

April 2021 Issue 42

HISTORIC GARDENS

Review



THE VOICE OF HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS WORLDWIDE



I Giardini di Firenze By Angiolo Pucci

Edited by Mario Bencivenni and Massimo de Vico Fallani
Published by Leo S Olschi.

Vol I. *I Giardini dell Occidente dall'Antichità a oggi*
403 pages. €38.00. ISBN 978-88-222-6374-2.

Vol II. *Giardini e passeggi pubblici*
549 pages. €48.00. ISBN 978-88-222-6398-8.

Vol III. *Palazzi e ville medicee*
642 pages. €48.0. ISBN 978-88-222-6422-0.

Vol IV. *Giardini e orti privati della città*
598 pages. €48.00. ISBN 978-88-222-6508-1.

Vol V. *Suburbio vecchio e nuovo di Firenze*
440 pages. €38.00. ISBN 978-88-222-6628-6.

Vol VI. *Comuni della cintura di Firenze. In preparation.*

Serious works on garden history in any language are relatively rare before the Second World War, so one can imagine the excitement of a modern garden historian discovering a huge and important work of garden history from the 1920s which had not reached publication at the time but had mouldered forgotten in an archive for 70 years.

Angiolo Pucci (1851-1934) was the last of a family of head gardeners in charge of Florence's public parks and gardens. On retirement he turned to teaching and lecturing and contributed to horticultural

encyclopaedias of the period. He dedicated the last twenty years of his long life to writing the history of the parks and gardens of (and around) his native Florence, and amassing a vast archive of drawings, pictures and, above all, photographs.

The work was known about at the time – his obituary referred to it – but no one pursued it. Then one morning in the 1980s a lady turned up at the Soprintendenza di Monumenti saying that she was Marta Pucci, Angiolo's grand-daughter and she possessed her grandfather's manuscript and picture archive.

Next, as in all good tales, a man walked into a bar and in chatting to the barman mentioned that he had been a printer and there was printed material of Pucci's book. Two garden historians, Mario Bencivenni and Massimo de Vico Fallani, who were in the course of writing their own book on Florence's public gardens (published 1998), heard about all this and negotiated to obtain the material.

The result has been that Pucci's original six volumes, brilliantly edited by the two historians, is being published by Leo S. Olschi with five volumes in print and the sixth in preparation.

To say that this is a historical treasure trove is an understatement. Pucci was a formidable scholar – volume I is a masterly summary of European garden history up to 1900 – and his picture archive, with a huge store of photographs of what are now lost gardens of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (including gardens in Britain, France and Germany), is a goldmine.

The rescue of this magnum opus by Bencivenni and Fallani is one of the major works of scholarship of the last two decades. If only the EU would finance an English translation.

Richard Mawrey



These Silent Mansions

By Jean Sprackland
Jonathan Cape. 226 pages. £16.99.
ISBN 978-0-22409-835-9.

Subtitled 'A Life in Graveyards', this is an evocative and poetic exploration of the cemetery and the graveyard, spaces that are familiar but unvisited. The author transports us on a journey through the tombs to discover the places that have been the touchstones of her life. As she travels into her peripatetic past, the graves, reflections, stories and ghosts condense, materialise, fade and disappear.

This beautifully written book melds anecdotes, nature notes, ecology and memories. Sprackland writes in a concise, lyrical and singular style about how, when moving to live in a new place, a visit to the local cemetery has helped her establish where she is. She writes carefully, picking her way between the tombs, slowly and diligently navigating the lost lives. As a poet, she is comfortable amongst the incised words that petrify stories into stone.

From the graves of slaves, smugglers, Lord Mayors, circus proprietors and a drowned boy she exhumes their stories. Researching the records of inquests, she recounts the randomness of death. Accidental deaths in a world before health and safety laws. She writes eloquently and evocatively about lichens, mosses and graveyard plants and how each has its own transient story, its own tiny interaction with death.

David Phillips

Florapedia

By Carol Gracie
Princeton University Press. 189 pages. \$16.95.
ISBN 978-0-691-21140-4.

Although not as droll as its sister volume *Fungipedia* (see HGR 40), *Florapedia* offers a similar enticing variety of facts not just about plants, such as the pineapple, but also about painters, parasites, physics, perfume and, inevitably, the pandemic. Both science and horticultural history are clearly explained, and Amy Jean Porter's line drawings, such as the one of lithrops (below), again add visual variety to the mix.

