

Robert Marnock worked in South Buckinghamshire throughout the 1860s. The gardens he is known to have been involved with are: Hitcham House (formerly Blythewood), Berry Hill and Taplow Court, which form a cluster to the east of the River Thames. All three sites changed hands around 1852 due to the sale of the Taplow estate by the Earl of Orkney. The new owners had made their money in business and therefore had sufficient funds to have their gardens created by one of the top designers of the day, Robert Marnock. They are located to the south of the better-known neighbouring estates of Cliveden and Dropmore. This area of Buckinghamshire was much sought after during the C18 and C19 due to its proximity to Windsor Castle. There were also good connections by river and later the Great Western Railway to London; it remains popular today with the M4 to the south. Despite considerable growth during the C20, the area has a rural feel, with Burnham Beeches to the north and the vast areas of parkland surrounding Dropmore. There is however a constant threat of development from Slough and Maidenhead which continue to expand.

Of the three Marnock gardens the one at Hitcham House is probably the best surviving. Berry Hill has suffered considerable neglect and it is difficult to determine what Marnock worked on at Taplow Court.

#### **Berry Hill** (Registered Grade II Park and Garden)

Berry Hill estate is located on the southern edge of Taplow village a short distance from Taplow Court. It occupies a long narrow rectangular site which runs from north to south down the south-facing Taplow Hill. To the west it is bounded by fields which run down to the nearby River Thames and to the south by the Bath Road.

The land at Berry Hill was part of the Taplow estate owned by the Earls of Orkney which also included nearby Cliveden. The 5th Earl was declared bankrupt in 1852 and John Noble, a leading varnish manufacturer, bought Berry Hill in 1855. He only stayed 16 years and moved out in 1871.

On his arrival the garden of 1.5ha comprised of shrubberies and pleasure grounds. Robert Marnock was immediately called in to design a layout which William Robinson described as 'a fine example of the English or natural style' (*The Garden* 1872). By 1860 over 7 ha had been planted with transplanted standard specimen trees (see plan and tree list) and shrubs and flowering plants. Noble asked Marnock to create his gardens in the shortest possible time, which he managed to achieve, as the *Gardener's Chronicle* of 1860 (p 815) reported:

*'This affords a good example of successful transplanting and furnished a place in a short time. Four years ago, the gardens had little pretensions to distinction, their extent being little more than three acres ... The grounds now consist, however, of upwards of fifteen acres, beautifully laid out, and contain as fine specimens of Pines as can be found in places that have been established for centuries.'*

Noble left Berry Hill House in 1870 as it was too small for his large family and servants; the house was leased to family members and eventually sold in 1902. It became a country club in the 1950s, but burnt down in 1969 and was replaced by a block of flats, Berry Hill Court.

## **Gardens and pleasure grounds**

The head gardener during the 1860s was Alexander Rogers and he would have worked closely with Marnock on the planting schemes. During the early C20 gardener Fred Milsom continued to maintain the high standards required in this type of garden.

The main focus of the pleasure grounds is a 2-ha lake with gently curving banks sloping naturally into the water. Unfortunately the southern aspect of the lake has been compromised by the Thames flood alleviation scheme which encroaches on the SW corner of the registered landscape. At the northern end is a small island planted by Marnock with deciduous trees and surrounded by reeds and waterlilies. An isolated specimen of *Tamarix* is quite lovely by the edge of the water (*The Garden* 1872).

Marnock's work included the levelling of a platform in the NW corner of the site to support a small reservoir, probably associated with the supply of water to the rockwork.

### **Marnock's planting scheme**

A garden plan for Berry Hill was published by William Robinson in *The English Flower Garden* (1883).

Archival evidence of Marnock's plans for Berry Hill is to be found in *The Garden*, 6 January 1872, which featured a planting plan for a portion of the lake.

For list of trees and shrubs see Appendix 1.

