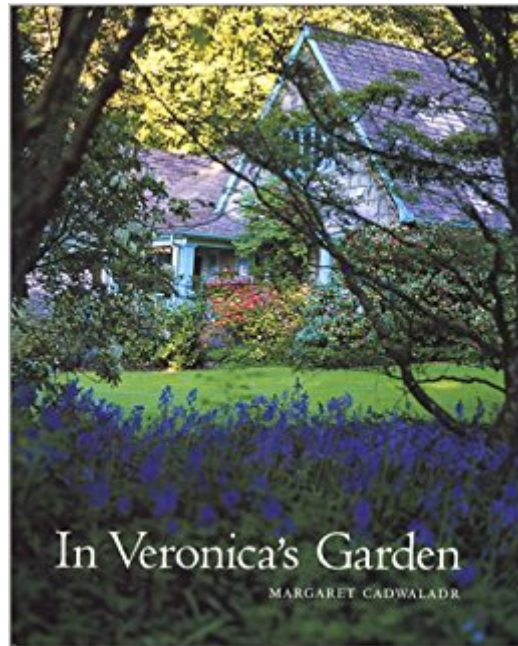




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# **In Veronica's Garden**



## Synopsis

In *Veronica's Garden* is the true story of a garden and the larger than life personality of its creator. This is a social history of the Milner Garden in Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, a stunningly beautiful garden nestled into the Canadian West Coast Douglas-fir forest. The book traces the life of Veronica Milner, the creative force behind the garden. Born into the Edwardian British aristocracy, she was related to Winston Churchill and Diana, Princess of Wales. As a young bride, she moved to an Irish castle. When widowed after an unhappy marriage, she remarried and moved to Canada where she built a garden in the style of Victorian garden writer William Robinson. Visitors to the garden included royalty. Malaspina University-College was gifted the garden in 1996.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"...meticulous research and exquisite writing draws the reader deep into the colourful details of this formidable woman's life." -- The Province, September 6, 2002 "a fascinating story...All the elements were there for this excellent book." -- GardenWise, Fall 2002 A lavishly illustrated "social history" of Milner Gardens and Woodland...Cadwaladr has an artistic eye. -- Lynne Van Luven, Times Colonist, May 26, 2002 In *Veronica's Garden* is a beautifully produced book. -- Barbara Pope, The News Weekender, May 3, 2002 adds to the allure of Glin castle...one of Ireland's finest country house hotels... -- Irish Examiner, August 31, 2002

In *Veronica's Garden* is the remarkable true story of a garden and the larger than life personality of

its creator. This is a record of the development of the Milner Gardens and Woodland, a stunningly beautiful garden nestled into the Canadian West Coast Douglas-fir forest. The book traces the life of Veronica Milner, the creative force behind the garden. Born into the British aristocracy, she was related to Winston Churchill and Diana, Princess of Wales. As a young bride, Veronica moved to Glin castle, Ireland. Despite an unhappy marriage, she and her husband restored the castle garden and became friends with influential garden experts and artists. When she was widowed, Veronica married a wealthy Canadian businessman and transformed his summer retreat into a beautiful "wild garden" in the manner of William Robinson. Visitors to the garden included royalty. Prince Charles and the late Diana, Princess of Wales were guests. Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip stayed at the estate for three days.

Now that I live on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, it's a short drive up the Island Highway to Milner Gardens in Qualicum Beach. A recent visit to the woodland gardens and English-style cottage with its breathtaking views of the Strait of Georgia was all the more memorable due to my reading of Margaret Cadwaladr's book, *In Veronica's Garden*. (The title comes from a book of the same title by poet Alfred Austin published in 1896.) Whether you can visit the garden in person or not, you can delight in its beauty in the pages of Cadwaladr's book. She has woven a fascinating story around botanical names of flowers, family histories, facts about the ownership of Milner Gardens, its famous visitors and the garden experts who have influenced it. Most of the colour photos that greatly enhance the book were taken by the author. This is an engrossing book, one of those that is difficult to put down. At the heart of the story is Veronica Milner. In fact, when author and subject met, Veronica said it was important to understand her in order to understand the garden. A garden which features over 500 varieties of rhododendrons contrasting with the majestic Douglas-firs and red-cedars of the West Coast rain forest. To gather information about the garden and its owner, Cadwaladr put many photographs of the garden in an album. As they chatted and looked at the photos, the visual cues would trigger Veronica's memory and keep her focused. Cadwaladr found this tactic to be so useful that she also took picture books from the Edwardian era, for instance, to her visits with Veronica. Within a week of meeting Veronica in 1996, Cadwaladr took her first trip to Ireland and visited Glin, the castle where Veronica lived during her first marriage to Desmond FitzGerald, the Knight of Glin. Veronica's son Desmond, the current Knight of Glin, allowed Cadwaladr access to his father's detailed diaries, which ended shortly before the elder FitzGerald's death in 1949. The diaries confirmed for the author many details about artists, writers and prominent garden experts who had influenced the development of the gardens in Qualicum

