

LADY ASTOR AND THE GARDENERS AT CLIVEDEN: 1920s–1950s

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Despite her considerable political, social, and family commitments, Lady Astor, the first female MP to take a seat in the house of Commons, was much involved in the running of the gardens at Cliveden and was extremely proud of their high reputation in the horticultural world. However, her volatile personality often made for difficult relations with her head gardeners. The article discusses these, as well as the size of the garden labour force and the tasks they undertook. The Cliveden gardens were expected to supply flowers, fruit and vegetables not only for Cliveden itself, but for the Astors' London and Sandwich houses, and for many friends and acquaintances. Where there were deficiencies in these, sharp reprimands were issued. The article concludes by considering the organization of the Cliveden Gardens during the Second World War and its aftermath.

'There could be few finer examples of the gradual modification of an essentially formal lay-out to meet the needs of modern taste in gardening fashions than the gardens at Cliveden ... A fine collection of shrubs and trees ... and ... attractive vistas to the windings of the Thames are by no means the least of the many charms and beauties of Cliveden.' G.C. Taylor in *Country Life*, 18 July, 1931, 68 and 74.

Nancy and Waldorf Astor moved to Cliveden in May 1906, following their marriage. The estate was a wedding present from Waldorf's father, William Waldorf, the wealthy future 1st Viscount Astor. It was situated on a wooded ridge, some two hundred feet above the Thames, and the mansion itself was surrounded by extensive gardens and grounds. It became a long-term project of the young Astors to improve and embellish these still further.¹ One writer has described the estate as 'the centre of the Astors' universe.'²

Lady Astor, as American-born Nancy became, has hitherto been seen primarily as a significant political figure in that she was the first woman to take a seat in the House of Commons, on 1 December 1919. After the death of Waldorf's father in 1919, her husband reluctantly relinquished the Plymouth constituency he had won for the Conservative Party in order to take his place in the House of Lords. Nancy was chosen as the Party's new candidate and she successfully contested the by-election held soon afterwards.³

Despite her extensive family, political and wider social commitments – she was one of the leading hostesses of the day – Nancy Astor took a keen personal interest in the gardens and grounds at Cliveden. She also attached much importance to the floral decorations both in her own houses and in those of friends and acquaintances. She frequently gave flowers, fruit and vegetables to her friends as well as to humbler acquaintances who had fallen on hard times or who needed a helping hand. They included a Mrs Thornton of Kennington Park, who was 'the old woman who [had] done the carpet mending at the House of Commons for forty years' before she was pensioned off. Instructions were given to William Camm, the then head gardener at Cliveden, in August 1928 that Mrs Thornton was to receive weekly supplies of fruit and vegetables. The gift continued until May 1938, when she died.⁴ In February 1930, when a new head gardener had replaced Camm, the supply was temporarily interrupted, and through her private secretary Lady Astor quickly reproved him for the omission: 'These are to be sent to her at once, and regularly until her Ladyship gives instructions for them to stop'.⁵

However, Lady Astor's involvement in the running of the gardens at Cliveden did not always make for easy relations with her staff, something her capricious nature perhaps made inevitable. As Frank Copcutt, the last of her head gardeners, commented drily in the 1970s, a decade after her

death: 'she was a real goer and she was very fussy but ... you had to stand up to her to do any good. She was a strong character'.⁶ He contrasted her approach with that of her husband. If Lord Astor 'wanted anything done in the gardens he asked if it was possible to do it, whereas her ladyship demanded that it be done'.⁷

William Camm was the first of the head gardeners appointed by the Astors. He arrived at Cliveden in October 1906 and initially his wife, Margaret, helped on the estate, too, working in the dairy. William remained until his death in February 1929 at the age of sixty-five. He was born in Yorkshire, but had lived in Sussex and Northamptonshire before moving to Buckinghamshire. When appointed his pay was £130 per annum. He was also given a substantial rent-free cottage and free vegetables. There were no other perquisites. In January 1915, as a result of wartime inflation, his wages were raised to £140 8s. a year and he also received £2 per annum as a Christmas present.⁸

Camm gave long and efficient service at Cliveden and was noted for his knowledge of trees. He was also an expert at packing fruit, so that grapes despatched to the Astors' London house arrived with the bloom still on them. In an obituary the *Gardeners' Chronicle* described him as 'a most capable gardener' whose 'love for the garden he managed so ably was so great that he rarely left it'.⁹ Yet this devotion did not exempt him from Lady Astor's criticisms. In July 1928, for example, she instructed the Cliveden agent, Hubert Smith, to 'take a look round the gardens when we are away and see that things are not neglected. The last time I came down, I found masses of brown roses on the terrace, that should have been cut ages before ... I was horrified and had meant to mention it sooner'.¹⁰ The following September she compared Camm's horticultural skills adversely with those of Sir Philip Sassoon's gardener, telling him that Sir Philip's tuberose were 'much fuller and an altogether better specimen than those grown at Cliveden.' She wanted Camm to find out from the gardener 'from whom he buys these and how he grows them. They are apparently produced in masses', while she was 'only able to have one or two at a time'.¹¹ Improvements were seemingly made, for just over two months later, she congratulated the head gardener on the beautiful tuberose he had grown: 'Do take great care of them'.¹² Earlier on, in May 1928 she had also been highly

critical when Camm had recruited a foreman on his own initiative, without informing her or the agent of his intention even though she had already given permission for a foreman to be appointed.¹³

