

Report on Professional Gardeners' Trust funding for training in skills to manage Cowden Japanese Garden.



Cowden Japanese Garden, November 2016

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1. Funding Proposal

The award would be used to increase my knowledge and practical experience of Japanese gardening techniques, specifically pruning and training of conifers and deciduous trees,. It would also broaden my understanding of Japanese gardens within the context of British garden history.

This would involve a number of different elements;

- Conifer pruning and training and Japanese knot tying
- Visit to Tatton Park and other gardens built by the Japanese Garden Society in the Cheshire area
- Tuition on own garden site in pruning and training by RBGE tutor.
- Japanese Garden Society conference

2. Estimated and actual costs

Estimated cost

Item	Cost
Conifer workshop no fee	Nil
On site tuition	£50.00
JGS conference	£60.00
Conifer workshop and Tatton Park visit petrol cost	£90.00
JGS conference train fare	£135.00
Conifer workshop 1 night free, 1 night paid	£70.00
JGS conference, 3 nights	£175.00
TOTAL	£580.00

Actual cost

Receipt number	Item	Cost
1	Train fare to Cambridge return	£101.00
2	Cambridge accommodation (2 nights)	£115.00
3	1 night Cumbria	£65.00
4	JGS conference fee	£60.00
5 & 6	Fuel for travelling to Falkirk / W Cumbria / Tockwith	£55.32
7	1 day training by James Clugston on pruning Acers at Cowden Castle	£50.00
8	Taxi for JGS conference	£9.00
TOTAL COST		£455.32

Costs were lower because the train fare was less than predicted, and I had one night less accommodation in Cambridge. However, I hadn't remembered to budget for food whilst away from home. Costs met personally £43.30 (food & conifer workshop fee), costs met by employer £45 (food & petrol). I have acknowledged the funding received whenever posting on the various social media streams that Cowden uses.

3. Learning outcomes

3.1 Technical skills

Both the JGS organised pruning course and the one to one session held in the garden were useful in varying ways. The JGS session was run by two self taught and very experienced members, and enabled me to put theory into practice through pruning and training young conifers. This really is something I personally can only learn by doing, book reading alone doesn't suffice. It is also something that needs to be repeated, and only by this repetition will learning, and importantly confidence, grow.



Figure 1 Steve showing us how to prune to create a suitable crown.

There was also a session on the traditional knots used to tie bamboo fences and structures used within a Japanese garden, and I actually managed to master this, and am confident I could teach it to someone else. They used a good method to teach the knots, setting up a mini bamboo fence on which participants could physically space out and practice tying on the vertical canes.



Figure 2 An Ibo-musubi knot traditionally used to tie fences.

The one to one session in the garden was with James Clugston, a PhD student from RBGE in an unrelated subject who had practiced bonsai for a number of years and previously worked at Heronswood Bonsai. James talked me through what was required to train Acers in the formative years. Again, this sounds pretty simple on paper, but requires some

confidence to start. We worked through most of the trees on the site, and I completed the



remainder the following week myself.

Figure 3 James pruning to encourage branched growth and create pads on a young Acer

3.2 Garden visits

I had previously thought to combine the conifer pruning workshop with a visit to Tatton Park Japanese garden, but I had managed to get to Tatton earlier in the year, so revised my plans. I visited Giggie Alley, now a Forestry Commission site in Eskdale, and Larch Cottage Nursery, which has a small Japanese area.

Giggie Alley was designed in 1914 by Thomas Mawson. Utilising the very prominent granite outcrops in the woodland, it is a series of pools and small pathways between plantings for bamboo, Acers and Rhododendrons. Unfortunately now sadly neglected, it is still an interesting example of the early 20th century fashion for Japonism. It is also a salutary lesson in the capacity for some plants to become invasive e.g. *Gaultheria shallon*, *Sasa* (short species, so probably *palmata*).



Figure 4 Giggle Alley, showing *Sasa palmata* in foreground.



Figure 5 Giggle Alley, detail of path shows similarities to traditional Nobedan design in Japanese gardens.

The visit to Larch Cottage Nursery was very interesting because of the range of plants (particularly conifer species and cultivars) on sale. The Japanese garden was interesting not for its excellence, but as a study in what we in Britain regard as what constitutes a Japanese garden. There were certain elements such as gravel, ornamental rockwork and plants traditionally associated with a Japanese garden. However unlike Giggle Alley, which did, despite its decay, retain a calmness which I've come to associate with Japanese gardens, this was not created by this space. So an interesting visit, even if not for the reasons expected.



