Victorian good ideas?

What seemed like improvements to the Victorians have sometimes become problems for us today. Plants such as Rhododendron ponticum, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam have escaped from gardens into the wild. They are able to spread rapidly and smother native vegetation and wildlife.

William Morris was a Victorian artist, designer and thinker. He believed that people should live simply, and work at making the things they needed for their own every day lives. In this way their work would be enjoyable and fulfilling and their lives more meaningful.

He was inspired by medieval craftsmanship – he admired how buildings, furniture and decorative items like tapestries were made in the Middle Ages. He was also inspired by nature. You can imagine him wandering around the High Weald appreciating its timber-framed houses and stone churches, or getting ideas from the variety of wildlife and the colours and textures of the area’s natural features.

His wallpaper and textile designs usually featured birds, plants and animals painted in a medieval style. These are still popular, almost 180 years after his birth. He designed the furniture, carpets, fabrics and wallpaper for Standen, a Victorian house and garden in the High Weald that you can visit today.

Broadening the mind

The new railway system made travel easier for the Victorians. The beauty of the High Weald attracted all types of visitor and many writers and artists found inspiration here.

Imagery and Inspiration

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a Victorian group of artists, were friends with William Morris. Some of their members spent time in the High Weald making paintings. They wanted to show the beauty of nature in great detail and used intense, glowing colour. One of the group, William Holman Hunt, made a painting of sheep on a cliff in Hastings Country Park. It is called “Our English Coasts” and now hangs in Tate Britain, London.

Another group of High Weald artists was the Cranbrook Colony. They painted scenes of rural everyday life, but made things look rosier and more romantic than they really were. Their paintings were popular with wealthy factory owners in the Midlands.

High Weald

EVENTS

1841 Balcombe Viaduct built over the River Ouse on the London-Brighton Railway Line using 11 million bricks

1879 Durdham house bought by Alexander Bell

1880 Queen Victoria came to the throne

1885 Board of Conservators set up to manage Ashdown Forest

1890 Bicycles became popular for everyday transport

1891 Queen Victoria died, Edward VII became king

1899 Invention of the telephone

1900 London Exposition

1902 Heathfield and East Grinstead Electric Tram opened

1837 1840 1850 1860 1870 1880 1890 1900

High Weald

WHERE IN THE WEALD?

You can visit many grand gardens begun by Victorians. Find out where at:

www.highweald.org.uk/explore/attractions

Cycle, walk or ride along disused railway lines built by the Victorians at:

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/countryside/walks/cuckootrail/default.htm

www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/countryside/walks/forestway/default.htm

Exhibits at:

Cranbrook Museum; Eden Valley Museum; Hastings Old Town Hall Museum; Tenterden Museum; Tisbury Wells Museum; Rye Castle Museum; Yesterday’s World, Battle

More online at:

www.highweald.org.uk/Edward – video of a Victorian garden owner

www.wolverhamptonart.org.uk/collections/browse_collections/art/cranbrook

Picture credits: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/countryside/walks/forestway/default.htm

Humm... What this garden needs is a bit of Japanese Knotweed

The Laurels, Crowborough, Sussex

Dear Henrietta,

We are all nicely settled in our new villa in the High Weald. We have had the house completely redecorated, so may for the garden!

Nature is all well and good, but it is rather untidy, doesn’t you think? Nothing grows in the right place. I’m sure we can improve on that. I think we could do something with the ground. We’ve heard rhododendrons are all the rage, especially the type called Japanese Knotweed. I think, if I plant these, I can’t go wrong. The flowers will look splendid in my new Japanese vase in the drawing room.

– Agatha

You have a very nice letter from London it will be easy for you to visit us often. We can go on walking tours all over the High Weald. The rocks and gills here are rather like the highland glens so beloved of our dear queen and her prince consort. The heathy commons with their clumps of pine and gills here are rather like the highland glens so beloved of our dear queen and her prince consort. The heathy commons with their clumps of pine

Look at HER right at the front. Who does she think she is?

Mutton dressed as lamb!

Let’s have a butcher’s!

Wake me up when he’s finished.

The Laurels, Crowborough, Sussex

4th May 1885

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