However, the greatest rift between Lady Astor and the Camm family occurred shortly after William's death, when his widow was required to leave her tied cottage speedily, to make way for the new head gardener, James Glasheen. After the years of loyal service she and her husband had given to Cliveden, Margaret Camm wrote bitterly to Lady Astor protesting at her treatment:

I have been stunned ever since my dear husband's death but I think I am more stunned than ever that you should think of turning me out for the sake of 3 or 4 weeks when I could have gone out comfortably. You need not think I want to stay here, if I could have got a house to have gone into straight away & I quite understand you want the new gardener on the spot ... I would never have wrote this to you but I feel so upset that you turn me out of this house after all those years ... My husband & I ran the dairies successfully for a great number of years without any credit ... If he had only put his children before his work it would have been better for them all today, he did not go to the trade's (*sic*) men & ask how much commission he was to have before he gave them an order ... he has saved ... & brought up 8 children, was the straightest man that could live ... Dear Lady Astor I hope all your gardens will flourish & after 22 years of faithfull (*sic*) service I hope this gardener's wife will not be turned out like me.¹⁴

In a postscript she pointed out that in accepting the pension Lord Astor had offered her, she did not regard this as 'charity as myself & my husband had worked for it, do you forget the promises you made him in the war. I am Scotch & was not brought up on Charity.' Soon after this she moved to Luton. At the same time it seems the Astor children did their best to smooth over the differences. That included the two youngest boys, Michael and Jakie, who presented one of the Camm sons with a 'very nice watch'.¹⁵

On 4 April, 1929, Lady Astor acknowledged what she called Mrs Camm's 'amazing letter ... I hope that you will never write in that way to anyone again. I can only think that you were demented at

the time with sorrow and grief and the blow of it all had affected your reason.’ The previous Friday she had visited the Camm home and had seen some of Mrs Camm’s daughters but ‘we decided that it would be better for me not to see you, because of the embarrassment that the amazing letter you wrote me would cause you.’¹⁶ Clearly, Nancy Astor was not used to receiving such straight talking from a member of the ‘lower orders’.

Around this time, in the late 1920s, there were around thirty-two men working in the gardens, pleasure grounds and woods at Cliveden, including three foresters. Two bothies or hostels were provided for the unmarried gardeners, each accommodating about six men. One group worked in the greenhouses, and the others were employed in the pleasure grounds. According to Frank Copcutt, who was recruited for greenhouse work at the end of 1928, ‘you wasn’t a gardener in my day unless you lived in a bothy’, the merit of the system being that the young, unmarried men could move on after a year or two to another estate, thereby gaining experience, so as to obtain eventual promotion.¹⁷ Most of the married men lived with their families in cottages on or near the estate. Unlike the indoor servants, who often moved around with their employers, as they migrated from one of their homes to another, these outdoor workers usually

spent all their time on the estate itself.¹⁸

At that date the gardens and woodland at Cliveden covered about 450 acres, and the tasks of the gardeners were carefully subdivided under the general supervision of the head gardener. He, in turn, was answerable to Lady Astor and the agent, Hubert Smith. Twelve of the men worked in the greenhouses, three in the kitchen garden, and two in the fruit garden, while the remainder were employed as woodmen, carters or within the main pleasure grounds, these last including wooded walks, a tennis court, a cricket field and other sporting facilities.¹⁹

Previously Frank Copcutt had been employed by the Rothschilds at Waddesdon Manor, where his father was also a gardener. Initially he contrasted the Cliveden facilities unfavourably with those he had been used to: ‘With the Rothschilds I only had to express a wish for something and it was provided.’²⁰ Doubtless this difference arose partly from the fact that Lady Astor’s interest in the gardens was combined with a strong emphasis on the need for economy, and that meant, for example, she was often reluctant to purchase a sufficient supply of bulbs or to buy in plants and shrubs if these could be raised at Cliveden itself. In July 1930, Glasheen, the new head gardener, was firmly told: ‘I do not think that we need any more Labur-



FIGURE 1 The gardens at Cliveden, early 20th century (*University of Reading, Special Collections*)

nums ... or Spireas, and I should not think that Lilacs are necessary.²¹ Her penny-pinching attitude even extended to the bothies, as, for instance, in October 1931, when she asked the agent whether it was worth paying for the table cloths in the bothies to be washed: 'It seems to me just a waste. I wonder if you would ask Mrs Smith if she could find some of that pretty American oil cloth ... or something like that. It would always be clean, which the cloths cannot be and would be much cheaper in the long run.'²²

Again, at the end of the 1930s, when John Young became head gardener, at a higher rate of pay than she had first proposed, her private secretary wrote to inform him that 'Lady Astor was coming' to Cliveden on the following Thursday, 'and will want to look over everything with you on Friday. Her Ladyship would like you to be prepared to tell her exactly where you think expenses can be cut down.'²³ Perhaps in response to this new economy drive, some of the garden staff seem to have left. The man who looked after the herbaceous borders was the first to go, but according to the agent, Hubert Smith, 'another man [was] leaving from the Glasshouses', early in May 1939.²⁴