Figure 6 Larch Cottage Nursery, elements of Japanese garden design, but too cluttered perhaps?

An unexpected garden visit was the new garden being created at the private home where the conifer pruning workshop took place. There was real attention to detail and innovative use of traditional and non traditional UK building materials. This included the use of gabions filled with local bricks and pantiles from the site to create the enclosure around the Japanese garden.



Figure 7 Japanese garden created by JGS member Dr Andy Bolton.

When planning visits in the future I will contact JGS members in the local area as they have lots more contacts. I'll also look at drive times a bit more carefully as this was a long trek cross country.

3.3 Increasing theoretical knowledge of Japanese garden design and history.

Attending the two day Japanese Garden Society conference was the most illuminating and inspiring part of the range of training I undertook. I have found this group to be so friendly, encouraging and welcoming since I joined, soon after gaining the post at Cowden last year. The conference had a number of internationally recognised speakers in the field of Japanese garden design and history. Equally important was the chance to speak to enthusiastic amateur gardeners as well as professional horticulturalists working in, or interested in, Japanese gardens.

Saturday 23 rd September	Sunday 24 th September
10:00 Registration – Tea/coffee	10:00 Jill Raggett: Exploring our Legacy of Japanese-style Gardens in the British Isles; why were they built; why do stereotypes emerge and what of the future...
10:45 Welcome: Peter Roberts-Taira, Robert Ketchell	11:00 Tea/coffee
10:55 Anthony Austin remembered: Graham Hardman	11:30 Where the path leads: Mami Mizutori, Colette Barnes and others, introduced by Graham Hardman
11:00 Kendall Brown: Opening Keynote lecture: Visionary Landscapes: Japanese Gardens in North America Now	12:45 Lunch
12:15 Lunch	14:15 Marc Keane - Closing keynote lecture: The Future of the Japanese Garden: What, How, Why?
13:45 Toshio Watanabe: Japanese Gardens and the West	15:15 Closing remarks – Robert Ketchell
14:45 Tea/coffee	15:30 Conference Close
15:15 Takuhiro Yamada: The view from Japan of Japanese gardens in other countries	
16:15 Close	
16:30 JGS AGM – members only (17:15 close)	

Figure 8 JGS conference program

I have summarised the key points that I took away from the conference. Many of these relate not only to Japanese gardens but can be applied to gardens generally. A lot of the points about gardens as art I have read before, but never heard articulated so clearly. Perhaps the act of hearing it aloud had a greater impact than that of reading it.

- Gardens as a living, never completed work of art, which are fostered, not maintained.
- Japanese gardens aim to express and convey something about the natural environment, in a limited space.
- Japanese gardens in the West don't need to claim authenticity. It is enough that Japan and its culture and landscape have acted as a catalyst to create a beautiful and calming environment. Authenticity is less important than the impact they make on visitors.
- The effort needed in Japanese garden creation should be costed / regarded as 40% in garden building and 60% in garden maintenance (I like this one!).

- Japanese gardens can have a significant function in fostering good mental health, and even improving it. Kendall Brown gave examples of walking programs in US Japanese gardens that are used to do this, e.g. Morikami garden, South Florida.
- Jill Raggett gave a comprehensive talk on how Japanese gardens emerged in the West. This was very helpful to place Cowden in the context of British garden history.
- There was a long discussion about the need for training UK professional horticulturalists in the skills needed to maintain Japanese gardens. I also took the opportunity to talk to two horticulturalists who had been on the Triad programme and experienced training in Japanese gardening techniques both in Japan and the USA. It made me realise that I should be looking to organise a trip to Japan to experience the gardens and the natural landscape that inspired them, and for technical skills. Portland Japanese Garden, Oregon would be a very good place to gain experience.

I really did come away from this weekend buzzing with ideas. I was particularly inspired and motivated to try and develop the concept of Cowden Japanese Garden acting as a physical space for improvement of mental well being. The garden is within a particularly deprived area of Scotland, and personally I feel that this would be a very rewarding use of the garden.

4. Conclusion

Funding from PGT enabled me to attend a wide range of training, which I would not have been able to undertake otherwise. It has introduced me to a wealth of new contacts, and has given me practical skills that have already been enacted. As a sole gardener it has also made me appreciate that there is a network of people locally and internationally who are passionate about this subject and willing to share their knowledge and skills.

どうもありがとう

Thank you PGT!