

The Japanese Garden

Cowden Castle, Scotland

A RESTORATION APPEAL



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The Japanese Garden Cowden Castle

CLACKMANNANSHIRE, SCOTLAND

*'The most important Japanese
garden in the Western World'*

Professor Jijo Suzuki

18TH HEREDITARY HEAD OF THE SOAMI SCHOOL

OF IMPERIAL GARDEN DESIGN, JAPAN, 1925

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Ella Christie, 1909



Cowden Castle



Ella Christie, Japanese Garden, Cowden, 1934

SHĀH-RAK-UEN

‘In a sheltered foothold of a grassy range of hills, that stretch from sunrise to sunset, lies the gardens of my dreams. As its background softly rounded hills breathe peace, after the fierce volcanic agencies that upraised them, and long aeons of time have moulded their forms into the undulating lines that encircle the surroundings of *Shāh-rak-uen*, the place of pleasure and delight.’

A long look at life by two Victorians
Ella Christie & Alice Stewart

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese Garden at Cowden is situated in the beautiful county of Clackmannanshire, thirty miles north-west of Edinburgh and nine miles south of the renowned Gleneagles Golf Course.

One of the few surviving sites of its kind in the United Kingdom, the Japanese Garden was created by my great, great aunt, Ella Christie (1861–1949). Known for her ambitious solo expeditions in the early 1900s (she was the first western woman to visit Samarkand and Khiva in Uzbekistan), Ella was inspired to create a Japanese garden at her home, Cowden Castle, during a visit to Kyoto in 1907. At that time the British cultural love-affair with Japan was approaching its height, but while many other Japanese-style gardens in Britain were a pastiche or mismatch of elements, Cowden was distinguished from the start by the involvement of Japanese practitioners familiar with the complexity of Japanese garden design.

Ella's seven acre garden was designed by Taki Handa, overseen by Professor Jijo Suzuki and maintained by Shinzaburo Matsuo. Centred on a long artificial lake, the garden incorporated elements of three traditional Japanese garden forms: a pond and island garden; a stroll garden; and a tea-house garden.

Ella Christie died in 1949 and Cowden was inherited by her great nephew, Robert Stewart. Although the castle was demolished, the garden continued to be the favoured destination of many 'garden tours', until one night in 1963 when the tea houses, bridges and lanterns were vandalised beyond repair. During this time my father was occupied with county politics, his farm and raising five children. As much as he loved Cowden, he didn't have the time, or the resources, to invest in full restoration. In addition, schemes suggested by various companies focussed on novelty theme parks; none of the designs saw the value of the garden as the primary destination.

In 2008, when my father was 82, Cowden was handed over to me. It has been my intention for some years to seek sponsorship to restore the historic garden and sensitively incorporate Imperial style Japanese architecture. The surrounding park still contains many of the trees planted by Ella's father John Christie, a keen arborist.

In 2013 Professor Masao Fukuhara of Osaka University was giving a lecture in Scotland and asked to visit Cowden. Instantly enthusiastic, and with credentials that included restoring the Japanese Gardens at Tatton Park in Cheshire and Kew in London as well as winning the Gold Medal at Chelsea Flower Show, we knew instantly that the Professor was the man to oversee the project.

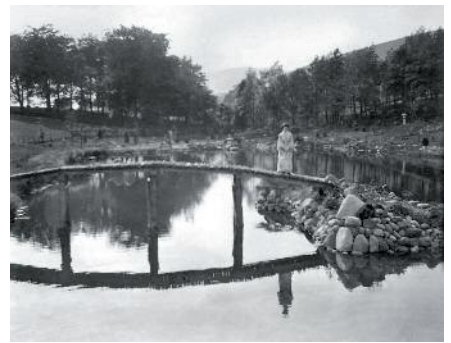
Restoration of this important site is a monumental task, but I feel passionately for its success; not just for those with an interest in historic gardens, but for the people of Japan who will be able to visit and enjoy another shared interest in Scotland.

