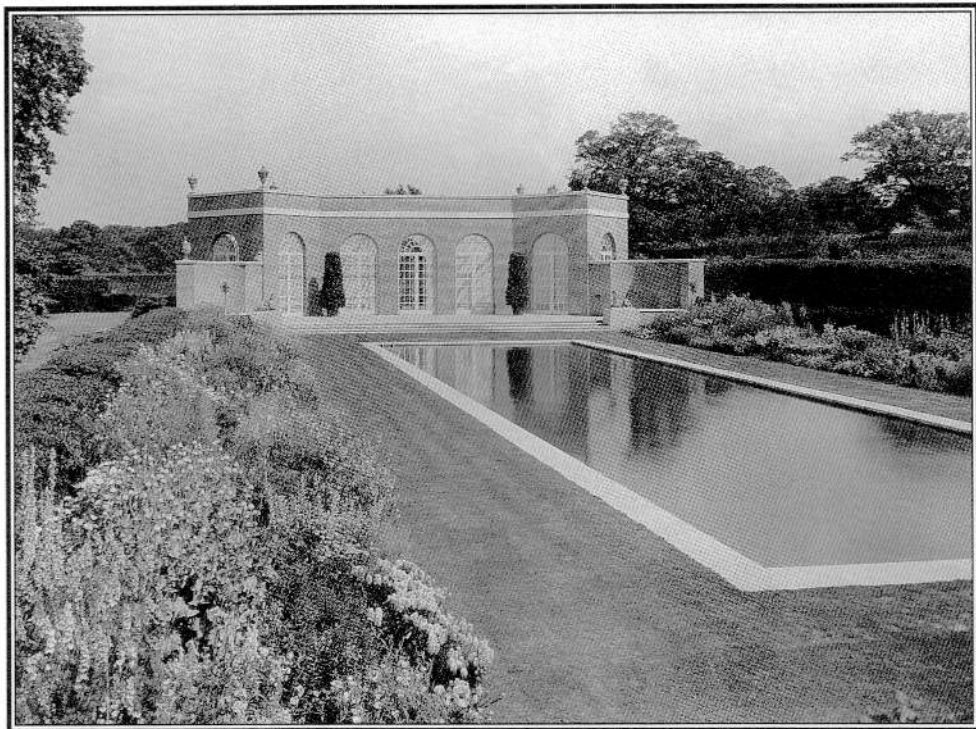
2. See R R James, ed., *Chips, The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon* (1967), p. 202; Stephen Dore, 'Sir Philip Sassoon (1888-1939) and Trent Park' in David J. Ellis, ed., *Trent Park Essays* (1974), pp. 47-67.

3. It is said that Jebb was granted the land in commemoration of the medical skill he showed in saving the life of the King's brother, the Duke of Gloucester, at Trento. Recounted in A E Stewart, ed., *The Last Journal of Horace Walpole... from 1771 to 1783* (1910), p. 45. Jebb was created a baronet six months later and took the title Sir Richard Jebb of Trent Place.

4. The creation of the landscape garden has been attributed erroneously to Humphry Repton, who had not begun his landscaping practice when the Sales Particulars of 1787 were produced. Lewis Kennedy proposed alterations to the house and garden in his *Notitia on the Improvements Proposed for Trent Park House* dated 1815. I am grateful to Jan Woudstra for bringing this to my attention. See a record of improvements to the garden in the nineteenth century: *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, 9 January 1892, p. 55; *The Gardeners' Magazine*, 30 November 1895, p. 761; *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, 5 December 1895, p. 533; *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, 19 September 1896, p. 333; *Country Life*, 21 February 1903, p. 240; *The Gardeners' Chronicle*, 12 August 1905, pp. 132-3.



