

Restoration of the Japanese garden at the National Botanic Garden of Wales by Graham Hardman

In May 2001 Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito visited the UK to launch Japan 2001, a year-long programme of Japanese cultural events in the UK. One of the first elements of this year-long programme was the "Real Japanese Garden" (Shin Gyô So), designed by Professor Masao Fukuhara, which won a Gold Medal and was

awarded Best in Show at RHS Chelsea Flower Show. And fortunately, rather than being destroyed once the show had finished, the garden was meticulously dismantled and reconstructed at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, opening on October 9th, 2001.¹ Over the years this garden has given pleasure to many JGS

members but recently it has been in need of some serious restoration work.

In 2017 the Japanese Embassy asked us if we wanted to nominate a UK garden for funding under the Japanese Government's world-wide garden restoration scheme. It soon became apparent that the scheme is aimed



The formal tiled path and deck October 2018.



The tea-house in July 2016.



The tea-house in 2008, still looking quite new.



The replacement path November 2018.



Re-surfaced path with new edging November 2018.



The tea-house prepared for rendering November 2018.

at providing Japanese expertise in the design and management of the restoration, leaving all construction costs, labour and material, to be met locally.

Unfortunately this model does not really suit conditions in the UK where the main issue is lack of capital to fund restoration work. We are able to provide design and construction management but not the capital required. After some consideration a special case for the UK was made, whereby they would provide a grant towards construction costs on condition that JGS provided the expertise and managed the project.

The funding would be the equivalent of their costs in the normal scheme. However, while this was very welcome it was relatively small compared with likely restoration costs at many of the gardens that could have been candidates. We therefore chose to make a formal application (this was still a bidding process

for approval by the Ministry in Japan) to help with the restoration of the garden at the National Botanic Garden of Wales.

For JGS to specify and manage a restoration it needed to be relatively straightforward. The garden in Wales is one that we had had contact with several times in recent years, so we were familiar with what needed doing. It also had the advantage that decision making on-site was also straightforward, a situation that is not true in several of the other candidate gardens we considered.

A fully specified application was prepared and submitted to Japan for approval along with gardens from other countries bidding for support. Our bid had the support of the Consul for Japan in Wales and the Director of the National Botanic Garden. We were delighted that our application was accepted as one of six gardens around the world to receive funding this year. ²

I was nominated as Project Manager and Robert Ketchell and Andrew Ninnis were appointed to carry out the work. Andrew has worked with Robert on several projects and can provide the specialist skills required for repairs to the tea-house.

Planning and preparation took place during this summer, with construction scheduled to start in October, after the main visitor season was over.

The work is in three separate areas.

- **Repairs to the tea-house and wall.** These were made with plywood suitable for a show garden, but not durable long-term for a permanent garden. Images on page 28 show the deterioration from 2008 to 2016. Shortly after the the 2016 photo was taken the roof was stripped and resurfaced with cedar shingles. The wall panels were beginning to rot and had been patched up as can be seen.



Work in progress October 2018.

National Botanical Garden of Wales.....continued

- **Repairs and re-working of hard landscaping.** A deck over the pond had begun to rot and was dangerous. It was agreed that it could never be used as originally intended as a viewing platform on safety grounds so this was to be removed and the pond edge it was covering rebuilt, along with the area around it. See images on page 28 of the original tiled path and deck beyond and the redeveloped path and stone work. The tiled path was lifting due to tree roots, becoming a hazard. Without the deck it was thought to be inappropriate on its own and has been replaced by a gravel path with embedded stepping stones. All the paths needed resurfacing and the dry garden renovating.
- **Planting and pruning.** Without regular pruning, a garden like this soon becomes overgrown. Time also exposes original planting that was perhaps inappropriate if regular control is not possible. An example is *Petasites giganteum* (a wild Japanese plant) that was planted in Chelsea and moved to Wales. In recent years this has spread very rapidly



The invasion of *Petasites* May 2018.