Sara Stewart

May 2014



Taki Handa at Cowden



Japanese Garden, 1908



Japanese Garden, 1909



Japanese Garden 1909

CHRONOLOGY

- 1861** Ella Christie born in Midlothian.
- 1865** John and Alison Christie (Ella's parents) bought Cowden Castle near Dollar, Clackmannanshire. They settled there as the estate had the perfect soil for an arborist.
- 1904** Ella left for India, Tibet and Malay after the death of her father.
- 1906–7** Ella embarked on a tour of China, Hong Kong, Russia and Japan. At Yaami's Hotel in Kyoto she met sisters, Ella and Florence du Cane authors of *The Flowers and Gardens of Japan* and became inspired to create her own Japanese garden.
- 1908** On her return to Cowden, Ella had the burn dammed in a seven acre hollow, creating a loch. Taki Handa, originally from the Royal School of Garden Design at Nagoya but at that time studying at Studley College in England, was employed by Miss Christie for two months to help create Shāh-Rak-Uen, 'the place of pleasure and delight'.
- 1908–1925** As the garden matured Professor Suzuki, 18th Hereditary Head of the Soami School of Imperial Garden Design came regularly to Cowden to prune the many imported shrubs and trees. Professor Suzuki declared Miss Christie's garden to be: 'The best garden in the Western World'. This is widely thought to be due to the garden being designed and maintained by Japanese gardeners.
- 1926** Robert Christie Stewart born at Arndean, Dollar, two miles south of Cowden.
- 1925–1937** Mr Shinzaburo Matsuo, who had lost his entire family in an earthquake, came to Scotland and worked in the garden until he died in 1937. He is buried in Muckhart Churchyard. Dressed in multi-coloured Kimino, wide-pleated trousers, golf stockings, white spats and velour hat, he was often mistaken for the Japanese Emperor. That Miss Christie went to such pains to obtain the right skill and knowledge from Japan and the fact that she was able to obtain such faithful service from those strangers in a foreign land were the reasons for the subsequent success of the enterprise.
- 1908–1949** Many people visited the garden, among them writer and historian, Andrew Lang, novelist Annie S. Swan, George Blake, and HM Queen Mary. The garden was opened regularly for Scotland's Garden Scheme (Alice Stewart, Ella's sister, was one of the founders of the scheme).
- 1949** Miss Christie of Cowden died of Leukaemia aged 87. The Garden was put in trust for her great nephew, Robert Christie Stewart, and maintained by estate workers.
- 1952** Cowden Castle demolished.



Japanese Garden, 1909



The Japanese Garden, c. 1915



Shinzaburo Matsuo, Caretaker 1925–1937



Ella Christie and author Andrew Lang



Japanese Garden, Autumn, 1938



Japanese Garden, Autumn, 1938

- 1955 The Japanese Garden was opened to the public for the last time on May 28th in aid of the Episcopal Church St James's in Dollar. Robert Stewart continued to give private tours and lectures to garden history groups.
- 1950s/60s Intensive tree planting at east end of garden (birches, oaks, and sequoias).
- 1963 Teenagers broke into the garden and burnt the teahouses, bridges and knocked the lanterns and shrines into the water during one night of mayhem. They were witnessed fleeing the scene by Mr Stirling at Castleton Farm.
- 2008 The garden was handed over to Miss Christie's great, great niece (Robert's daughter), Sara Stewart.
- 2010 Taki Handa's granddaughter visited the garden.
- 2011 Two new bridges commissioned by Robert Stewart.
- 2012 The pond was dredged in order to clear the weeds and find the missing pieces from the lanterns. The garden was included in the Inventory by Historic Scotland.
- 2013 Professor Masao Fukuhara from Osaka University, Japan, was appointed to restore the garden.
- 2014 Proposed start of restoration.



Professor Fukuhara and Junya Matukawa at Cowden

THE LAST PUBLIC OPENING

28TH MAY, 1955





PRESS

24 August, 1996

THE HERALD

www.heraldsotland.com

5 September, 2013

HISTORIC SCOTLAND

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

5 September, 2013

CALEDONIAN MERCURY

www.caledonianmercury.com

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BBC NEWS

www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-23970528

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SCOOP

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DAILY RECORD

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www.glasgowarchitecture.co.uk

10 October, 2013

COUNTRY LIFE

www.countrylife.co.uk

'The best Japanese garden in the West' at Cowden Castle, Scotland

'Lost' garden to be restored

A CAMPAIGN has been launched to restore what was once described as the 'best Japanese garden in the Western world' to its former glory. Set in the grounds of Cowden Castle in Clackmannanshire, Scotland, the garden was discovered by the early-20th-century explorer Ella Christie. It was largely forgotten for decades and, although none of the brick and stone structures remain, the garden's symbolic stones remain.

THE CONCEPT PLAN



Fuji slope & Miniature hills

Restoration of miniature hills on Fuji sloping area designed by Taki Handa on the west side.