At the beginning of 1929, around the time Frank Copcutt came to Cliveden, Tamplin, the then decorator or flower arranger, left for a better post elsewhere. Copcutt was now appointed decorator, alongside his greenhouse duties. Not surprisingly, aware of Lady Astor's volatile temperament, he was somewhat apprehensive. His only previous experience of this work at Waddesdon had been when he helped the foreman with some of his indoor flower and plant arranging. Lady Astor bluntly informed him that his predecessor had stayed for six years, and she expected him to remain even longer – which in fact he did.²⁵ Fortunately Frank quickly showed a flair for the work and was a successful decorator both at Cliveden and at the Astors' London home, 4 St James's Square. In the 1970s he described how his daily round as flower arranger started at 7 a.m., when, if the family were in residence, he went to the house and watered and arranged the floral decorations and plants downstairs:

That all [depended] how much of the house was in use how long it took me. The thing that would hold you up would be getting to the ladies' bedrooms. If you had flowers in the ladies'

bedrooms you had to wait till they came out before you could get in. Then I went back to the greenhouse ... I went back later on to arrange the lunch flowers ... She might have a lunch party. Well then it was more flowers to do, ... more vases ... then I wouldn't go back till the evening, and ... there would be fresh flowers again on the dining room table for the night.²⁶

Although nominally subordinate to the head gardener, Copcutt received most of his orders direct from Lady Astor. He also had to travel to London each week with flowers for the St. James's Square house. He found the dining table displays particularly difficult, since Lady Astor was likely to interfere with these, even when they were in place. 'Before I travelled up' to a dinner party in London, he declared,

it was my business to find out what dinner service was to be used, because my flowers and plants would have to blend in with it ... Another of her ladyship's foibles was her dislike of fern ... Lady Astor wouldn't have anything of any size on the table; it interfered with her talking to and looking at her guests ... The oval tables at St. James's Square were hard to cope with. I'd have to climb on to them to get the centre decoration arranged, and there'd be the footman around shouting advice, sometimes abuse.²⁷

On one occasion, however, when Frank had arranged a particularly original display involving the use of water-lilies for a dinner for the Prince of Wales, he did receive rare praise. Two or three days later when Nancy was at Cliveden, she told him that some of the guests had said that while they enjoyed meeting the Prince of Wales, 'they'd enjoyed seeing my plants and flowers more – and particularly those beautiful lilies.'²⁸

The picking, packing and arranging of fruit for dinner parties was also one of the decorator's tasks, and that included displays of grapes, peaches, nectarines and 'glorious "black" strawberries', all of which were grown on the Cliveden estate.²⁹

Another of Copcutt's duties was to provide Lady Astor with a daily buttonhole of white sweet-scented flowers for her to wear when she went to the House of Commons. Should these fail to arrive, a sharp reprimand was soon issued.³⁰ Special buttonholes and sprays had to be prepared for the



FIGURE 2 Cliveden flower arrangements (*University of Reading, Special Collections*)

large number of guests staying at Cliveden during Ascot week, this being one of the social highlights of the Astors' year. 'There would be a large selection so that the ladies could choose those that went with their colour scheme for the day. The carnations for the men were again all different colours and sizes.'³¹

In the 1970s Copcutt described the daily routine of the unmarried men who lived in the bothies between the two world wars. The Astors supplied the furniture, bed linen, heating, cleaning and cooking for the residents. A housekeeper came in each day to carry out the domestic chores, while vegetables were also provided. But the men had to buy the rest of their food, including three joints of meat a week and bacon from the local butcher. As the housekeepers did not come in on Sundays, they always had cold meat on that day: 'the duty man had to cook the potatoes, and you cooked your own breakfast.'³² The 'duty' man was recruited on a set rota each week from among the bothy workers and was primarily responsible for regulating the heating and ventilation, of the greenhouses during that period. Accommodation in the bothies was cramped, with two men sharing a bedroom, and there was a communal sitting-cum-dining room.³³ A club was provided for all the estate workers, although few indoor servants were able to attend.

There whist drives and dances were held, there was billiards, and the younger men joined football and cricket teams. Refreshments were on offer and although Lady Astor was a strict teetotaler, she allowed a limited amount of alcohol to be sold in the club bar.³⁴ Parties were held for the servants from time to time, for example to celebrate the Astors' birthdays in May and at Christmas.

The wages of the gardeners and other estate workers were based on those paid to agricultural labourers and, like them, they were not eligible for unemployment pay if they lost their job. That helped to end the bothy system since with the heavy unemployment of the 1930s men were reluctant to move to another estate in case they were made redundant. According to Copcutt, as a decorator he was paid £2 a week in the early 1930s, while the foreman earned £2 2s. or £2 5s. a week, and the greenhouse men £1 15s. But surviving records for March 1939 reveal a more complex picture, with the then decorator receiving £1 16s. a week; the other greenhouse employees obtained between £1 1s. a week for a boy and £1 17s. for the most senior man, while the foreman got £2 2s., and the new head gardener, John Gault, £4 10s.³⁵ Lord Astor was, however, more enlightened than many estate owners at that date, since he allowed his gardeners and outdoor men a week's holiday before

that became common practice for manual workers.³⁶

After the death of William Camm in February 1929, James Glasheen was appointed the head gardener. He remained until early in 1937, when he retired to Slough, having almost reached the age of sixty-five. He gave as his reasons for leaving, his age and the heavy responsibility of looking after such a large and prestigious property as Cliveden. He wrote to Lady Astor on 15 January, 1937, humbly proffering his resignation and expressing regret at leaving 'your beautiful Gardens and Grounds (which are in first rate order) but perhaps a younger man would manage somewhat easier than one my age'. In a subsequent letter, dated 2 February, he declared his willingness to stay on until a new man had settled in: 'I have no wish to run away from Cliveden, and shall no doubt be sorry when the time arrives as I shall still have to work (or starve) and could have done so perhaps in a smaller place'.³⁷ Subsequently he was asked to advise some of the head gardeners who succeeded him, or to give temporary leadership when they left, before a new man was appointed.