49. Sir Philip Sassoon by John Singer Sargent (1923)
(COPYRIGHT TATE BRITAIN)



50. The south front of the house and forecourt (1931)
(COPYRIGHT COUNTRY LIFE)

51. The orangery and bathing pool (1931)
(COPYRIGHT COUNTRY LIFE)

the lease of Trent Park was sold to Sir Edward Sassoon who was only to hold it for a short period before his death in 1912. His twenty-three year old son, Philip, inherited the estate, turning it from a Victorian family home into a millionaire's weekend retreat.

Sir Philip Sassoon's father and his mother, Aline de Rothschild, were both from wealthy Jewish families. Aline had died a few years before her husband; thus, on his father's death, Sassoon inherited several properties, shares in the family business and a vast fortune.⁵ Sassoon also 'inherited' his father's parliamentary seat at Hythe, Kent, buying a nearby property that was to become Port Lympne, renowned not only for its flamboyant architecture and garden style, but also for its political house parties.⁶ However, it was at his Middlesex home, Trent Park, that Sassoon more often entertained the Prince of Wales, Lloyd George, Churchill and other celebrated guests, with his sister Hannah Gubbay, as hostess.⁷ Correspondence between the Trent Park estate office and the Duchy of Lancaster concerning lease renewal indicates that, although improvements to the property began earlier, major works were not executed until Sassoon acquired the freehold in September 1922.⁸

Sir Philip Sassoon, conscious of his foreign ancestry, was constantly striving for acceptance as an English gentleman. His aspiration at Trent Park was to create an English country seat in the eighteenth-century manner – the Victorian 'red-brick pile' became a Georgian-style mansion. (fig. 50) The east and north fronts were rebuilt, the windows changed and the whole house refaced in eighteenth-century bricks from William Kent's recently demolished Devonshire House. It is generally assumed that Philip Tilden, the

architect who remodelled Port Lympne and Sassoon's Park Lane house, was responsible for this transformation but the extent of his involvement is not clear.¹⁰ Sassoon's extravagant touches are reported to include gilded drainpipes, flowers dyed to match the curtains in the bedrooms, and taking down the union jack because it clashed with the sunset!¹¹

The house was not completed until 1930, but Sassoon entertained throughout and continued to develop the gardens in his own inimitable style, importing 'rare black and white swans, duck and coot of every species, pink flamingoes and gay pelicans' and two king penguins to decorate the lake.¹² Perhaps his yearning for English authenticity, matched with 'his exquisite aesthetic taste'¹³ and love of beauty, restrained Sassoon from dramatically changing the landscape garden, but he did install an outdoor heated blue swimming pool with a classical eighteenth-century-style orangery by Reginald Cooper, (fig. 51) a golf course, and an airfield where he landed his private aeroplane. In addition to the more active pursuits of golf, flying and swimming, contemporary photographs show Sassoon's guests relaxing on the lawn below the terrace in the shade of the mature cedars of Lebanon on the west side of the house. (fig. 52) Neither did he alter the approach from the main gates along a double avenue of limes, preserving the views over the fields and vistas to the hanging woods beyond.¹⁴ The main drive sweeps around to Sassoon's paved forecourt on the south entrance front of the house, in spring still 'made yellow and gold with the blooms of thousands of daffodils naturalised in the grass', a vision shared with visitors on garden open days.¹⁵

The remodelling of the celebrated nineteenth-century terrace to create a less formal

5. The properties included 25 Park Lane, London (described in James Knox, 'Not Our Gods. Philip Sassoon at 25 Park Lane', *Country Life*, 17 November 1994, pp. 50–3), a house at Sandgate, Kent, and a 'shooting box' in Scotland. This inheritance was in addition to the fine art collection left to him and his younger sister Sybil (later to become Lady Cholmondeley) by their Rothschild grandparents.

6. Described by 'Chips' Channon as 'a triumph of beautiful bad taste and Babylonian luxury, with terraces and flowery gardens, and jade green pools and swimming baths and rooms done up in silver and blue and orange', R.R. James, p. 7.

7. I am grateful to Lord Cholmondeley for allowing me to see the Trent Park Visitors Books for the period, held in the Sassoon archive at Houghton Hall, Norfolk.