- Restoration of miniature hills
- Structural pruning
- Planting



Fuji slope in 1931



Current Fuji slope

Streams

Restoration of small stream and waterfall

- Restoration of the stone arrangements and bridge
- Restoration of stepping stones, and pathways



Current stream with small waterfall



Current stream with stone works

Southwest flat garden

Restoration of the flat garden on the west side designed and modified by Jiju Suzuki.

- Restoration of the stone arrangements, stepping stones, and pathways
- Reinstatement of Mizubachi (water basin)
- Restoration of stone lanterns
- Restoration of Azumaya (as work in Phase 3)



Stone lantern



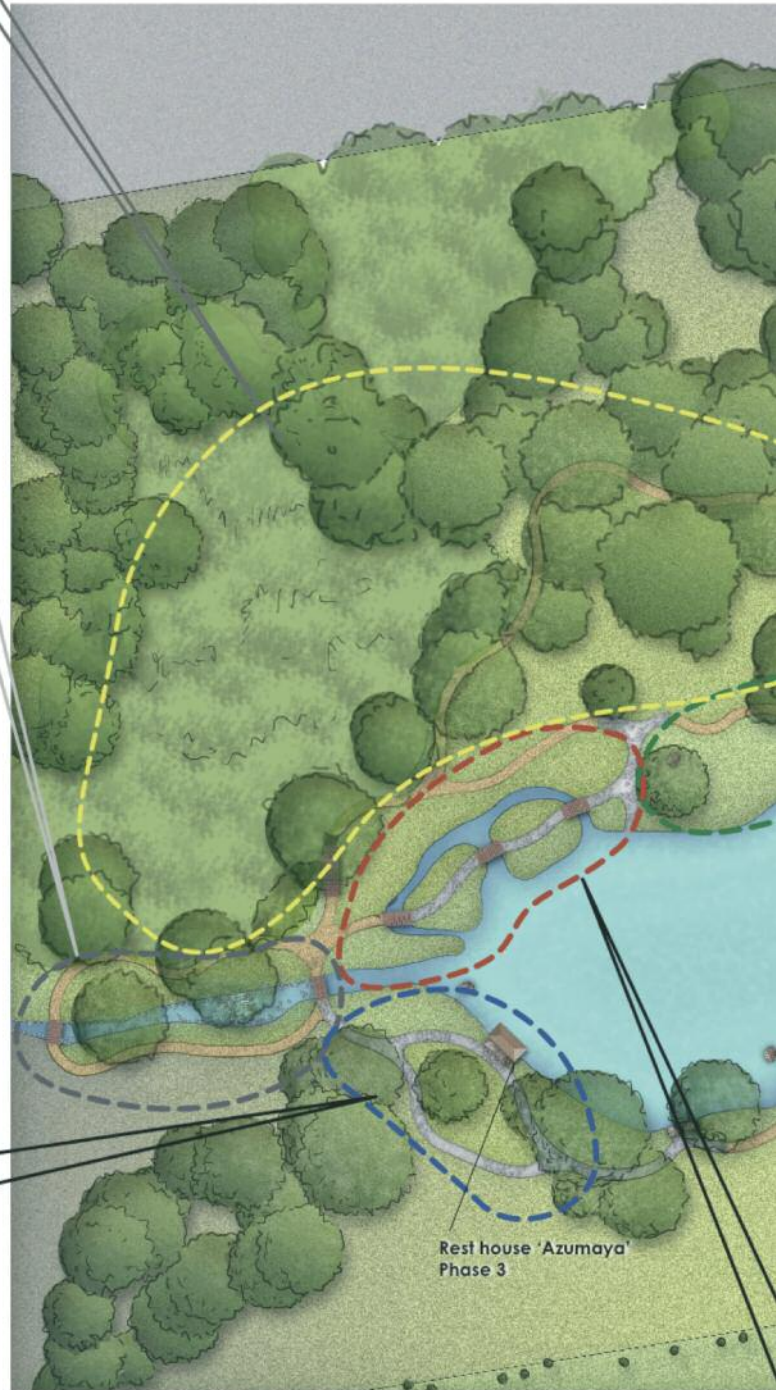
A photo taken at same location



Azumaya (Rest house)



A photo taken at same location



PHASE 1 PROJECT (FROM AUGUST 2014)

PHASE 2 PROJECT (FROM OCTOBER 2014)

PHASE 3 PROJECT (FROM YEAR 2015)

DESIGNED BY
TEAM FUKUHARA

COWDEN JAPANESE GARDEN		
C.J001 CONCEPT PLAN		
DATE	15.02.14	DRAWN AH
SCALE	NTS	CHECKED MF

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West islands

Restoration of the islands designed by Taki Handa to the west.