In the early days Glasheen encountered problems in his dealings with Lady Astor, notably over the quantity and quality of vegetables and fruit supplied to the kitchens at Cliveden and in London, and over the flowers provided for the Christian Science Reading Room and Church in London which she attended. In July 1930 she drew attention to the inferior grapes being sent from Cliveden to St James's Square: 'The grapes which are coming up are so wizened and dried up, I can hardly believe that they came from Cliveden. I can understand their being small, but I do not understand why they are so dried up'.³⁸ Three years later, her private secretary wrote to complain about the peas: 'They are too large and are flavourless. Her ladyship only likes green peas when they are young and small and she thinks that the trouble is that you are producing the wrong variety.' Difficulties arose also over the supply of plants and fruit for the family when they were staying at Rest Harrow, their seaside home at Sandwich in Kent. On 9 September 1930 Glasheen was peremptorily informed that Lady Astor could not understand why 'only ... two melons' had been sent there, when she had seen 'the large number of melons ... at Cliveden ... Will you please see that ... these ... are sent down at once.' Mention was made, too, of

the fact that the 'tuberoses' despatched to Sandwich had been 'covered with green insects', and she hoped he would 'keep an eye on these and see that they are cleared and that this does not happen again'.³⁹

The appearance of the flowers supplied caused still more trouble. As early as December 1929, Glasheen was told to improve the packing of those sent to London. 'The gardenias have arrived here bruised and battered. I have had gardenias sent to me for years from Camm, and never have they come in such a state. He used to manage to send them in perfect condition. I am sorry to have to speak about this, ... but will you please try some other method of packing them, or find out how Camm packed them'.⁴⁰ Nonetheless the greatest tensions arose over the flowers supplied to the Christian Science Reading Room and Church each week, with allegations that they were half-dead or so badly packed that on arrival they were useless. All of the head gardeners experienced this difficulty. Typical of the general tone was a letter sent to Glasheen on 8 February 1933, stating that the blooms he had dispatched were 'much too full blown, so that when they arrive they are not worth the carriage on them, and are seldom fit to be used at all. It is ... very bad indeed for the reputation of the Cliveden gardens ... please see to it at once.' On 12 April in the same year it was the lilies which were at fault. They were not only insufficient in quantity but 'not fresh and were dead by Sunday evening'. The following 19 May, the poor state of the lilac caused a problem. 'Surely we can do something to prevent this happening week after week,' wrote the private secretary, 'it is so bad for her Ladyship's reputation in the Church, more particularly when people come to the house and see the beautiful flowers we have for our own use'.⁴¹

In 1931 steps were taken to sell produce from the Cliveden gardens when the Astors closed the house between February of that year and April 1932, apparently in an effort to reduce expenditure. This was despite Waldorf's great wealth; when he died in 1952 his estate was valued at almost a million pounds.⁴² In an effort to get the best value for money from the sales, Lady Astor told Glasheen that she was arranging a meeting for him with the gardener employed by a Mrs Arthur James: 'She has had to do as we have, and she tells me that they are making quite a lot of money out of their flowers.' She then added: 'I don't think that we

need send Mrs Tree [her niece] more than a dozen lavender and rosemary, and you can send them at once. Perhaps we could sell the others'.⁴³ During November 1931, Lady Astor also complained to Hubert Smith, the Cliveden agent, about the size of the greengrocery bills incurred during June and July by the London household. Glasheen was to send a weekly list of the vegetables and fruit available in the Cliveden gardens and greenhouses, 'so that we can know what to order for the coming week. I am determined that Cliveden shall produce what we need, and that all this money shall not be wasted on buying things which are going to waste at Cliveden. Please be very firm with Glasheen about it.' In reply, Smith defended the head gardener, pointing out that fruit and vegetables were being sent to London two or three times each week – in fact as often as was required: 'the quantities of the different kinds of produce sent being what was actually ordered. Neither Glasheen nor I had any idea that considerable purchases of fruit and vegetables were being made at the same time in London. If I had known I should have pointed out at once that we already had a considerable surplus, and that it was absurd to buy in London what we were actually marketing at Cliveden'.⁴⁴

These criticisms were to resurface in an even more acute form under Glasheen's successor, John Gault, with complaints in April 1937 about the shortage of onions and carrots, and in June about the insufficient supply of strawberries.⁴⁵ The following July, Lady Astor wrote to Smith to draw attention to the dirty condition of the greenhouses. She asked him to keep Gault 'up to the scratch about the condition of the pots etc. The houses are nothing like they were in Glasheen's time. Also I should be glad if you would have a look at the Tennis Court and have it cleaned ... Do impress upon Gault that this is his responsibility'.⁴⁶