According to the *Gardeners' Chronicle* (1860), the views of the grounds from the south side of the house were very pleasing, advantage having been taken of the fine meadow to the front on the SW side; the pleasure grounds continued all round, and included the lake. The soil removed was used to undulate the opposite part and to raise the ground where necessary to block out any unsightly objects from view. Near the house were various beds filled with the usual bedding plants. Walks were created along the banks of the lake so as to catch views here and there of the lake and the house. On the undulations beyond the lake were planted fine specimens of conifers, *Ailanthus* and hollies and evergreens mostly of a large size. These were transplanted at all times of the year and without the slightest trace of having been shifted.

### **Rockwork, James Pulham 1859–62**

To the NW side of the lake is an extensive area of artificial rockwork which in parts stands over 4m high. This was created by the second James Pulham, construction starting in 1859 and continuing into the 1860s. It was planted with small shrubs and rock plants, probably on the advice of Marnock. An artificial cliff was built to hide the nearby gas works, and the cave associated with it survives, however the waterfalls that tumbled over the rocks and the 7m jet of water no longer function. The planting included ferns, potentillas, roses, variegated vines, cotoneaster, magnolia, *tropaeolums* (*Nasturtiums*) and *Cupressus*.

The other main feature of the garden was a rustic fernery also constructed from Pulhamite (this was still in situ in 2013) and may have been the idea of Mr Veitch. It is a round structure, with three rustic arch entrances and a small fountain at the centre. It measures about 20 feet across and is sunk about 8 feet into the ground with a boundary wall extending about 18in above the ground level. The internal wall is made of rough projecting bricks which may at one time have been covered with tufa; there is evidence of numerous planting pockets. There are also square holes on the wall which could have been for the roof supports: such a structure is mentioned in the *Gardeners' Chronicle*. A similar Pulhamite structure complete with roof survives at Merrow Grange, near Guildford (Hutchings).

*'...here and there a glint of well-constructed rockwork, fringed and speckled as it should be with native and other pretty rock plants, and not by the shrubs which frequently cover such. It is an intriguing delightful lakeside environment; an expanse of water surrounded by splashes of colour, gaining interest from flowerbeds and specimen plants. There is also a remarkable rustic fernery, with none whatever of the glasshouse about it, either inside or out.'*

*Gardeners' Chronicle* 1866 pp.759–760

### **Kitchen garden**

The kitchen gardens are located behind the house and are hedged. They were designed by Edward Kemp (1817–91) in around 1855 on the site of an earlier kitchen garden. The original design (see *The Garden* Dec. 1871 pp.80–81) was intended for decorative effect. It no longer survives, and the glasshouses have gone. On his arrival Marnock took over from Kemp and it is possible he added finishing touches to the kitchen garden, which included flower beds and roses along the central walk and two specimens of weeping beech (one of RM's signature trees) which were trained to form an archway. The detailed plan was published in *The Garden*, Dec. 16th 1871, p.81.

### **References and Acknowledgments**

Thank you to Nigel Smales of the Hitcham & Taplow Society.

The late Claude Hitching for the Berry Hill article on the Pulham Legacy website  
<https://pulham.org.uk/2013/01/01/20-january-2013-berry-hill-buckinghamshire/>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1000135>