- Revetments on the banks
- Restoration of stone arrangements and pathways
- Restoration of wooden bridge
- Planting (as work in Phase 3)



Wooden bridge on the islands



A photo taken

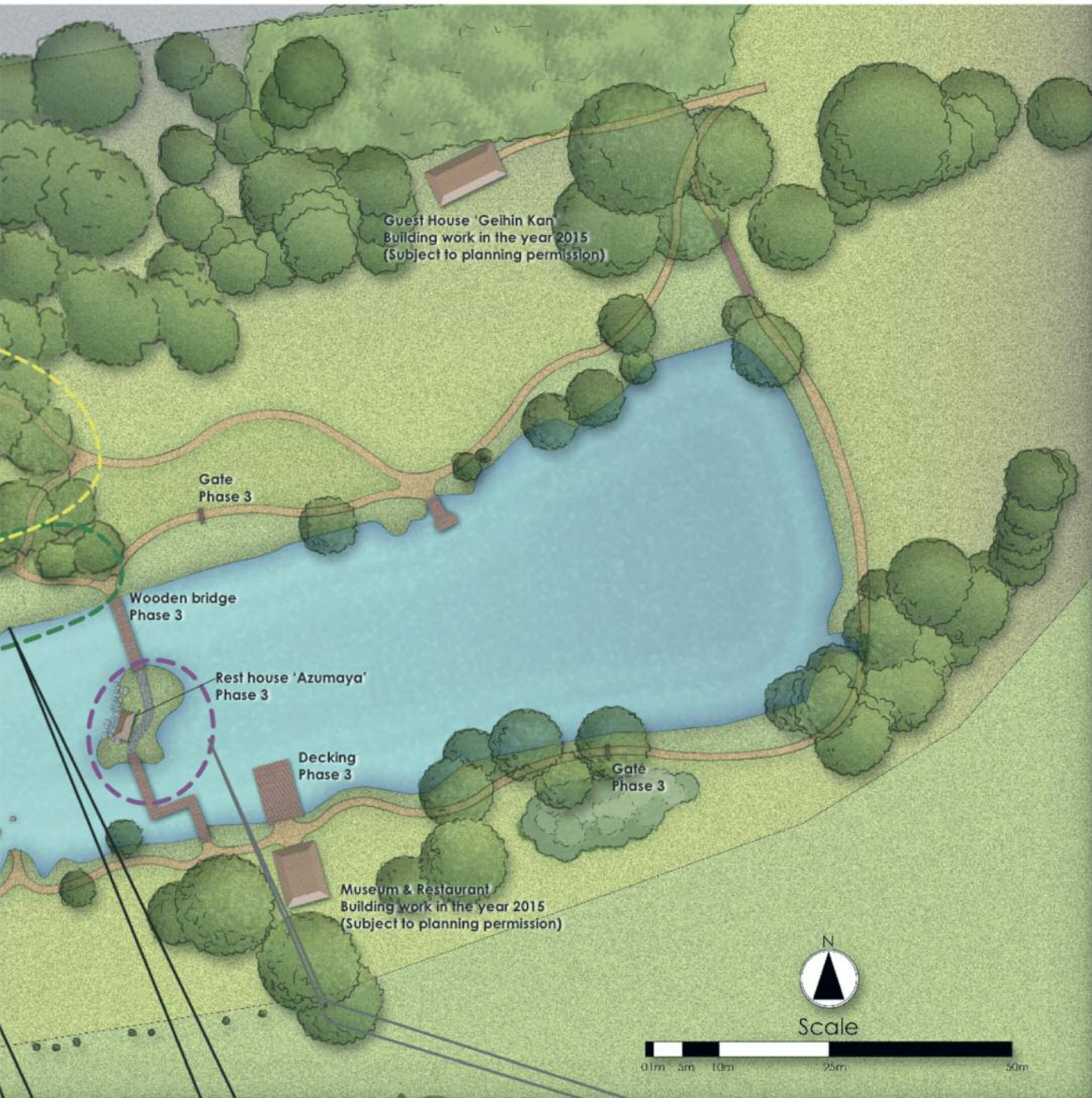


Ella Christie at a headland in 1933



A photo taken

CONCEPT PLAN



taken at same location



taken at same location

Northwest flat garden

Restoration of the flat garden designed by Taki Handa on the northwest side.

