

Top Houses and Gardens in West Sussex

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Worthing Herald and Littlehampton Gazette Article

3rd June 2021

Since 1996 we have enjoyed a pleasant small home in central Worthing at the corner of Ambrose Place and Portland Road, opposite Christ Church. When C-19 and rain allow, I am an enthusiast for the charming back gardens of Ambrose Place, opened for the National Garden Scheme fundraising for medical charities.

It is possible to stroll to the Town Hall, to the Pier and to nearby amenities, including the Dome. Tim Loughton and I as local MPs produced £10 as token money when the Trust was created to save it. Worthing Borough Council have contributed more to our country's greatest chalk garden, given by Sybil, Lady Stern.

Steyne Gardens and Marine Gardens are well-rated by Trip Advisor writers. I could add Beach House Park and Denton Gardens. Presently comes top for West Sussex are the Gardens at Highdown, renovated and well-presented by the experts and volunteers of Worthing Borough Council.

Before the current cycle of devoted attention, one reviewer contributed these lines: "In the summer the gardens are lovely . . . place to walk and just be. Love the ponds. The different plants and colours are amazing."

Gardens can be important to our leaders. Last week this newspaper's property focus was on a superb country house estate, subtitled 'Arts and Crafts country house with its own vineyard and stunning views of the South Downs'. When bishop of Arundel and Brighton, living at St Joseph's Hall in Storrington, the great beloved Cormac Murphy-O'Connor kindly walked with us around his gardens and grounds before family supper in the kitchen. We saw him regularly in his retirement. The new owner should cherish the parkland, landscaped gardens and the meadow.

Highdown Gardens reopened this week. Advance booking is needed for the first weeks. See the website [Highdown Gardens – A unique chalk garden](#) and read about its creator Frederick Stern. From 1909 and ten years later with the enthusiastic partnership of his wife Sybil, he showed what can be achieved in chalk. I have treasured a copy of his book *A Chalk Garden*.

He was knighted for his extensive services to horticulture. In his last year he wrote that the garden at Highdown was made as an experiment to see what would grow on the chalk soil of the Downs. Many of the plants were collected in the mountains of West China.

In addition to meeting members of the Stern family at the opening, I was delighted to listen to a knowledgeable volunteer, daughter of the head gardener some decades ago. She will have been impressed that her home in childhood is now the accessible visitors' centre, displaying fascinating memories of visitors, examples of sources of plants and charming descriptions of staying with the Sterns at Highdown.

Visit and try a meal or refreshment at Brunning & Price's Highdown pub and restaurant, led by Tom. At Highdown, I have watched sky larks ascend before fluttering back to earth. At the carpark I have enjoyed refreshment at Kerry's kiosk, looking on the town where many problems have been tackled successfully with the Council's help.

Great gardens in the county include Leonardslee, Arundel, Nymans, West Dean, the Weald & Downland display, Borde Hill, Parham, Denmans and Lodgers.

Contributions of Worthing Borough Council at Highdown have been matched by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Combining talent, commitment and cash paid for lottery tickets conserves and develops our heritage. Colleagues of our retiring chief executive of Adur and Worthing will appreciate how Alex Bailey has supported their enterprising approach to public service.