

the EVERYDAY GARDEN

**Dedication and
expertise have
ensured the
lasting appeal of
Monksgrange's
Gardens**

**Words and
pictures by
Gwen Wilkinson**

Had Adela Orpen the opportunity to see the results of her labour in the 1980s she may have wished to revise her earlier dairy entry with the warning: "Be afraid, it will grow very fast."

When Jeremy and Rosie Hill came to occupy Monksgrange, Adela Orpen's garden had indeed grown very fast. Having largely been neglected for fifteen to twenty years the garden had almost returned to a wilderness. Not only had laurel and bramble run riot but the restoration requirements were long and intimidating. Beds and borders required intensive clearing of weeds. Shrubs and trees needed pruning and shaping. Stone and brickwork had shifted and in many cases collapsed. Flights of steps and paved areas needed rebedding as they had subsided unevenly due to the growth of shrubs and trees. The Hill family is the ninth generation to live in the house since it was



built. Their committed responsibility to preserve and develop the house and garden as a whole is strongly reflected in the impressive restorative work they have achieved. Monksgrange house and garden lies on the lower slopes of Blackstairs Mountain in the North-West corner of County Wexford. The land faces just east of south, and the garden has the shelter of trees to the north, east and west, with the house affording southerly shelter. The history of Monksgrange stretches back to the 12th century when the Cistercians at Graiguenamanagh used the land as an outfarm (a grange). The house was built in 1769 by Goddard Richards, the 3rd son of John Richards of Raheen, Co. Wexford; the architect is unknown. It is a fine building of the Georgian style. The house sits comfortably at the end of a long tree-lined avenue underplanted with laurel and rhododendron. Its southerly aspect affords pleasing vistas of rich, open pastures, planted with mature oaks.

When Adela Orpen came to occupy Monksgrange at the turn of the 19th century

The Hill family is the ninth generation to live in the house since it was built. Their commitment to preserve and develop the house and garden is strongly reflected in the impressive restorative work.

she started the creation of a formalised garden. In the 1930s Iris Orpen, Adela's daughter, who was a keen amateur painter, developed the garden's formal structure by laying flagged and laid paths. The Sunk Garden, the Rock Garden, a Scree Garden and the Worm Pond were all her creations. Two grass tennis courts were made, and extensive planting took place.

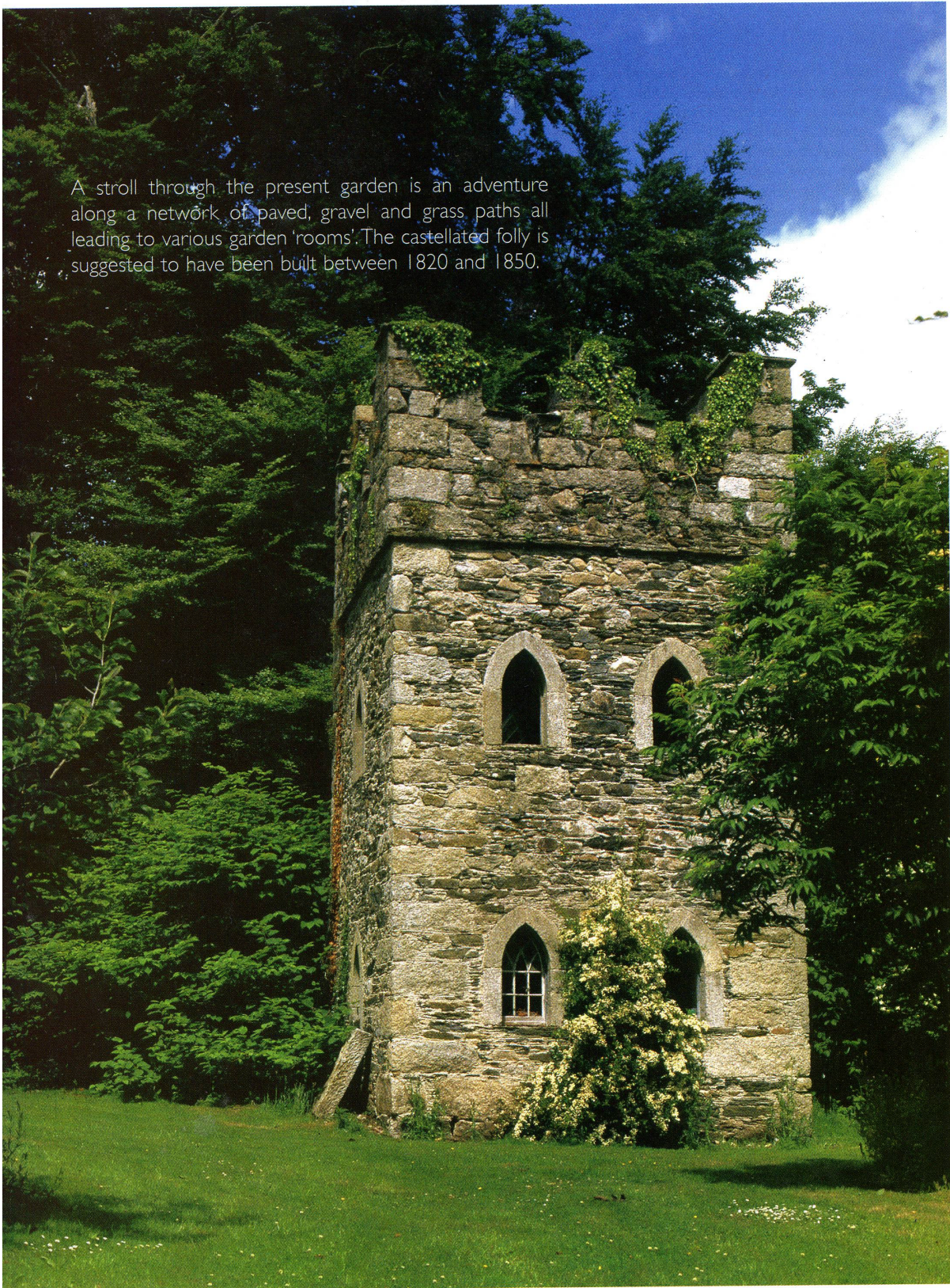
Iris Orpen was obviously a keenly interested gardener and aware of contemporary garden styles and design. Several books of Gertrude Jekyll's are in the house library including; *Wood and Garden*, by Gertrude Jekyll, 7th Impression, 1899 and *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden*, by Gertrude Jekyll, 5th edition, 1921. Evidence from Iris Orpen's notebooks in the house library includes lists of specimens, invoices for seeds purchased and detailed visits to Glasnevin. Dr. Praeger was a friend of the