Gault was recruited in March or April 1937 to succeed Glasheen. He seems to have come from Stoke Place, Slough, which was a much smaller property than Cliveden. From the beginning he was criticised by Lady Astor, as in July 1937, when she stressed the necessity of his sending a list of the fruit and vegetables that were available each week to the kitchens and stillrooms so that both the chef and the London and Cliveden housekeepers could order accordingly. Most of these complaints were mediated through the agent, and she expressed regret that this should be necessary, 'but I am very

anxious to get Gault into his stride, and to have him understand the standard, we [expect] to be maintained'.⁴⁷

Meanwhile Frank Copcutt was continuing to work at Cliveden and although he was promoted to foreman, he still seems to have been responsible for the flower arranging in the house as well. Perhaps he had become tired of this dual responsibility, or he wanted promotion to head gardener, but in the autumn of 1938, without giving warning to Lady Astor he applied successfully for the post of head gardener at Old Warden Hall, Biggleswade, in Bedfordshire. He was probably anxious to get a pay rise, as well as increased responsibility and status. Hubert Smith thought he would be probably earning an extra £1 a week by making the change, but his departure came as a great shock to Lady Astor. She expressed the wish that he had spoken to her before he decided to move: 'I do hope though you won't go until we have got suited because I think that is only fair to us and to yourself. I shall be very sorry to lose you, as you know'.⁴⁸ Soon after he had left, Copcutt wrote to Lady Astor to thank her and Lord Astor 'for the most generous gifts you have made to my wife and I this week. The Lamp will always remind me of the very happy days I spent at Cliveden and the Cheque I intend to bank as soon as I have cashed it. In leaving I have lost none of my respect for you or your family'.⁴⁹

Through the years Frank remained in touch with Cliveden, the Astors and their garden staff, but it was not until the end of the 1940s that he returned to the estate as head gardener. His time with the Shuttleworth family at Old Warden Hall seems to have been happy, but in his oral account of life at Cliveden between the wars he made no mention of the fact that he had left for this long period.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Lady Astor's dissatisfaction with John Gault was mounting. When he suggested hiring a specialist decorator to replace Copcutt, Lady Astor coldly replied that he 'must select one of your men in the bothy and get Frank to train him for the next month. Frank did the decorating when he was doing his bothy work. I believe you have a good idea of decorating, and no doubt you could do so, but it is never a Foreman's job'.⁵¹ In practice, of course, Copcutt had been combining the work of foreman with that of decorator.

Eventually in March 1939, Glasheen was asked to come to Cliveden to report on the state of the box hedges and of the glasshouses and the conserva-

tory, and to offer advice. According to the Cliveden agent, he suggested that 'the flowering shrubs and trees in pots ... have had insufficient attention, especially as regards pruning and cutting back.' Should he be formally recruited as an adviser, 'he told me he gets a guinea a day when he makes reports on gardens, or 1/6d. an hour when doing shorter jobs by the hour.'⁵²

In these circumstances it was not surprising that on 4 April 1939, Lady Astor wrote to Gault, dismissing him. 'I feel certain that it is best for us both, and I am hoping that you will find a good place, and one which will prove more suitable than ours.' She then added sharply: 'I am afraid Mrs Gault does not like your being in private service, but I hope very much that you will not allow her prejudice to stand in your way, for the sake of your career ... Glasheen will take over from you, as I believe that will be easier ... I told you last year that I hated having to complain all the time, but on a place the size of ours it is really essential that we have a more experienced man.'⁵³

This time great care was taken to recruit a well qualified successor to Gault. That included making enquiries among several of Lady Astor's friends and consulting, among others, Mr Wright, the highly skilled gardener at North Mymms Park in Hertfordshire. In fact, steps were taken to consult him even before Gault was dismissed. Wright replied, recommending John F. Young, gardener at Bolton Hall Gardens in Yorkshire. But he firmly stated that the new man would be unlikely to come 'for the salary you offer i.e. £3 15s. [a week] rising to £5 within a space of two years.' He was certain that £4 5s. a week would be needed as a starting salary. He also pointed out as 'a very great drawback' the fact that the Cliveden head gardener had to 'pay for his own electric light and coal. These are usually supplied'. According to Wright, 'the man he had in mind would expect these concessions.'⁵⁴

Seemingly the concessions were made for on 1 April, Young accepted the position and arrived at Cliveden later that month. However, despite his good qualifications and his avowed intent 'to produce Fruit, Flowers, and Vegetables for your requirements', Lady Astor was soon finding fault. On 7 June, she noted that the grapes did not seem 'very sweet at the moment, and I wonder if we are not picking them too early.' Again, on 19 July, the private secretary commented on the poor packing of the fruit sent, with 'practically every peach badly

bruised ... Her Ladyship wishes you to find out how the fruit has been packed previously; I believe each peach was packed separately in cotton wool.'⁵⁵

John Young remained at Cliveden during the difficult early years of the Second World War, which broke out on 3 September, 1939. As in the First World War, a Canadian military hospital was established in the grounds at Cliveden, causing inevitable disruption to the estate routine. The Astors themselves spent a good deal of time in Plymouth, which was badly ravaged by the war. On the narrower gardening scene, some of the glasshouses fell into serious disrepair, so that as early as January 19 1940, Lady Astor wrote to the agent, 'I did not realise that so much of the glass was out, and now our geraniums are frozen. This is one of the things which it seems to me calls for better judgment'. Hubert Smith replied coldly that he had pointed out two years before the unsatisfactory condition of the large greenhouse, but it had been decided 'owing to the cost not to have the work done'. By implication that had been Lady Astor's decision.⁵⁶