- Reinstatement of Yose lantern, stone lantern
- Restoration of stepping stone pathways
- Planting (as work in Phase 3)



Mr Matsuo at the flat garden in 1926



A photo taken at same location

Central island

Restoration of the central island designed by Ella Christie.

- Revetments on the banks, stone arrangements
- Reinstatement of Mizubachi (water basin)
- Restoration of wooden arched bridge (as work in Phase 3)
- Restoration of Azumaya (as work in Phase 3)
- Planting (as work in Phase 3)

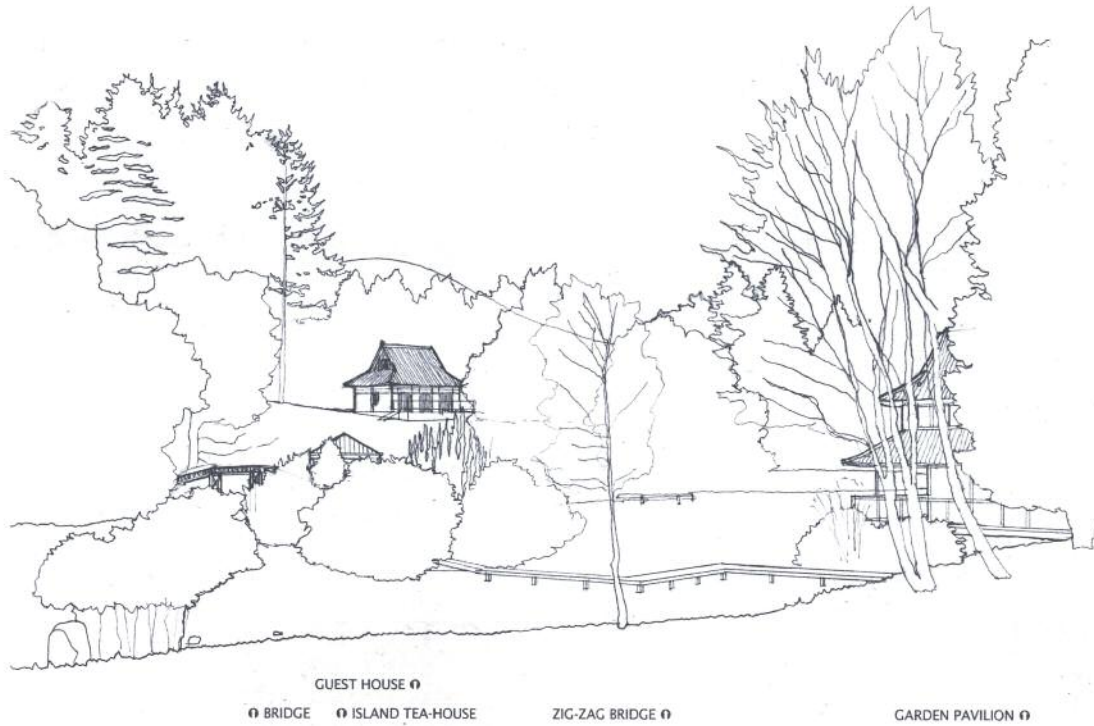