Beach. Veronica Villiers was born in London, England, in 1909 and was descended from the Duke of Marlborough, as was Winston Churchill, her mother's cousin, which meant they were related to the late Diana, Princess of Wales. When Veronica married Desmond FitzGerald in 1929, they moved to Glin, the castle and 500 acre estate near Limerick. The couple had two daughters and a son. From the time Veronica and Desmond began their married life, they began to update the castle (built in the 1780s) and create a magnificent garden. Cadwaladr gives a candid portrait of Veronica, an imperious woman, who was a gardener as well as a painter of flowers. Apparently, she had dalliances during her first marriage and was known to be a difficult, complex and unusual woman. When Desmond was ill with tuberculosis, he and Veronica travelled to New York and Chicago to visit several doctors. While on a train, they met Canadian businessman Ray Milner. After Desmond died, Veronica, in a crimson satin dress, married Ray Milner in London in 1954. The home that Veronica moved to in Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island had been the summer home of Ray and his first wife Rina. With the help of Ted and Mary Greig, who owned a nursery in Royston, Veronica began to expand the garden. It became not a manicured garden of mowed lawns but rather controlled chaos, as it has been described. Garden writer William Robinson had a profound influence on Veronica and therefore on the style of the garden and the plants chosen for it. Veronica became a widow again in 1975 when Ray died. She continued to travel and employ servants from India. Winston Churchill's daughter Mary Soames visited her in 1984. Charles and Diana visited in 1986. A photograph of Princess Diana, her feet on the rung of a chair, stirs a poignant memory. Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip visited the garden and stayed at the house in October 1987. Veronica, though, had to stay at a nearby hotel while the royal visitors slept in her room (on a new mattress) and only got to see them in the last hour of their visit. To preserve the gardens, especially following her demise, Veronica found a benefactor via Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo. The garden was dedicated on May 17, 1996, and Veronica was presented with a honorary certificate in horticulture. The author and her husband, Jim, who was coordinator of the horticulture program at Malaspina, were in attendance. That was the day Cadwaladr met Veronica, a woman who complained about "the decline of the aristocracy." Cadwaladr found her subject to be "both gifted and far-sighted." Veronica "created a Canadian version of a "wild garden" in the rainforest, a teaching tool and living laboratory in a time when conservation was becoming increasingly important." Veronica Milner died in 1998. This book is a stunning example of the results of dedication to life story, including the research, the interviews, the special relationship formed, the surprises and knowledge gleaned along the way. In Cadwaladr's case, she took on the extra challenge of starting her own publishing company to publish her book. When I last spoke to her, she was getting ready to

go into a second printing. Margaret Cadwaladr has had a long-standing interest in autobiography and life story. She took an interdisciplinary graduate-level course at the University of British Columbia on the topic and gives workshops now on life writing as well as on the subject of self-publishing. She often is asked to speak to gardening clubs in Canada and the U.S. by Mary Ann Moore for Story Circle Book Reviews[...] reviewing books by, for, and about women

This book sets out to tell the story of a garden and the larger-than-life personality who helped in its creation. The garden is the Milner Garden and Woodland, near Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island off Canada's south west coast. It has an international reputation as a beautiful "natural" woodland garden. Sadly, the book does not do the garden justice. The Veronica of the title is Veronica Milner, born to an aristocratic English family and related to both Winston Churchill and Princess Diana. She first married Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin and lived a life of privilege in an Irish castle. Her second husband, Ray Milner, was a prominent and wealthy Canadian businessman who seems to have been an exceptionally nice man. Ray had previously been married to Catherine and the two of them had bought the land and developed what became the Milner Garden. Both loved the garden and the trees that gave it its lovely natural setting beside the ocean. After Catherine's death Ray met and married Veronica and somehow managed to live amicably with this selfish, snobbish, difficult woman and to finance her extravagances, which included improvements to the garden. The writer seems to be fascinated with Veronica's wealthy and titled background, and with visits from the Queen, Prince Philip, Prince Charles and Princess Diana to the garden. The reader has to struggle through page after page of name dropping. I had been hoping for a book about the garden, not "Lives of the Rich and Famous". There is very little information about the design of the garden, and how it evolved, and it seems that Veronica took much of the credit due to Ray and Catherine Milner. The illustrations are adequate (except for the maps, which are quite crude) but not professional quality and don't really reflect the beauty of the garden. This is a regional book with little to recommend it to readers outside British Columbia. Actually, there's not much to recommend it to local readers either.

This was an interesting book about a mean spirited miserable lady who thought she was better than everyone else.

Thoroughly enjoyed this book..great saga, even for non-gardeners. A most interesting woman. A true biography, way more than a book about gardens. Will hold wide appeal.

Great read about an eccentric lady and the two amazing gardens she built. Lots of royalty namedropping and interesting pictures. Well written.

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