Heating of the greenhouses was soon restricted by Government decree, to conserve fuel, and there were staff shortages. Cuts had to be made, and in September 1941 Smith and Young suggested 'tomatoes and lettuces grown in the greenhouses should prove profitable and would require little heat'.⁵⁷ By 1941 two female gardeners had been hired, and the total garden staff now numbered fourteen males and two females, the latter both working in the greenhouses and paid £2 10s. and £1 17s. per week respectively. Young, as head gardener, was paid £5 2s. 3d. a week, and one of his underlings, who combined work in the kitchen garden and on the roadways and paths with chimney sweeping, received £2 16s. a week. It was proposed that labour in the greenhouses and in producing cut flowers should be reduced further, thereby permitting a few men to be transferred with advantage to White Place, the estate farm, to replace some of the 'schoolboys' who were helping there.⁵⁸

In the summer of 1943, Glasheen had to be called in to help two or three times a week when Young was away ill.⁵⁹ In January of that year the Ministry of Fuel and Power had issued further instructions prohibiting the use of fuel for heating greenhouses 'other than those which are used

solely for raising tomatoes and vegetable crops.’⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the pressures of the war years were causing tensions among the depleted garden staff, with Young expressing dissatisfaction with the attitude of one of the under-gardeners, a man named King. According to Hubert Smith, the problem arose from a clash of personalities: ‘The older men seem able to put up with Young’s somewhat brusque manner in a way that fresh men cannot’.⁶¹ This time matters were smoothed over, but early in 1944, their mutual ill-feeling led to King’s departure. Then, to Lady Astor’s annoyance, on the very day that he left Young also gave in his notice, ‘for no reason at all. When I pressed him he said it was because he thought I was going to give him notice! As soon as I got back I went to see him, but he [was] firm’.⁶²

In these difficult circumstances a new head gardener, O. Huckson, was quickly appointed, with Glasheen employed to help and advise him. However, after a few months, Lady Astor’s concern about costs reasserted itself, in that she seems to have made critical comments to Huckson about the high pay being received by Glasheen. The old man reacted furiously in July 1944, pointing out that his daily rate of £1 10s. involved nine hours ‘away from home’ and had been agreed with the agent before he took up the work. He further pointed out that without his help, Huckson could not have coped with all the necessary tasks.⁶³

Lady Astor attempted to placate him, itself doubtless a sign of the tight wartime labour supply, by emphasising that ‘nobody has appreciated your work more than we have’. But he was not mollified and although she expressed a hope that he would return to Cliveden, should he be needed, there is no evidence that he did so.⁶⁴ It was, therefore, amid some acrimony that Glasheen’s links with the estate were severed. They had lasted, on and off, since the death of William Camm in 1929.

Huckson, too, had his disagreements with Lady Astor in the late 1940s, although by now she was taking a less personal interest in the Cliveden gardens. Under pressure from Waldorf, she had agreed reluctantly not to contest the 1945 General Election, as he believed that in what turned out to be a Labour landslide she might have been defeated. Whether that would have been the case or not, she harboured a grudge against her husband for the decision and, according to her lady’s maid, she spent most of the succeeding years travelling,

or at the family’s seaside home at Sandwich, where she could indulge her passion for golf.⁶⁵

Nonetheless she came to Cliveden from time to time and on 30 November 1948, Huckson tendered his resignation as head gardener, ‘following our conversation of yesterday’. It was to take effect from 1 February, 1949. ‘I will vacate the House on that date if I can obtain a suitable post in the meanwhile’.⁶⁶

That laconic statement did not suit the volatile Lady Astor and she promptly informed him that as his resignation had been accepted by the Cliveden agent on 1 December 1948, his services would terminate on 1 January 1949. ‘I hope very much before that date you will have got a good place, as we must get the new man in by the middle of January’.⁶⁷

It was at this point that Frank Copcutt returned to Cliveden. His former place of employment, Old Warden Park, had become an agricultural college, set up by his mistress, Mrs Shuttleworth, to commemorate her only son, who had been killed in 1940 serving in the RAF. Although Copcutt had continued to work at the college, he was clearly now ready to take on the responsibility of the Cliveden gardens, despite its depleted work force. Even on 22 August 1956, there were only fourteen gardeners employed, including one girl and Copcutt himself. This was under half the number at work in 1928/29, when he first came to the estate. As head gardener he was earning a basic wage of £9 5s. a week, while Miss Cooper, the female worker, was paid £3 9s. per week. The most senior man after Copcutt earned a basic £7 5s. a week.⁶⁸

In 1942 Waldorf Astor presented the house and grounds to the National Trust, on the understanding that the family could live there as long as they wished. He himself continued to reside on the estate after the War, even though Lady Astor spent relatively little time there. In 1950, however, he had a stroke, and became an invalid. During this time he and Copcutt got on well together and when he died in 1952, the head gardener stayed on with William, the 3rd Viscount Astor and Waldorf’s eldest son. Frank paid tribute to William’s considerate treatment of his staff, while Lady Astor now played little part in the running of the gardens. When William died in March 1966, his widow and her young son moved away. Cliveden ceased to be the family’s home, with the National Trust assuming responsibility. It was decided to find a

tenant for the mansion itself and between 1966 and 1984 the Trust let it to Stanford University, California. In 1985 it was leased to Cliveden Hotel Ltd for use as an hotel.⁶⁹