opposite: Noon bronze by Hilda Roberts

top: The New Extension begun in 1912, abandoned, and now the Norman Gallery



A stroll through the present garden is an adventure along a network of paved, gravel and grass paths all leading to various garden 'rooms'. The castellated folly is suggested to have been built between 1820 and 1850.





opposite: The nineteenth century folly
above: St. Patrick in bronze by Melanie Le Broque
right: garden scenes



family and no doubt his knowledge was availed of. Through her knowledge of colour and form as a painter she was able to plan a garden with a skeleton in the form of paths, streams and paved areas from which to support the trees, plants and shrubs.

A stroll through the present garden is something of an adventure. A network of paved, gravel and grass paths leads to various garden 'rooms'. The castellated folly, situated to the rear of the three acre garden provides a strong focal point. It is suggested to have been built between 1820 and 1850. Though it has suffered years of neglect and is in need of re-roofing and new windows it has curiosity and charm. Shelter is provided by the mature hardwood trees to the rear of the garden, coupled with the extra sunshine of the south-east this generates a mild micro-climate that





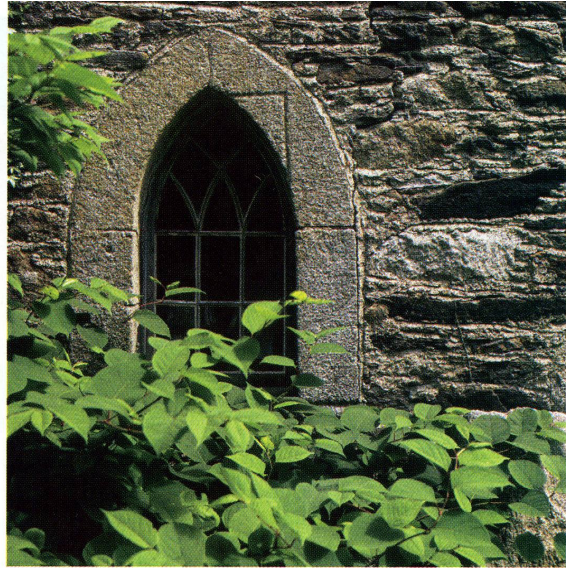


above: Iris Orpen in her garden at Monksgrange, circa 1930
opposite: Monksgrange House's impressive facade
below: Sculpture of Iris Orpen in galvanised wire by Gwen Wilkinson



"The Every Day Garden should be as near the house as possible; it is part of the family and not a visitor who sits with hat or muff in lap . conversing, a personality quite outside one's life. Such a visitor seldom or never brings brightness into the house when calling; on the contrary, more likely introduces a chill which has to be overcome on her departure by a sigh of relief and a poking up of the fire. Now the garden I speak of must bring brightness, cheerfulness and pleasure always and everyday. It also must be small to begin with. It must be like puppies and babies, very little and almost helpless at first so you can learn to love it by feeling that it depends utterly upon you and your care for its existence. Do not be afraid, it will grow very fast."

From the diary of Adela Orpen, 1922.



Monksgrange house and garden lie on the lower slopes of Blackstairs Mountain in the north-west corner of county Wexford.



permits many tender plants and trees to flourish in the acid soil: myrtle, embotrium and rhododendrons.

Jeremy and Rosie are both keen art enthusiasts. This particular interest has led them to adapt several aspects of the garden and house during the course of restoration. The first is the creation of a sculpture garden on what was originally one of the grass tennis courts. This open and bright gravelled area now displays pieces by a collection of artists, including the beautiful bronze statue *Noon* by Hilda Roberts. The second important development is the Norman Gallery. In 1912 an extension to the main house commenced but remained incomplete until recent efforts. The fine cut stone wing is now home to the Norman Gallery and hosts important art exhibitions throughout the year. ✽

Monksgrange is a private garden which opens occasionally to the public during the year. For opera and gallery exhibition details contact: Monksgrange, Rathnure, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. Tel: 054 55145.

