

## **Harewood's Himalayan Garden Past Present and Future. Trevor Nicholson.**

Trevor Nicholson has been head gardener at Harewood House in Yorkshire for over 20 years.

He thanked the group for the invitation and explained that he wants the Himalayan Garden to be more widely known. He likes looking at the variety of plants as a professional gardener. Variety keeps visitors coming to the garden. He is inspired by lots of things, trips to the Himalayas, plant hunters and opportunities. Harewood is a place of great opportunities with a rich horticultural heritage. He gave a brief overview of the estate and its history to put the Himalayan garden into context.

The whole estate covers around 4,500 acres, 1000 acres of which is ornamental parkland. A lake covers 32 acres while the rest is agrarian.

The first slide showed the boundary line of the Harewood Estate and the land managed by the Harewood House Trust, who are Trevor's employers. Harewood House lies in the centre of the landscape. The views from the House across the estate are spectacular throughout the year.

Trevor's background is in garden history, conservation, and the management of gardens and landscapes. His qualifications include an HNC in Plantsmanship and a Foundation Degree in Garden & Landscape Management.

A large part of the ornamental landscape at Harewood was created by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the lake at Harewood being one of his principle works. The area containing the Himalayan Garden is located at the western end of the lake, below the downstream face of the dam. 2016 is the tercentenary of Brown's birth.

The house sits within the landscape. From the north side it is mainly parkland with specimen trees

To the south side of the house is the Victorian parterre, restored in 1994. The yellow flowers seen in the slide were planted because Harewood House was the official starting point for the Tour de France in 2014.

Below the terrace is a 100m long x 5m wide south facing border containing a wealth of tropical and Mediterranean plants and shrubs planted in a bold, highly ornamental Victorian style. Plants are chosen to help extend the flowering season. They are overwintered in the glasshouses

The bold planting reduces the dominating effect of the 15 foot bastion wall of the formal terrace, which, it has been commented, looks rather like a wedding cake when viewed from the landscape. Formal gardens were swept away by Brown to make way for the more natural style landscape gardens of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Formal gardens were re-introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and now sit within Brown's designs.

The three main parts of the garden are: the formal gardens containing parterre & archery border, west garden which is arboretum style planting; the walled garden where vegetables are grown on a large scale; and the rock garden which is now the Himalayan Garden. These different areas of the gardens are linked by walks.

The estate has long standing links with the Himalayas. Many Gurkhas work on the estate. In the Himalayan garden there are also links with Bhutan.

The walled garden predates the house being built in 1755/56. It has been intensively planted. There were once 35 gardeners on the estate, but far fewer today. Plants grown now in the walled garden include herbs, used in the education programme of the estate, heritage varieties of vegetables, plants destined for the parterre and the ornamental planting of hops to brew beer. A greenhouse once housed *Amherstia*, collected by the fifth earl, a great plant collector.

Harewood was once famous for pineapples and passion fruit. Today peaches, and figs are grown. The fig trees are 100 years old. The slides below show grape growing in 1783, the house enlarged in 1780 and the heritage grape growing today.

Labels may be used in the walled garden but are not to be found in the Himalayan Garden, once known as the Rock Garden. This is to create the feeling of a private place where this naturalistic garden provides the opportunity to grow plants in a naturalistic way.

It is reached via the lakeside where trees and shrubs are reflected in the waters. At the end the water flows through cascades and pools.

The area was originally planted with beech and oaks by Brown but in time these did not grow well in the anaerobic conditions produced by the water and so were cleared leaving a more open area.

Rhododendrons were planted in the space created in the 1930s.

The collection of Loderi rhododendrons was started by the fifth and continued by the sixth Earl. His wife, Princess Mary, was interested in Asiatic primulas, particularly *Primula florindae*,.. The rocks in the garden were installed by Conways, a landscape firm based in Halifax, who also supplied rock plants. The rocks were put in place after a storm which had breached the dam holding the water back.

Lists of seeds including primula, rhododendrons' *lilium giganteum* and *lilium martagon* and meconopsis were sent to Princess Mary and so onto the head gardener at the time. The meconopsis planted included *paniculata*, *wallichii*, *rudis*, *prattii* and *baileyi*. (*betonicifolia*). The seed lists have helped in the restoration of the garden.

At the present time a photographic database is being compiled of the thousands of plants at Harewood.

The sixth Earl was in correspondence with Frank Kingdom Ward as a label for one of Ward's rhododendron collection shows. Old labels are still being dug up in the garden.

In 1939 when war broke out 90% of the resources were involved with food production. The hardy plants remained, but many others did not survive.

In 1947 the sixth earl died from pneumonia and 75% of the estates income and assets were frozen. The garden became commercial. e.g 60,000 roses were planted for sale, the parterre was simplified as it was difficult to maintain. The resulting planting could be described as municipal.

The simplification of planting extended into the Himalayan garden where astilbes and hostas were grown for a time.

The rhododendrons remained. When Trevor arrived in 1994 it was a nice garden

He first of all wanted to expose the rocks which were obscured by golden Lawson Cypress. This had elicited some complaints.

Later he was invited by Mike Hirst to go to Nepal in 1999 and was able to go with a grant from the RHS. It was important that he saw the plants growing in their native habitat. Going up the mountain he saw the different geographical zones the plants inhabit. This was the start of him becoming interested in botanical horticulture, and presented him with the opportunity to augment the collection.

Improving the access to the Himalayan garden was essential. It had previously been down stone steps and over stepping stones.

A circular series of paths was constructed so that visitors did not see each other. They could choose to keep to the main path or take minor paths to get closer to the plants.

In 2004 Bhutanese monks came to Harewood to build a Stupa to precise specifications. It is made of five different chambers filled with different objects. It was opened in 2005 and is the only consecrated Stupa in Europe. It provided the impetus to do all sorts of things in the garden.

The Stupa is built around the Tree of Life which is a wooden pole covered with thousands of mantras. It is the defining feature of the garden. The tree was cut down in Bhutan by a man who had both his father and his father's father present. Prayers were said and it was covered in resin. When placed in the Stupa this Tree must face east.

Monks returned a couple of years later to make a sand mandala, which afterwards was poured into the river whilst saying prayers. An important part of the ceremony surrounding the Stupa.

A bridge over the river allows access to visitors. The garden is divided into zones where different plants can be seen in different habitats. Over 600 meconopsis were planted last year including *M. 'Ascreavie'*, *M. paniculata*, *M. x sheldonii* and *M. baileyi*.

There are rock plants in the scree beds primula in a primula meadow and of course rhododendrons, arisaemas and gentiana sino-ornata to name but a few. The best time to see the Himalayan garden is in May and June. Guided tours are available.

The talk ended with slides of a few of the many plants on display

Trevor would like to develop the collection of three genera meconopsis, primula and arisaemas for display in large groups. A map showing the distribution of the plants is being undertaken by volunteers.

There were plenty of questions at the end. Some of the answers are shown below and some have been included in the report.

1. There are now five gardeners for the estate in a team of eleven.
2. The garden is about 100m above sea level.
3. The Stupa represents the Path to Enlightenment. In the lowest level which is below ground are tools connected to the site, not all of which are old e.g. a scythe, a camera, etc.  
The second layer contains offerings to the deities

There are around 2000 small Stupas inside the Stupa.

Finally Trevor would like to see a lot more visitors interested in Himalayan plants coming to Harewood.

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