8. *Surveyors Reports* (1919), item 6196. Duchy of Lancaster Offices, London. Sassoon bought the freehold to the Trent Park and adjoining Ferney Hill Estates, in total 570 acres, on 29 September 1922.

9. *Country Life*, 21 February 1903, p. 240.

10. Philip Tilden does not mention Trent Park in his autobiography, *True Remembrances* (1954) nor in 'Architectural Reminiscences – 4', *The Builder*, 23 February 1945, pp. 147–50. Also see James Bettley, *Lush and Luxurious. The Life and Work of Philip Tilden*, the catalogue accompanying the exhibition at the RIBA in February 1987, p. 27.

11. Stanley Jackson, p. 188.

12. In the mid-1930s about sixty species of ornamental waterfowl are reported. Winston Churchill, a frequent visitor, praised Sassoon's 'bird man at Trent', later identified by Lady Cholmondeley as Osborne, who 'looked after the golf course as well as the birds'.

Correspondence in the Sassoon archive (Box 11) at Houghton Hall.

13. C. Roth, p. 258.

14. Patrick Campbell, *Trent Park. A History* (1997) reports that the local council refused Sassoon's request for a change in the siting of the entrance gates during the 1920s, p. 35.

15. See *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 22 October 1932, p. 295; 21 April 1934, p. 255.

area, with 'flights of steps, hugging the face of the retaining wall so as not to cut into the great panoramic view' is recorded both by the 1935 OS map and a contemporary garden guide.¹⁶ The focus of Sassoon's gardening activities was to the east of the house, the guide providing information on the new garden areas and a plan of the landscape. (fig. 53)

True to the eighteenth-century tradition, the gardens lie a little apart from the house, and are approached from the continuation of the terrace at the east end of the house. Here, as a link between the two, an enclosed sunk garden has been formed, with an oblong bathing pool as its main feature. The pool, in its surround of grass and paving, is flanked by flower borders and high beech hedges, and terminated by an orangery designed in the eighteenth-century manner, and ornamented with fine decorative trophies from Wrest Park. The purpose of the orangery is not only to house some of the largest specimen orange trees in the country (originally transported from Versailles), but also to close in this open-air extension of the house. The borders framing the pool are planted for the most part with blue flowers relieved and accented by a touch of white and pale yellow.

The collection of 'decorative trophies' to ornament the landscape may have been part of Sassoon's plan to create an instant 'landed gentry' pedigree. During the 1920s and 1930s, he imported eighteenth-century stone gate piers, urns, three obelisks (believed to be from Wrest Park), Coade stone sphinxes and roundels, and a number of lead statues including *Hercules Wrestling Antaeus* (fig. 54) and *Samson Defeating a Philistine*, both by Nost after Giovanni de Bologna.¹⁷ Some of these statues were aligned on a *rond point* near the pool enclosure with views northwards to the woodland across the lake and from which sunken lily pools and flower beds, 'long twin borders with their barbaric splendour of colouring and luxuriance of bloom'¹⁸ stretched southwards between yew hedges, terminating in an ancient oak tree. (fig. 55)

Summer borders at Trent Park were not only a source of admiration for guests and vis-

itors, but also the subject of articles in the gardening press.¹⁹ A frequent houseguest was the eccentric socialite Norah Lindsay, described by Tilden as 'one of the most instinctive gardeners of this generation'.²⁰ She is known to have planted the herbaceous border at Port Lympne and there has been speculation on her involvement in the design of the gardens at Trent Park. A series of delightfully written and uninhibited letters from Lindsay to Philip Sassoon (sadly undated) refer to 'your new house', 'Trent... a second Pleasure House' and 'the new borders', other comments confirming not only that she was actively sourcing plants for the gardens, but that she was doing so on a professional basis:

Dearest Philip, I was very grateful, as the Americans say, to get my nice wages and your line... I do want you to get a marvellous clematis I put in three years ago with *Catleya* velvet bells - which I have ordered for you... Also the fuschias (which I want to hedge your walls round with) were divine - a special kind with mauve grey leaves and red brackets.²¹