Zig zag bridge and central island in 1955

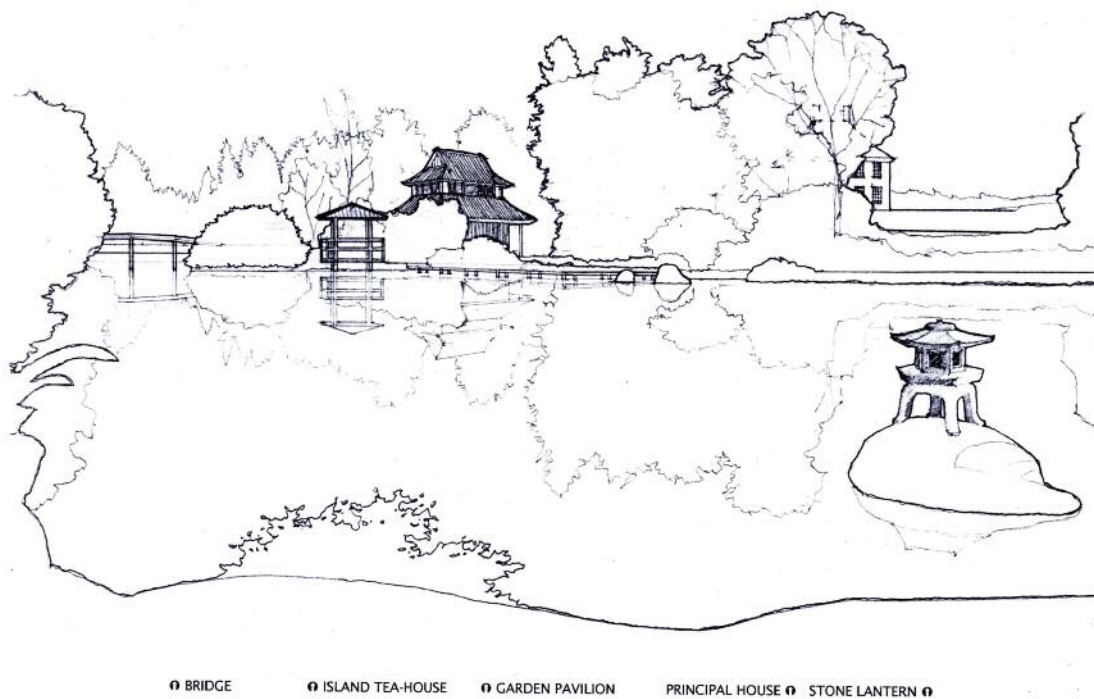


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ARCHITECT'S SKETCHES

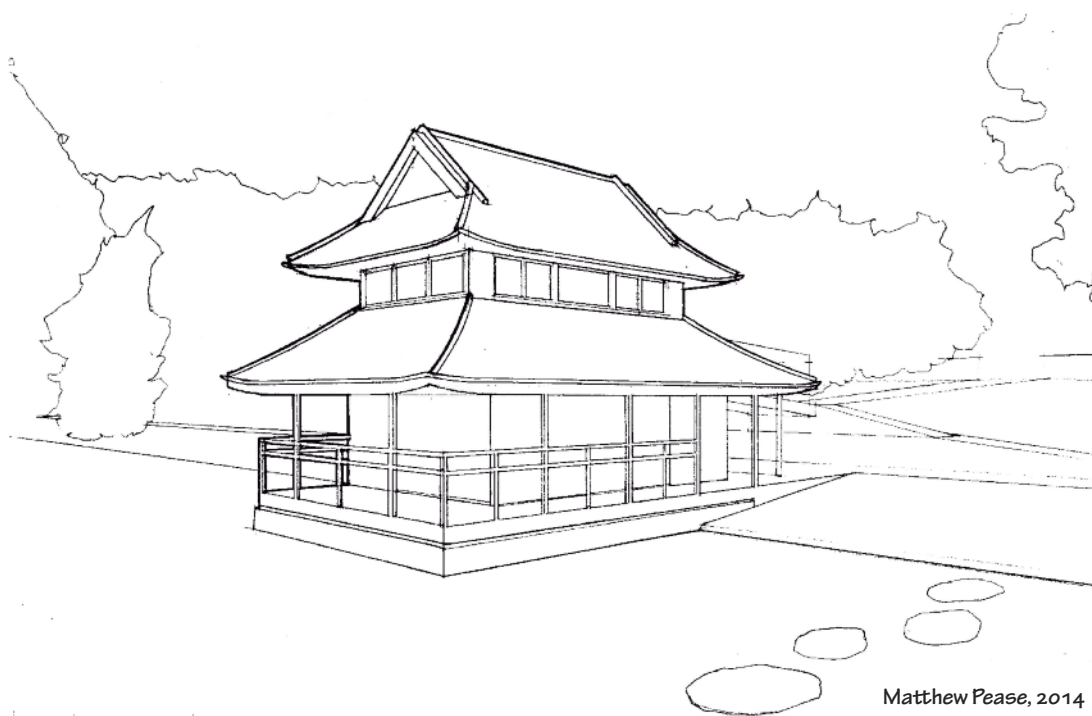


ABOVE: view from the south west towards new Guest House BELOW: view from the north west towards new Pavilion/Museum





ABOVE: sketch of new Guest House BELOW: sketch of of new Pavilion/Museum



Matthew Pease, 2014

THE RESTORATION TEAM



Professor Masao Fukuhara

Professor of Design and Environmental Planning Faculty and Architecture Faculty, Osaka University of Arts.

