

# A Stroll Through Old Bladbean Stud Garden

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Scrolling through Facebook, I kept seeing posts with photos of a beautiful English country garden filled with roses, herbaceous perennials, and intriguing planting. Every time I saw a post showing a different view of the garden, I would stop and observe, thinking how clever the creator has been with the colours, textures and – I should imagine – fragrance, in the planting scheme. Having clicked through to the Old Bladbean Stud Garden page, I decided I had to find out more. With the opportunity to travel within the UK now opened up, this is a garden well worth a visit if you are planning a long weekend or holiday in Kent. Just over 12 miles from the historic city of Canterbury, meander down the country lanes that lead you to Bladbean, near Elham.

**T**he gardens are the work of Carol Bruce who started with an abandoned 1.2 ha (three acres) covered in waist-high weeds and broken glass in 2003. It was an ambitious project for someone with a degree in Economics; Carol had the analytical skills required to take on such an ambitious project, but as far as her horticultural skills were concerned, she had to learn as she progressed. Her vision was to create a garden that sits happily in its landscape, in a tiny hamlet set amidst beautiful surroundings. Carol's plan was to build five different garden rooms with one cohesive look and planting inspired by the local natural scenery. Her garden became her classroom as she delved into horticultural books, seed catalogues and websites on the internet. "Not all the plants I found from internet searches were suitable," Carol explains. "However, over the years my horticultural knowledge has grown, and I care for the garden single-handed. I have learned how to propagate plants originally grown from a pack of seeds and in parts of the garden, I encourage self-seeders

to grow freely. I have also replaced foreign species and named cultivars with their British wildflower counterparts raised from locally collected seeds.

"The garden is carefully managed, using minimal amounts of weedkillers, staking and mulches. Other than the vegetable garden, ▶

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unless a plant is newly planted or living in a pot it is never watered. Rather than fight with Mother Nature, I observe and fit in with her eco-systems as respectfully as I can.”

### So where did Carol start when she brought her vision to fruition?

The first two sections of the garden to receive attention were the Rose Garden and the Yellow Garden: using what was a rough area of ground, Carol designed a complex and intricate pathway for the Rose Garden as she wanted to be able to be immersed in the blooms and smell their intoxicating perfume. Landscaping and planting started in late summer of 2003 with planting completed the following March. Selecting over 80 varieties of roses, many of which are the Old English roses grown for hundreds of years and which are grown in clumps of three. Interwoven with perennials, irises, clematis, bulbs, and flowering shrubs, the roses produce a delightful tapestry of colour with their peak flowering time from mid-June to mid-July.

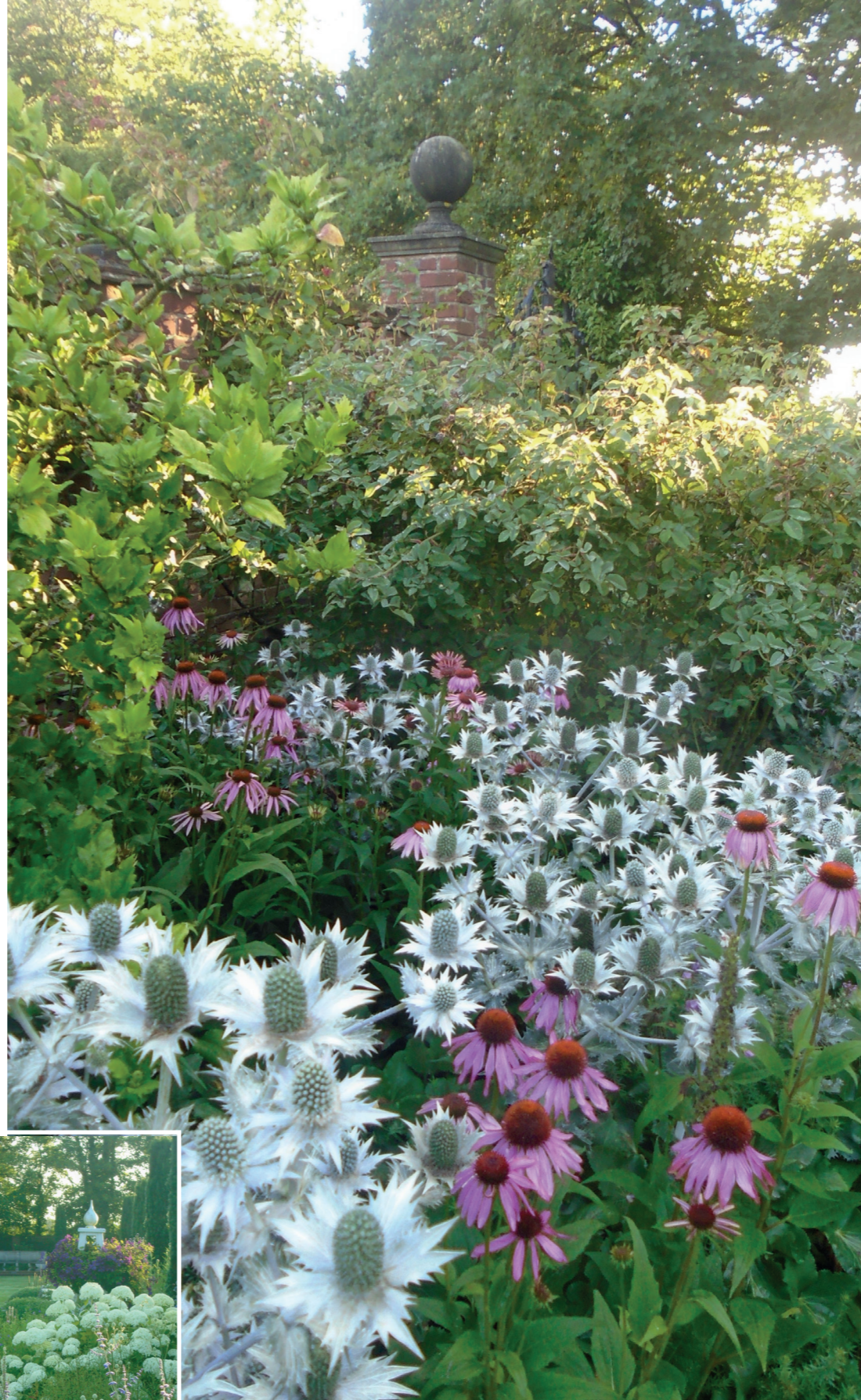
The Yellow Garden was designated as an area for calm, tranquil relaxation, in complete contrast to the other parts of the garden. Completely enclosed on all sides by evergreen hedging, Carol wanted to ensure that the pinks of the Rose Garden were kept completely separate from this part of the garden. When she first opened her garden to the public in 2012, this area became the tea garden. Over the years, the roses and shrubs have matured, and planting includes a mix of David Austin hybrid musk and alba roses, perennials in yellow and white and fragrant shrubs such as Philadelphus and Lilac.

