

The Enduring Edwardian

GREYWALLS, EAST LOTHIAN, SCOTLAND

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Greywalls is situated close to the southern shore of the Firth of Forth, some fifteen miles east of Edinburgh. All that separates it from the water is a narrow band of sand dunes and the world famous Muirfield golf course. The house itself is adjacent to, though carefully screened from, Muirfield's clubhouse, home of the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers since 1891.

From the sunken lawn on the north side of the house, there are wonderful views of the golf course and, across the Firth, towards the Paps of Fife (the Lomond Hills). On the south side the eye is led along the main vista of the garden, through the *oeil de boeuf* in the perimeter wall, to the gently sloping, pastoral landscape with the Lammermuir Hills ('muir' meaning moors) in the far distance.

During my stay at Greywalls last September there was the almost mystical sight of early-morning mist lingering over the links, gradually burning off to reveal the surrounding landscape and giving way to the most glorious autumn day. The celebrated golf course and nearby sandy beaches were the *raison d'être* for Greywalls, built in 1901 as a holiday home for politician and sportsman Alfred Lyttelton (1857–1913) and his family. Its architect was none other than the English Arts & Craft maestro Sir Edwin Lutyens, who was responsible too for the layout of its eleven-acre garden.

Today the house and garden, one of only two Lutyens commissions north of the border, survive virtually intact – the very reason for it being designated Category A and for the garden being included in Scotland's *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*. (Some years earlier Lutyens had converted a property called the Ferry Inn near Rosneath, north-west of Glasgow, for Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, Queen Victoria's fourth daughter. It is

believed that the Princess's friend, garden designer Gertrude Jekyll, who first suggested she employ Lutyens to do the alterations.)

The 'wall-bit' of the name Greywalls immediately explains itself on arrival at the large forecourt: a symmetrical layout of simple lawns and paths is bound by both curved and straight garden walls. The story goes that Lutyens, coming to stay and finding flower beds on the front lawns, exclaimed that they were distracting from the beautiful lines of his favourite house. Needless to say, the flower beds were grassed over at once – resulting, alas, in today's a line of parked cars that tends to commit the same sin.

The house used to be called High Walls; exactly why it was changed to Greywalls is unclear, as the main building material is a cream coloured stone from a local quarry, with grey pantiles imported from the Netherlands. The same materials are used in the walls that surround the forecourt and adjacent garden, with arched doorways containing beautifully-crafted solid wooden doors.

The main garden is off to the east side of the forecourt, where a perimeter wall shelters the planting from the sea winds. Internal walls and magnificent holly hedges further divide the garden into various compartments with mostly herbaceous plantings. Having been allowed to outgrow their original position, the holly hedges have recently been cut back hard by, 'finally, a head gardener who was brave enough to do so', admits owner Ros Weaver.

It is tempting to speculate that Gertrude Jekyll, Lutyens's collaborator on so many gardens, was involved at Greywalls too. After all, Lindisfarne, where Lutyens transformed the castle into a holiday home and Jekyll designed the small walled garden, is only about fifty miles south. However, there is no documentary evidence to suggest that Jekyll had a hand in the garden at Greywalls. Even so, when, in 2000, it came to rejuvenating the rose garden after ninety years, garden designer Laura MacKenzie understandably let her planting

be influenced by Jekyll's ideas of warm and cool colour combinations – and very effective it is too.

While his children might have enjoyed the seaside, Lyttelton himself found little time to enjoy their holiday home. His duties as an MP and as Secretary of State for the Colonies kept him 'down south' and he soon realised that a more easily accessible country house would suit him better. There was another reason to sell the property: the various golf courses in the area attracted an endless stream of visitors and 'rural quiet was not to be attained, and I found life there even more exhausting than in London.' His wife Edith complained: 'It was a wrench to sell the place, with its garden full of roses, the glorious stretch of sea, the fine air, but to keep up a large house for the sake of six weeks in the year seemed extravagant.'

It was thus that the house was sold in 1906 to William James (1854–1912) and his society hostess wife Evelyn Forbes of West Dean in Sussex. It might well have been Lutyens who first alerted the James's to Greywalls as some years earlier he had not only converted West Dean but also built Jameses a completely new home, Monkton House. Even though the Jameses too just used Greywalls as a holiday home, with five young children they needed more room. While Lutyens was called back in to build two lodges to house staff, the architect Sir Robert Lorimer – often called 'the Scottish Lutyens' – was charged with building a new nursery wing.

'Willie James died in 1912 and after the First World War the property was let until, in 1924, it was sold to Sir James Horlick (1886–1972) of Horlick malted drinks fame.¹ Sir James's particular interest was in rhododendrons, but the conditions at Greywalls are not to their liking – hence Sir James moving on to Achamore gardens on the island of Gigha, where his breeding of the genus eventually gained him a Victoria Medal of Honour.

In the meantime, Horlick he had passed Greywalls on to his daughter Ursula who, after the Second World War (when the property was requisitioned) further developed the planting. In doing so she was much influenced by the elaborate gardens of nearby Tynninghame, then owned by the Earl of Haddington. It was Ursula who in 1948, together with her husband Col. Weaver, decided to turn Greywalls into a hotel.

Now, nearly seventy years later their son and daughter-in-law, Giles (a trustee of the Lutyens Trust) and Ros Weaver, continue to run Greywalls as a hotel. Although they have delegated the hotel management to a third party the Weavers have much interest in the gardens, ensuring that any developments are sympathetic to Lutyens' original Edwardian layout.

Editor's Note

The HORTUS garden tour to Lothian (10–14 September this year) will be accommodated at Greywalls, and we are delighted that Giles and Ros Weaver will join the group one evening, sharing with us their enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, this historic and much loved property. Full details from our long-standing travel associates Boxwood Tours. *Email* mail@boxwoodtours.co.uk; *telephone* 01341 241717.