### **Current images: Claire de Carle**



Entrance to Berry Hill Court

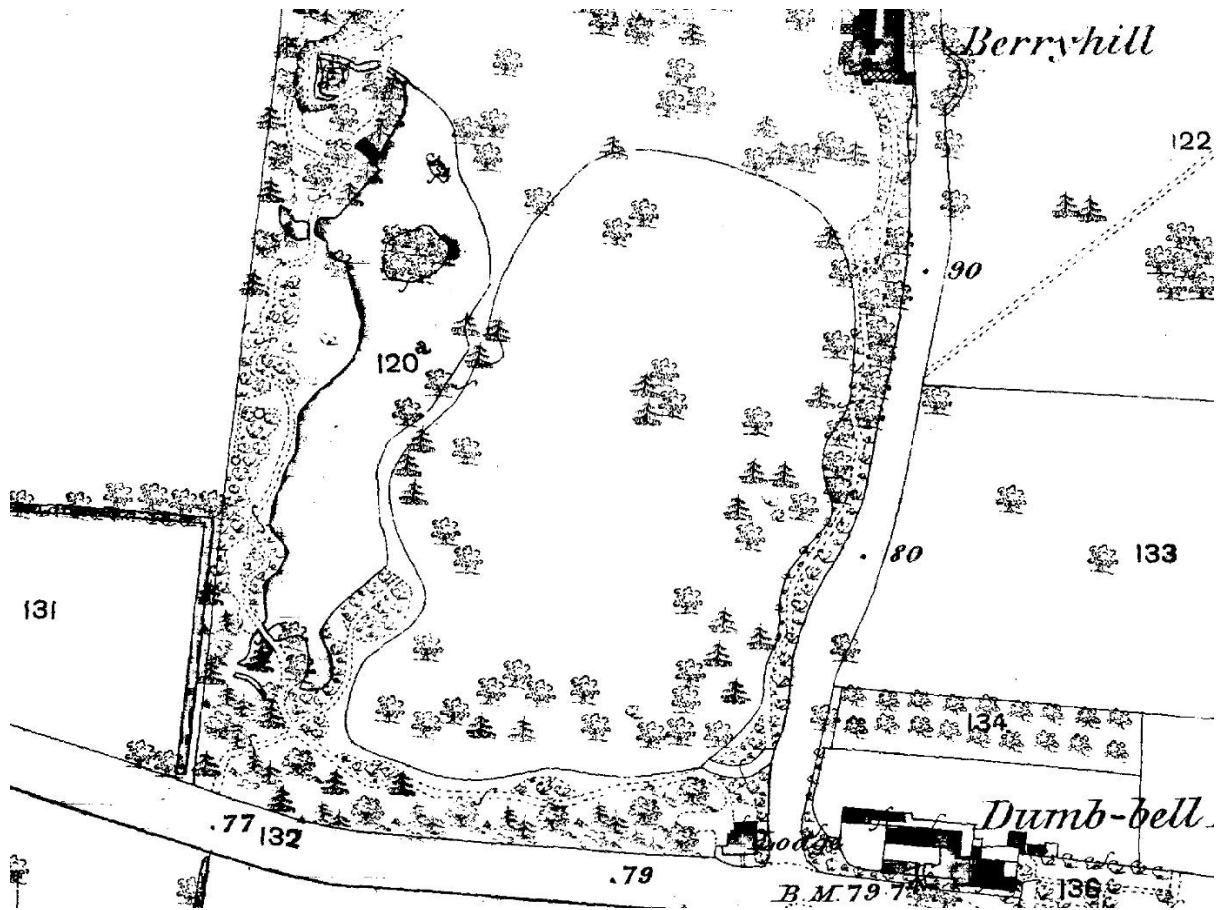


View towards the lake, flood alleviation scheme in foreground



View to the park with Berry Hill Court in the distance





1877 1st edn OS 25in showing detail of rockwork, north end of lake and tree planting (Bucks Council HER)



2003 aerial photograph (Bucks Council HER)



places, uninterrupted views across the open green, and in others fine glimpses of the castle from different points of view. As to flower-beds and flower planting, in the ordinary sense, there should be none of it. All must be strictly a nature garden; and nature, left alone, does her garden work exceedingly well. Over the broken walls of our ruined abbeys and castles she has hung, with unerring grace, her glistening mantle of ivy; not cropping its fringes either with the aid of the mechanic's straightedge or gardener's peg-line. And then she leaves portions of the hoary masonry free from the ivy-woven scarf, in order that, at sunny angles, she may plant in the crumbling crevices seeds of the golden wallflower, to shed its perfume over the scene of venerable decay, and that she may suspend graceful tufts of the creeping antirrhinum from certain joints of the dislocated stonework; while along the ridge of the ancient pampas she plants its more ambitious congener, the greater snapdragon, whose bold spikes of pink or crimson flowers form a gorgeous crest-work to old ruined walls. Rochester, too, has long been celebrated for an exceptional and elegant addition to nature's ordinary wall furniture; those old battlements being known as one of the few spots in England where the wild carnation is found; and many an enthusiastic field botanist has made a devout pilgrimage to the ancient castle of the Medway to gather specimens, destined to be long cherished among the choicest treasures of his herbarium.