In the absence of any longer publications (for which there was never time between social engagements),²² Lindsay's evocative description of the borders in a *Country Life* article gives an insight into her design and planting philosophy:

The summer borders at Trent Park are a feast of beauty during the months of June and July. They were carefully planned in an elaborate colour scheme to include all the hints of the rainbow, but, like that supreme order of the Heavens, the colours were kept in their own groups, delicate shading being preferred to the more banal plan of violent contrast... The architecture of a border is as important as the painting of it. Nothing is so dull as masses of colour all the same height and shape. What is wanted... is a bold treatment of fine foliated plants to produce a well balanced effect... Above all let no earth be visible, but crowd up the front with large comfortable mats of permanent things, which can brim over the edge in uneven groups and prevent the hard tailored look which spoils the outline of so many borders.²³

The design and planting of the pergola and wistaria walk south of the long borders are

19. See *Country Life*, 20 July 1929, pp. 78-9; *Country Life*, 10 January 1931, pp. 40-7; *Country Life*, 16 July 1932, p. 65.

20. Philip Tilden (1954), p. 33.

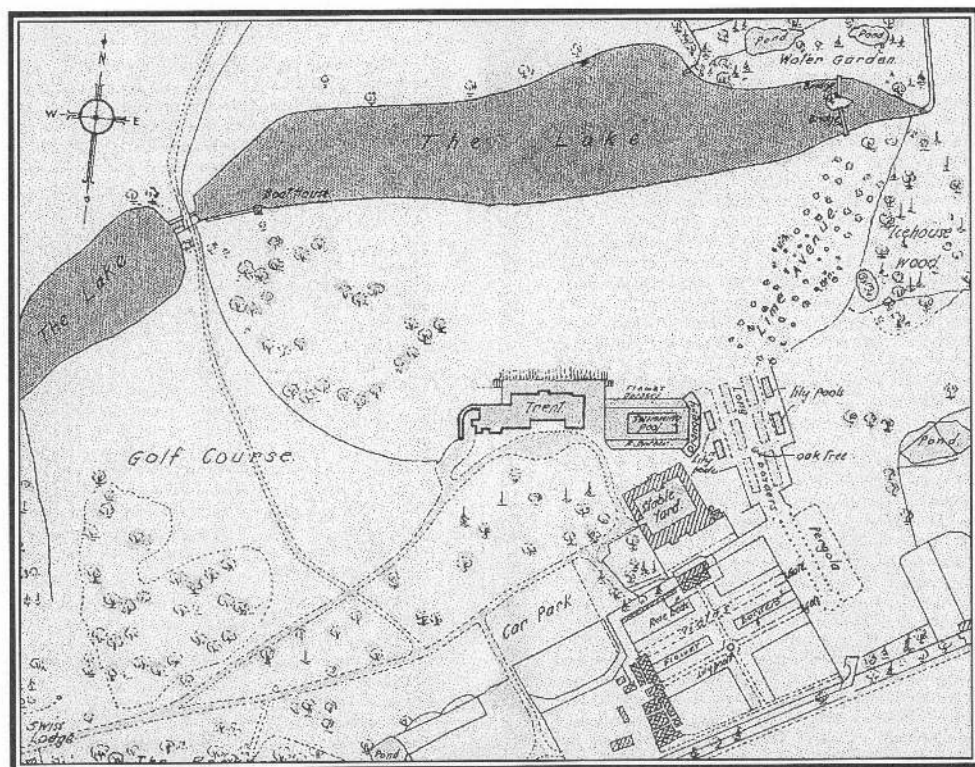
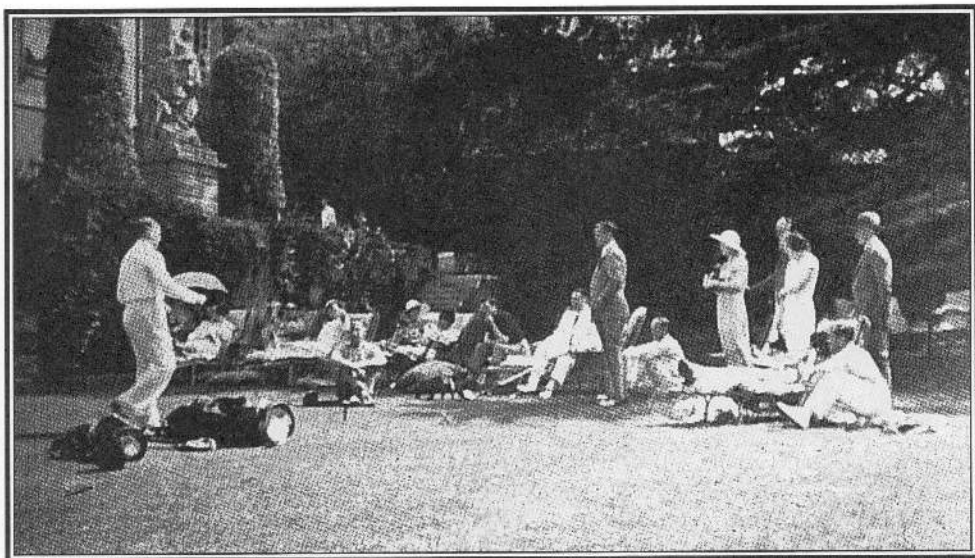
21. Undated letter from Norah Lindsay to Philip Sassoon from Sutton Courtney. Houghton Hall Sassoon archive (Box 21).