(see image below) and has had to be eradicated. This is still a work in progress and may take another year or two to be completely clear. Another example is an *Acer saccharinum* "Pyramidale" that was planted near the tea-house. Within 13 years it had almost swamped the tea-house resulting in increased deterioration of the roof. (see images below from April 2012 and July 2014). In a report we submitted in 2014 we recommended that the tree be significantly cut back or removed. The Garden staff removed it and another one that was planted on the bank at the top of the stream. This still left many trees and shrubs in the garden that required significant work or removing altogether.

It has been an opportunity for JGS volunteers to assist, organised by Diane Crawford on behalf of JGS SW region. Unfortunately Storm Desmond hit the garden that weekend with severe flooding in nearby Carmarthen, so one day had to be cancelled. A separate article by Tom Peters describes his involvement as a volunteer.



A very vigorous tree April 2012.

At the time of writing (December 2018) much of the hard landscaping work is complete and the building and wall have been reconstructed with only the rendering of the walls to do. (See image on page 28) Tree pruning has also been completed, at least for this year. We are very grateful that Mr Takuhiro Yamada, who came from Japan to verify that we were doing the job satisfactorily, was willing and able to spend two days pruning the trees, illustrating what he was doing for future reference.

Planting will be done in the spring once warmer weather arrives. There will be the opportunity for JGS members to assist with this. More details will be published in the Newsletter.

A further article will show the completed restoration in due course.

Footnotes

¹ The entry for this garden on the website "Japanese Gardens Outside Japan" states that "*Construction of a Japanese garden had been under consideration from the beginning of the National Botanic Garden plan, since*



An even more vigorous tree July 2014.

Renovation of the Japanese Garden at the National Botanical Garden of Wales by Tom Peters

there were no authentic Japanese gardens in Wales. However, funding and content were undecided and the plan had been suspended. Meanwhile, the Japanese embassy was looking for a permanent location for the Japanese garden exhibited at the Chelsea Flower Show. Negotiations with the Welsh local development office ensued, and the removal and reconstruction of the Japanese garden was decided. There was a promising space on the hill on the left side of the main path going to the greenhouse, which all visitors pass as they proceed from the front gate. This spot, prominent from the bordering wall garden, was agreed to be the best place for the Japanese garden." See: <http://www.nodaigarden.jp/garden/europe/united-kingdom/wales/suioutei-japanese-garden-at-national-botanic-garden-of-wales/>

² The other five gardens receiving funding are at: Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research, Bloomfield, Michigan, USA; Brand Park, Glendale, California, USA; White Park Japanese Friendship Garden, Riverside, California, USA; Jackson Park, Chicago, USA; Botanical Garden, Prague, Czech Republic.

I recently took up the offer to work on the Japanese garden within the National Botanical Garden of Wales. Arriving in the area after a 12 hr train journey from the Lake District during Storm Desmond, which might have put somewhat of a damper on things, I didn't know what to expect. I walked around the Japanese garden which the storm had left looking very wild. However the storm was over and for the next two weeks we had only one day with a shower.

This was a once in a lifetime chance to work on one of the best loved and most visited Japanese gardens in Great Britain alongside Graham Hardman, Robert Ketchell and Yamada San (from an old, well-established company in Kyoto). Also, from time to time, a couple of BGOW garden staff would provide invaluable help: we would hand-pick and set aside the stones we required and these would be transported down to us and our rubbish removed by them. We set several large stones in place and re-laid all the path edging stones throughout the garden, created a rain gutter around the tea-house, created a new moon

feature, repaired the steps, did some cutting back / pruning and re-gravelled the whole pathway. We also drained a pond, rebuilt the wall along one side of it and refilled it.

It was unfortunate that the South-West region working party, which six people had booked for, had to be cancelled because of Storm Desmond, but a smaller group were able to help on the following day. Everyone remarked how friendly and helpful the local people were to us (perhaps being born in the area I could be biased).

On leaving the project there remained a bamboo fence to work on, work on the tea-house building itself was being carried out by Andrew Ninnis, and there was some planting up to do. Although I say it myself, what a transformation! I loved every minute spent there, felt very happy and at peace with the world. The days spent there will remain in my mind always.



Tom at work (photo GH).



The new roof drainage channel November 2018.



After pruning and clearing of plants.