Between 2009 and 2012, Carol completed the design and implementation of the two Mirrored

Borders. Taking three years of planning, the mixed borders are 90m long. Using rigid design rules, each plant appears four times with each border being a mirrored image. The restricted colour palette combined with planting in a symmetrical and geometric way, ensures that what could be chaos appears as an ordered border. Three plants which define the journey along the length of the border are bearded irises, clematis, and delphiniums. Large stone benches placed at each end of the central lawn encourage you to sit and enjoy the profusion of colourful plants. The colour palette has been selected to link the land and sky with plants in shades of silver, white and blue and it starts to look at its best in late May and early June. The season of interest continues throughout the summer and by early October the sedums and asters take centre stage. A new wall was constructed in the summer of 2008 as part of the Mirrored Border project with the Kitchen Garden laid out along the other side.

The final part of the garden for visitors to enjoy is the Pastel Garden. Acting almost as an entrance lobby to the other ‘rooms’, planting is designed to be viewed as you pass through; en-route to other parts of the garden. However, two white benches have been placed in this part of the garden so visitors can take time to enjoy the plethora of plants. This part of the garden was originally used as a grass tennis court with the lawn kept mown. Today it consists of beds forming a continuous ring around the central lawn with the plants selected as an artist pastel palette in shades of blue, mauve, pink through to white and yellow. This section of the garden is at its best in early summer.

Over the years, the construction of the Old Bladbean Stud Garden has been managed as cost-effectively as possible. Carol has learned



new skills and has developed her garden with the motto “Do it yourself and you get a skill, hire someone else and you get a bill.”

The garden is open at various times of the summer, check [oldbladbeanstud.co.uk](http://oldbladbeanstud.co.uk) for dates and more information.

# OX

## GOGGLE-OX

When did summer officially start? 28th June or 11th? Guess it depends if you prefer Love Island or the Euros (and that’s not to suggest it couldn’t be both). Forget foreign travel this year, we’re planning to be sofa-bound for the duration of this staycation.

Unlike football which can be teeth-gnashingly boring (England/Scotland anyone?) Love Island is guaranteed entertainment, not least because – much as it is touted as a reality show – the reality is this is entertainment; we are the Romans and they are the gladiators, in the ring for our amusement. And, if that sounds harsh it isn’t meant to. The mental health protocols have been ramped up this year, which is of primary importance. If we can have faith that the updated psychological support has been rigorously managed then appearing on Love Island can be a viable career move. ITV2 and ITVBe shows are populated by past contestants and just look at good ol’ Dr Alex; doing alright with his 1.9M followers and taking on the title of Youth Ambassador for Mental Health whilst working alongside ITV in their campaign to Get Britain Talking.

Once your eyes become accustomed to the sheer volume of butt-cheeks and tanned, toned flesh on casual display, you can’t fail to be entranced and intrigued by watching the interaction at play. Female friendships are usually championed (‘girl code’) and male vulnerability is explored. Any form of kindness is appreciated and rewarded, and (usually) any behaviour less than decent will be called out and judged. In 2018 the notorious Adam Collard’s behaviour brought the concept of gaslighting into the mainstream, with Women’s Aid using the relationship between him and Rosie Williams as a hook to highlight ‘clear warning signs’ of domestic abuse. Twitter was up in arms, and even his family issued a tweet decrying his behaviour. Love it or hate it, you can’t deny its influence and its ability to make vital conversations happen.

But enough, that’s not the point, is it? The point is beef, shade, bantz – the point is GOSSIP. Love it or hate it, Love Island is Event TV, dominating the scurrilous sidebars and infusing social media with memes, tropes, and a whole new vocabulary: pied, melts, grafting, mugging and mug-off, Factor 50 – anyone who loves language is doing themselves a massive disservice if they elect to scorn what is arguably the most vibrant linguistic-coinage factory beamed into our living rooms night after night.

Of course, it is questionable, but, in the words of many a contestant whose ‘head has been turned’ by a new arrival, ‘at the end of the day’ I’m a ‘loyal’ fan and ‘it is what it is’. And it’s a right ‘sort’\*.

\*sort – Love Island vernacular meaning physically attractive