Despite Lady Astor's sometimes difficult relationships with her gardeners, especially the senior men, over several decades, there is little doubt that she took a close personal interest in the welfare of Cliveden, at least to the later 1940s. She also had her favourites. Frank Copcutt was one. Another was 'Old Jefferies', who had worked at Cliveden from the 1890s, before she and Waldorf moved there. In August 1932 she paid the artist Rhys Griffiths fifty guineas to paint the old gardener's portrait, and when he retired about four years later, she told the agent she wished him to be used as much as possible to show visitors around the gardens.⁷⁰ He was a regular recipient of gifts at Christmas and when he died in February 1937, she instructed Glasheen to make sure 'a very lovely wreath' was prepared, 'I think mostly of Spring flowers'. She also attended his funeral in person.⁷¹ This concern for 'old Jefferies' was an example of her disconcerting mixture of kindness, single-minded determination, and concern for the reputation of Cliveden and its gardens. As she told Frank Copcutt soon after his return to the estate in 1949 as head gardener: 'Well, if you can't stand to me you can't stand to anyone. If you can't stand up to the men you're no good to me'.⁷² Only with firm discipline, in her view, could the high standards she expected from her gardening staff be maintained and Cliveden's own enviable reputation sustained.

NOTES

1. See entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), for Nancy, Waldorf and William Waldorf Astor, vol. 2, 798–803. Christopher Sykes, *Nancy. The Life of Lady Astor* (1979), 97 and 100–102. Allyson Hayward, *Norah Lindsay. The Life and Art of a Garden Designer* (2007), 125. Maurice Collis, *Nancy Astor* (1960), 35.
2. Hayward, *Norah Lindsay*, 126.
3. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, entry for Nancy Astor, vol. 2, 799 and Sykes, *Nancy*, 214–231.
4. Private Secretary to William Camm, 13 August 1928 in Astor MSS 1416/1/2/42. Private Secretary to Hubert J.F. Smith, 11 May 1938 in Astor MSS 1416/1/2/182. The Astor papers are in the Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading, unless shown to the contrary.
5. Private Secretary to James Glasheen, 26 February 1930, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/65.
6. Transcript of an interview with Frank Copcutt, conducted in September 1975, 1, at Maidenhead Public Library, BUT.91.
7. Rosina Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service* (1975), 148.
8. Astor MSS Payroll No. 1 for Cliveden. D.158/29 at Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies.
9. *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 9 March 1929, 193. Collis, *Nancy Astor*, 53.
10. Lady Astor to Hubert J.F. Smith, 25 July 1928, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/42.
11. Private Secretary to William Camm, 10 September 1928, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/42
12. Lady Astor to William Camm, 15 November 1928, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/42.
13. Lady Astor to Norah Lindsay, 19 September 1928, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/46.
14. Margaret Camm to Lady Astor, n.d. (probably March 1929), Astor MSS 1416/1/2/53.
15. Margaret Camm to Lady Astor n.d. (probably March 1929), Astor MSS 1416/1/2/ 53, written from Luton. In the letter she mentioned that Lady Astor's daughter and her eldest son had called on her: 'their kindness I shall never forget'.
16. Lady Astor to Margaret Camm, 4 April 1929, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/53.
17. Geoffrey Tyack, 'Service on the Cliveden Estate Between the Wars' in *Oral History* 5 (1977), 75–76.
18. In addition to Cliveden, the Astors owned four other houses – 4 St James' Square, London, a venue they used for entertaining 'high society' and as a base for their political work; Rest Harrow, Sandwich, Kent; Plymouth, for constituency business; and on the Isle of Jura, Scotland. The latter was used only once a year, in August, for shooting and fishing.
19. Transcript of an interview with Frank Copcutt, BUT.91, 17 and Tyack, 'Service on the Cliveden Estate', 67 and 74.
20. Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service*, 129.
21. Lady Astor to James Glasheen, 17 July 1930, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/65.