Those ancient flower-wreathed walls, and the window-gaps in the great square keep—those "loops of time," whose crumbling sills have been long since replaced by mingled masses of flowers and ferns—should be allowed to give the keynote to the floral treatment of the green space of the enclosure. Hollows, in suitable aspects, may be naturally carpeted with primroses and wood anemones; others with blue bells, mingling tints with purple squills; while towering foxgloves, purple, white, and grey, may contrast their hues with the yellow and orange of the wild linaria on bright and sunny banks. And then, huge clumps of the pale golden daffodil might be made to light up the deeper parts of shadowy dells, and many other delightful natural features might be developed by careful, and not obtrusive, art. In short, nature may be aided, in the setting forth of her fair display, in such a manner as to conceal the aid afforded. Thus, wallflower and antirrhinum seed may be freely sprinkled in the crevices and along the ridges of the walls, and nature may be safely left to rear such of her numerous progeny as she chooses, while rejecting others; just as, after the thick planting of primroses, blue bells, foxgloves, and other of the queens of our native flora in what appear to be the most suitable spots, nature may be left alone, to extend or diminish the colonies so planted according to her own good grace, ever unerringly guided by the suitability of the situation and the soil. So treated, the ground about Rochester Castle may be filled with attractions of an elevating character, that will be in sweet and reposeful accordance with the scene of noble ruin. But, cut up in the glaring fashion of the tea-garden horticulture exhibited by the published design, it will become a desecration to the spirit of the place, and a disgrace to the city authorities, who permit the perpetration of such a vulgar piece of atrocity.

H. N. H.

[If Rochester wants a Rosherville, there cannot be the slightest objection; but, in the name of good taste, do not let it be made within the precincts of the glorious old Castle. The illustration will enable the reader to judge of this piece of "prize" garden design. The chief vices of "landscape-gardening" are well shown in it. The scarcity of tastefully-designed gardens in private places need puzzle us no longer, when a beautiful piece of ground, in one of the most hallowed spots in England, is thus violated. As an example of the true course to be pursued in such a case, we may point out the quiet and beautiful garden surrounding the Abbey and Roman ruins at York.—CONDUCTOR.]