22. Tilden (1954), p. 34.

23. *Country Life*, 20 July 1929, p. 78.

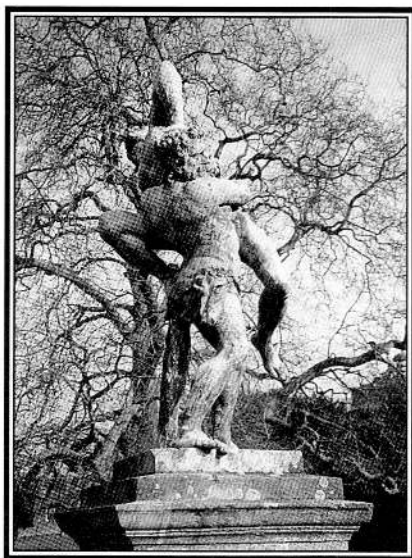
16. *Trent. A Descriptive Guide to the Garden* (c. 1935). Enfield Local History Unit, Palmers Green Library. 17. All the statuary is Grade II listed, the two named statues, which come from Stowe, are on the English Heritage *Buildings at Risk Register*.

18. *Country Life*, 21 February 1981, p. 237.



52. Sir Philip Sassoon's guests relax on the Lawn below the terrace
(COPYRIGHT HOUGHTON HALL)

53. Plan of the gardens (c.1935), published in *Trent. A Descriptive Guide to the Garden*
(COURTESY LOCAL STUDIES UNIT, PALMERS GREEN LIBRARY)



54. Hercules Wrestling Antaeus by John Nost (c.1700) after Giovanni de Bologna.
The statue was brought to Trent Park from Stowe in the 1920s
(PHOTOGRAPH: BARBARA SIMMS)

55. View from the top of the summer borders looking northwards (1931)
(COPYRIGHT COUNTRY LIFE)

56. View across the daffodil planting to the mansion (2000)
(PHOTOGRAPH: BARBARA SIMMS)

also commonly attributed to Lindsay and Philip Tilden, and are almost certainly 'the pink pillars' referred to in Lady Asquith's diary entry for 28 July 1915.²⁴ A description of the Italian pink marble columns supporting oak cross timbers, the path below it paved with stone slabs 'clothed with vines, wistaria and clematis, forming a cool green corridor carpeted along each side with mauve violas, out of which rise in July the incomparably lovely blooms of *lilium regale*',²⁵ make it tempting to believe this was the stylish work of a Lindsay-Tilden partnership. However, as Tilden was introduced to Sassoon by Sir Louis Mallet with a view to completing Port Lympne after the war, there is doubt that he was the architect.