22. Lady Astor to Hubert J.F. Smith, 7 October 1931, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/81.
23. Private Secretary to John Young, 30 May 1939, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/194.
24. Hubert J.F. Smith to the Private Secretary, 2 May 1939, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/194.
25. Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service*, 129–130 and William Camm to Lady Astor, 27 January 1929, reporting the imminent departure of Tamplin. Astor MSS 1416/1/2/53.
26. Tyack, 'Service on the Cliveden Estate', 74.
27. Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service*, 131–132.
28. Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service*, 134.
29. Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service*, 134
30. Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service*, 65 and Lady Astor to James Glasheen, 8 November 1929, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/53.
31. Harrison *Rose: My Life in Service*, 140.
32. Transcript of an interview with Frank Copcutt, BUT.91, 12–13.
33. Tyack, 'Service on the Cliveden Estate', 76.
34. Transcript of an interview with Frank Copcutt, BUT.91, 22.
35. Tyack, 'Service on the Cliveden Estate', 76 and 'Workers in Cliveden Gardens', 23 March 1939, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/194.
36. Transcript of an interview with Frank Copcutt, BUT.91, 18.
37. James Glasheen to Lady Astor, 15 January and 2 February 1937, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/168.
38. Lady Astor to James Glasheen, 17 July 1930, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/65.
39. Private Secretary to James Glasheen, 15 July 1933, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/109 and 9 September, 1930, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/65.
40. Lady Astor to James Glasheen, 5 December 1929, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/53.
41. All of these letters to Glasheen are in Astor MSS 1416/1/2/109.
42. Value of the Estate of Waldorf, 2nd Viscount Astor in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 2, 802.
43. Lady Astor to James Glasheen, 5 March 1931, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/81.
44. Lady Astor to Hubert J.F. Smith, 12 November 1931 and Hubert J.F. Smith to Lady Astor, 16 November 1931, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/81.
45. Hubert J.F. Smith to Private Secretary, 10 May and 30 June 1937, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/168.
46. Lady Astor to Hubert J.F. Smith, 6 July 1937, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/168.
47. Lady Astor to Hubert J.F. Smith, 6 July 1937, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/168.
48. Lady Astor to Frank Copcutt, 8 October 1938, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/182. *See also at this reference*, Frank Copcutt to Lady Astor, 6 October 1938 and Hubert J.F. Smith to Lady Astor, 10 October 1938.
49. Frank Copcutt to Lady Astor, 6 November 1938, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/182. By this date Copcutt had taken up his new post as head gardener.
50. *See for example*, Lady Astor to Frank Copcutt, 21 December 1942 and Frank Copcutt to Lady Astor, 31 December 1942, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/228.
51. Lady Astor to John Gault, 20 October 1938, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/182. In the same letter Lady Astor reprimanded Gault for his delay in ordering iris bulbs: 'Why on earth did you wait so long?'
52. Hubert J.F. Smith to Lady Astor, 15 March 1939, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/194.
53. Lady Astor to John Gault, 4 April 1939, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/194.
54. Note from Private Secretary to Lady Astor, n.d., but probably March 1939; Mr Wright to Lady Astor, 22 March 1939; *see also* Private Secretary to John F. Young, 23 March 1939, calling him for interview, all in Astor MSS 1416/1/2/194.
55. Private Secretary to John F. Young, 19 July 1939, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/194.
56. Lady Astor to Hubert J.F. Smith, 19 January 1940 and Hubert J.F. Smith to Lady Astor, 22 January 1940, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/208. Collis, *Nancy Astor*, 195–200.
57. Hubert J.F. Smith to Lady Astor, 'Cliveden Estate: Memo on Suggested Economies (Additional Notes)', 19 September 1941, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/219.
58. Hubert J.F. Smith to Lady Astor, 'Memo on Estate Expenditure and Proposed Economies,' 16 April 1941, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/219.
59. W.H. Lawrence, the new Cliveden agent, to Lady Astor, 13 August 1943, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/236. Hubert Smith had left in the previous spring, Lady Astor wrote to him on 15 March 1943, lamenting his departure: 'I am appalled at the idea of your leaving, but I know it was my husband's fault, not yours'. Precisely what Lord Astor's 'fault' had been was unclear.

- Perhaps Smith had been called up for military service or had merely moved to fresh employment.
60. Hubert J.F. Smith to Lady Astor, 23 January 1943, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/236.
 61. Hubert J.F. Smith to Private Secretary, 18 December 1942, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/228.
 62. Lady Astor to James Glasheen, 20 March, 1944, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/240.
 63. James Glasheen to Lady Astor, 29 July, 1944, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/240.
 64. Lady Astor to James Glasheen, 8 August, 1944, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/240. However, on 21 July 1944, the Private Secretary had written to Glasheen, declaring that Huckson could now carry on without his supervision and asking him to submit his account to the agent, Mr Lawrence. The abrupt tone of the letter may have added to Glasheen's resentment.
 65. Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service*, 249.
 66. O. Huckson to Lady Astor, 30 November 1948, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/251.
 67. Lady Astor to O. Huckson, 2 December 1948, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/251.
 68. Astor MSS Cliveden Garden Wages Sheets D.158/34 at Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, for week ending 22 August, 1956. In July 1952 Copcutt's two children, Michael, aged 12, and Barbara, aged 8, were listed as eligible to join in the annual summer tea and games held under Lady Astor's direction for children from the estate. A.N. Wiseman, the new Cliveden agent, to Lady Astor, 9 July 1952, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/260. Lord Astor died the following 30 September.
 69. Jonathan Marsden *et al*, *Cliveden* (The National Trust, 2009 ed.), 5. Collis, *Nancy Astor*, 204. Harrison, *Rose: My Life in Service*, 242 and 248–249. Rosina Harrison, *Gentlemen's Gentlemen. My Friends in Service* (1976), 207, 208 and 210. George Washington was the last Astor butler at Cliveden: he moved with the young 4th Viscount Astor and his mother to their new residence, Ginge Manor, Wantage.
 70. Rhys Griffiths to Lady Astor, 14 August 1932 and Private Secretary to Rhys Griffiths, 31 August 1932, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/97. Private Secretary to Hubert J.F. Smith, 3 July 1936, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/153, suggesting Jefferies be employed as much as possible to show visitors around.
 71. Lady Astor to James Glasheen, 8 February 1937, Astor MSS 1416/1/2/168. According to Copcutt, the old gardener, nicknamed 'Manager' Jefferies, was in charge of the Long Garden at Cliveden. Transcript of an interview with Frank Copcutt, BUT.91, 15.
 72. Tyack, 'Service on the Cliveden Estate', 79.