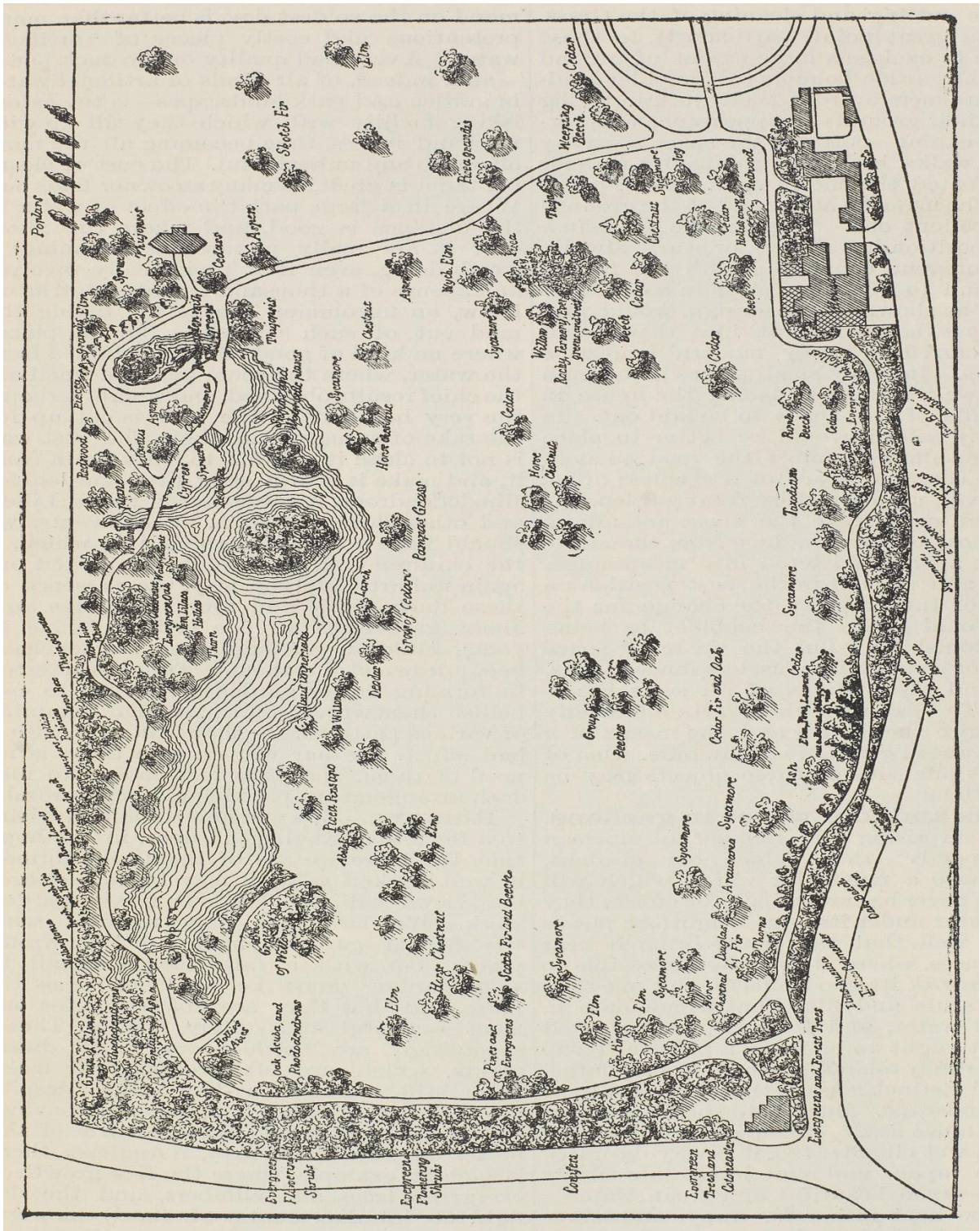
**The Odour of Box.**—So they walked over the crackling leaves in the garden, between the lines of box breathing its fragrance of eternity; for this is one of the odours which carry us out of time into the abysses of the unbeginning past; if we ever lived on another ball of stone than this, it must be that there was box growing on it.—*Eloë Yvonne.*

THE PLANTING AND LAKE MARGIN AT BERRY HILL.

WE this week engrave a plan of a portion of the pleasure-grounds at Berry Hill, to show the beautiful character of the planting carried out there by Mr. Marnock. The comparatively small portion represented enables us to show the planting much more clearly. Besides, this small portion of good work clearly shown and clearly understood will teach much more than a large plan, in which the eye is caught by walks, drives, and other details which, while they make a plan seem pleasing to some, are only fraught with danger to garden scenery. Here we are brought face to face with a graceful piece of water and a narrow slip of ground running between it and the public road, and we can study its treatment without having the eye of the tasteful offended or that of the injudicious beguiled by the geometrical twirlings which are unfortunately rarely absent from garden plans or gardens, but which have nothing to do with pure gardening. Our plan gives a clear idea of the planting, and also of the free and tasteful disposition of the margins of the water, but only a visit can give an idea of the charming effects of the scene from many points of view.