- 1996 Created Japanese garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew.
- 2001 Won Special prize in Show for Japanese Garden at the RHS Tatton Park Flower Show.
Won Gold and Best in Show for Japanese Garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show UK
- 2003 Created Japanese Garden at Rothschilds Museum of Art, South of France
Author of *Japanese Gardens built around the World* (Gakugei Publishers)



Junya Matukawa

*Professional gardener specializing in Japanese gardens
1st grade in landscape management and construction (Japan)*

- 2007–13 Site foreman for garden management at Chion-in, Kyoto
- 2008 Created private Japanese tea garden in Kyoto
- 2011 Created a private Japanese garden in Belgravia, London
- 2010 Created landscape garden for Inzai Building, Chiba-ken, Japan



Ai Hishii

*Director at Momiji Design Ltd.
Chartered member of Landscape Institute (UK).*

- 2012 Japanese garden management in a private garden in London
- 2011 Created a private Japanese garden in Belgravia, London
- 2006–11 Worked for Groundwork London as a Landscape Architect
Worked with communities; designed and created public parks in London



Matthew Pease

*Architect
Director, Clackmannanshire Heritage Trust
Member, Muckhart Community Council*

- 1989– Independent Architectural practice pursuing contextual architecture
- 1984–5 Green Lloyd Architects, Bedford Row, London
- 1987–9 Gilmore Hankey Kirk, London
- 1986–90 Surveyor to British School of Archaeology, Jerusalem
- 1981–4 B.Arch (Hons), Edinburgh University
- 1985–7 Dip Arch, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh
- 1976–80 Educated: Dollar Academy, Clackmannanshire



Sir Robert Stewart KCVO, CBE, DL

- 1992–2002 Lord Lieutenant Clackmannanshire
- 2001 Initiated Citizen of the Year, Clackmannanshire
- 1968–72 Chairman, Scottish Landowners Federation (SLF)
- 1970–82 Chairman, East of Scotland Colleges of Agriculture
- 1953–75 Perth & Kinross County Council
- 1955–75 Lord Lieutenant Kinross-shire
- 1966 Initiated Best Kept Village, Kinross-shire
- 1963–1965 TA, Commanding Officer
- 1949–65 Territorial Army (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders)
- 1948–51 University College, Oxford
- 1944–8 Scots Guards



Sara Stewart

- 1997– Managing Director, Fine Art Commissions Ltd, St. James's, London
- 2014– Partner, The English Room
- 2013– Vice Chair, Picton Castle Art Group, Pembrokeshire
- 2000–8 Managing Director, Arndean Gallery, 23 Cork Street, London
- 1996–2002 Director, Malcolm Innes Gallery, St. James's, London
- 1971–7 Prep School: Dollar Academy, Clackmannanshire



EXTRACT FROM HISTORIC SCOTLAND'S PRESS RELEASE

UNIQUE JAPANESE-STYLE GARDEN AT COWDEN RECOGNISED FOR ITS NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Elizabeth McCrone, Head of Listing and Designed Landscapes, said:

‘The story of Cowden is a fascinating one. It was once described as the best Japanese garden in the Western world and was visited by Queen Mary in the late 1930s. It is of outstanding importance for its value as a work of art and its historic value, and also of high importance for its horticultural, nature conservation and archaeological value. It came into being due to the determination of a remarkable woman, Ella Christie who named it Shāh-rak-uen, “a place of pleasure and delight.” I am delighted that her garden has recognition through its inclusion in the Inventory.’



The Slopes of Mount Fuji, Japanese Garden, Cowden

BACKGROUND

Cowden was celebrated as an especially authentic and successful example of a Japanese-style garden in the West and remains known as such in modern scholarship. Although it does not survive intact, enough of its basic structure survives for it to hold its place among one of very few remaining sites of this kind and era in the UK.

A historic Japanese-style garden designed and maintained by Japanese practitioners Taki Handa and Professor Suzuki in the early 20th century for the explorer Isabella (Ella) Robertson Christie (1861–1949). It incorporates elements of three Japanese garden forms; a pond and island garden, a stroll garden and a tea-house garden. The garden was seriously vandalised in the 1960s and none of the built structures remain. However much of its essential form remains, including plantings, the plan and form and low-lying structures, including symbolic stones.

Located 2.5 km north east of Dollar, the Japanese-style garden is set within the undulating park and woodland grounds of the former Cowden Castle estate. The garden itself occupies a relatively low-lying area close to the Cowden estate boundary wall. It is centred on an artificial lake created from what was once a tract of waterlogged ground and is secluded around much of its perimeter by higher ground, shelter-belt plantations and the mature specimen trees and shrubs of the garden itself with the notable exception of an open and panoramic outlook to the west towards the Ochill Hills. The concept of *shakkei* or borrowed landscape is a common device in Japanese garden design, and this view is significant in how the garden was intended to be experienced.