Sassoon did not confine his garden-making to the areas near the house, planting a double lime avenue northwards from the *rond point* to a wild water garden, reached over two bridges spanning an island at the end of the lake. Although he is credited with creating a 'natural woodland retreat, which is never without beauty of form or colour' from a 'neglected plantation and a few trees growing in a heavy and unyielding, sticky clay soil',²⁶ it is possible that it is a development of the 'wild-garden or dell... with a stream running through it', the inspiration of an earlier head gardener.²⁷

Sir Philip Sassoon died in 1939 just before the outbreak of war. His house and gardens were requisitioned as an interrogation centre and the landscape became subsidiary to the needs of institutional life. This has been an ongoing process, Trent Park becoming a teacher training college after the war and now forming part of Middlesex University.²⁸ The core of Jebb's original landscape garden survives, but much of Sassoon's lavish design and planting schemes have been submerged beneath accommodation and teaching blocks. Astonishingly, many of the statues he brought to Trent Park are still in the grounds (although in a poor state of repair) and the lead figure of a *Gladiator* from Stowe, which greeted guests

from the front lawn as they arrived, sadly languishes in a storeroom under the terrace. Some conservation attempts have been made - the water garden has been restored, and the 'pink pillars' of the pergola were rebuilt following storm damage. Perhaps one of Sassoon's lasting contributions to the Trent Park landscape is his mass daffodil planting on the lawns and under the trees on the approach to the house, (fig. 56) a quintessentially English touch to 'a dream house, perfect, luxurious, distinguished with the exotic touch to be expected in any Sassoon Schloss!'²⁹

The author wishes to acknowledge the help provided by Anne Tanthony of the Duchy of Lancaster Office, who has painstakingly searched the Duchy archives for documentation not held at the Public Record Office; and David Yaxeley, archivist at Houghton Hall, Norfolk, who has spent considerable time searching the Sassoon papers held there.

CONSERVATION NOTES: A TOUR of LONDON'S HISTORIC LANDSCAPE INITIATIVES

By Chris Sumner

Indignation: the campaign for conservation (Kit-Cat Books, 2000) was published at the end of last year, and is a carefully-timed reminder to all of us in the conservation world that we too may be *at risk* and an *endangered species* unless we carry the general public and the politicians with us. The three authors, Mavis Batey, David Lambert, and Kim Wilkie respectively, write with knowledge and passion about *Ruskin, Morris and the early campaigns*, *Indignation today*, and *Indignation tomorrow*. While the immediate spur for the publication of the book may be seen as the imminent centenary of the passing in 1902 of the *Richmond, Petersham and Ham Open Spaces Act*, the essays raise important philosophical issues, some of which are also addressed in *Power of Place*.¹ Not least of these issues is: what should we protect, and for whom?

Indignation reminds us that while the British have always been strongly resistant to restrictions on private property rights, since the late nineteenth century *amenity societies*

24. We strolled about in most lovely garden with pink pillars and flamingoes'. Cynthia Asquith, *Diaries 1915-1918* (1968), p. 60.

25. *Trent. A Descriptive Guide to the Garden*, pp. 9-10.

26. *Country Life*, 21 February 1931, pp. 237-9.

27. *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 12 August 1905, p. 133.

28. The estate was compulsorily purchased as Green Belt Land in 1951, has been designated a conservation area and since 1986 has been the responsibility of the London Borough of Enfield. Approximately 81 hectares are administered by Middlesex University, whilst the remainder is open to the public as Trent Country Park.

29. R.R. James, p. 28.

1. *Power of Place. The future of the historic environment* (English Heritage, 2000). English Heritage Customer Services tel. 01793 414386 or at www.english-heritage.org.uk/discovery/heritage-review.