What are the merits of the planting, and the disposition of ground shown by the plan? 1st. The natural flow of the margins of the water. The true and natural way in which the banks slope into the water cannot be seen, but it helps to lend a great charm to the place. Two kinds of wretched water margins may be named in opposition to this: the railway bank-like margin, in which the ground rises stiffly and abruptly; and the French pseudo-natural style, in which the very edge, instead of being allowed to kiss the water, is plastered with a tarry compound, and made to look like a section from a newly-tarred ship's side, both in colour and curve. The kerf-stone style is nearly allied to this. The most violent example I know of it is in the public gardens at Boston, U.S. The line of cement and stones that guard the edge of the ornamental water in the Regent's Park for the past few years is quite as bad in its way, as may be seen from the suspension bridge near Hanover Gate. 2nd. The tufts of water plants, and isolated specimens and groups near the margin, are well selected and placed. An isolated specimen of the common Tamarix is quite lovely by the edge of the water. Dovaston's Yew, too, near the margin, and on one side slightly drooping over it, is very effective. Groups of stately water plants, like the Lythrum, Epilobium, and taller rushes, and of floating ones like the water lilies, are most effectively placed in various positions. 3rd. The formal lines which margin most of our ornamental plantations are unseen. Hence the most perfect ease. The scene is as free from stiff formalism as some quiet little lawn by the side of a mountain lakelet. 4th. There is a rich variety in the planting. No hasty glance suffices to exhaust its interest; no eye, however learned in plants, may not find a new friend or a fresh lesson. We have only been enabled to write the name of the family in many cases on the plan. The "group" is often a whole family of distinct species of our handsomest trees or shrubs. In some cases the ground beneath the trees looks much too bare; but in the smaller groups on the grass there is nothing in wild plant-life more lovely than the way the beds and groups of the various kinds of savin and other dwarf conifers send their shoots fearlessly over the short grass, and the way the American and other vines throw their long shoots over the low grassy banks. The grouping of the various families, too, is noticeable, as superior to the general mixture and dotting plan. 5th, and lastly for the present, the breadth of sweet little lawn preserved is the most noticeable feature of all. On the small lawn, fringed by tufts of Tamarix, trailing vine, and with the groups of heath and Kalmias, the effect would have been totally destroyed by dotting specimens. Now, from every point on it the varied planting towards the road is seen to the greatest advantage. Not less charming are the peeps through it and across the water to the open sweep of rising pasture-land on the opposite side. Some might suppose it needless to point out the advantage of this last feature. Not so! In the great majority of gardens, when a pretty new conifer arrives it is usually planted in some open green spot, and if the garden ever bore any evidence of thoughtful design, by perseverance





Marnock plan for Berry Hill (RHS Linley Library)

## Appendix 1 Trees and other plants planted by Marnock at Berry Hill

List compiled from planting plan and texts of *Gardeners' Chronicle*

Oak	Elm	Horse Chestnut	Scotch Fir
Beech	Sycamore	Magnolias	Cedar
Taxodium	Copper Beech	Sweet Chestnut	Willow
Wych Elm	Redwood	Tree Box	Larch
Douglas Fir	Spruce	Weeping Beech	Cyprus
Wellingtonia	Thuja gigantea	Aspen	Araucaria
Cherry	Cryptomeria elegans	Alder	Poplars
Cypress	Spruce	Thorns	English Yew
Chestnut	Ash	Birch	Cupressus
Laburnum	Picea grandis		



	Cotoneaster	Berberis	Arbutus
Trailing ivy	Tamarix	Heaths	Kalmias
Rhododendrons	Aucuba	Laurels	Ivy margins
Pampas Grass	Ferns	Spiraea	Trailing vine
Savin	Juniper	Lilac	Hypericum margins
Vinca margins	Reeds	Nymphaea	Waterlily
Roses	Potentilla	Yucca gloriosa	Ailanthus