HISTORY

Cowden Japanese-style garden was the brainchild of explorer Ella Christie (1861–1949). She is known to historians as one of a handful of pioneering explorers who broke with traditional ideas about the role of women in the later 19th and early 20th century in order to mount ambitious and far-flung solo expeditions (Birkett 2004). Her early trips included Tibet, India and Burma in 1904–5, China, Korea and Japan in 1907 and Russian Turkestan in 1910 and 1912 where she was the first British woman to reach Khiva in modern Uzbekistan.¹

In between expeditions, Christie transformed her home environment at Cowden Castle, evoking scenes from her travels by filling rooms with artefacts.² It was her journey to Japan, however, that inspired her most ambitious home project. Enchanted by the gardens, temples and flowers of Kyoto and Tokyo in the late spring of 1907, and having taken a nine hour walking tour around Mount Fuji, she settled on the idea of creating her own Japanese-style garden.³

The wider context for Ella Christie's personal interest was the end of Japan's self-imposed isolation in the mid-19th century and the ensuing vogue in the West for its art, culture and nature. Garden-making was a popular manifestation of this trend, fuelled by the sudden availability of exotic plants, bulbs and ornaments, the work of artists and writers, such as Josiah Conder, author of the influential 1893 *Landscape Gardening in Japan*, and the trend-setting example of early gardens like that at Gunnersbury House, Middlesex. By the time of Christie's trip east, the British cultural love-affair with Japan was approaching its height. Within the space of just six months in 1910, some eight million people visited the Japan–British Exhibition in White City, London, with its gardens, tableaux and miniature landscapes.⁴

Whereas most early 20th-century Japanese-style gardens in Britain were a pastiche or mismatch of elements, Cowden was distinguished from the start by the involvement of experienced Japanese garden designers who applied fundamental concepts of the design tradition to create a more convincing design.⁵ First of these was Taki Handa from the Royal School of Garden Design in Nagoya and another female pioneer in her field. While still in Japan, Christie had been advised by Josiah Conder to source 'English speaking experts'⁶ and Handa certainly fitted this description, having studied horticulture and botany both in Kyoto and in the UK. Commissioned by Christie in 1907 to establish the framework of the garden, Handa spent six weeks at Cowden shaping the ground and placing stones.⁷

Japanese garden design is an ancient and complex discipline in which practitioners devise entire landscapes in microcosm. Scale, proportion and harmony are prioritised in order to compose highly refined views of nature, rich in meaning and symbolism. At Cowden, the overall layout was determined by these conventions. It was inspired partly by the 'ancient rule' of the Imperial

Palace Gardens and partly by Josiah Conder's writing.⁸ 'An absolute sense of proportion was observed from the very beginning', wrote Christie.⁹

Carefully composed photographs taken in the years immediately afterwards show the bare bones of the new garden. There was the newly created lake itself, the main island accessed by wooden bridges, timber structures and symbolic stones, lanterns and small shrubs all set within an open, still treeless landscape. Paths and stepping stones marked out the route around the lake, punctuated by a thatched gateway on the south side of the lake, a Shinto shrine on the west, and a revolving summerhouse on the north. The garden was named Shāh-rak-uen, meaning a place of pleasure or delight.

Christie then initiated what was to become an enduring professional relationship with a second key figure: Professor Jijo Soya Suzuki, Master of the Soami School of Imperial Design, who had forged a successful career in the UK from c.1910 onwards.¹⁰ Suzuki visited Cowden on occasion to advise on garden form, planting and architecture and to execute very specific

pruning methods on the growing trees and shrubs. His surviving letters provide valuable insight into the philosophy behind the practical garden work at Cowden, and one of his most well-known modifications was to persuade Christie to remove one of the original bridges and create a new, zig-zag (yatsubashi), bridge in its place (NLS Acc. 5058).

The third Japanese individual associated with Cowden was employed by Christie in order to provide continuous, on-site care. Recommended by Suzuki in 1925, Shinzaburo Matsuo lived and worked as gardener at Cowden until his death in 1937 where according to some accounts he proved 'as great an attraction to visitors as the exotic plants.'¹¹

The combination of Christie's drive and vision together with the involvement of individuals familiar with the nuances of Japanese garden design meant that Cowden achieved some degree of fame in its hey-day as a particularly authentic Japanese-style garden. According to Professor Suzuki, it was, in fact, the best in the Western world (NLS Acc. 5058).

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NLS = National Library of Scotland.

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RECOLLECTIONS OF THE JAPANESE GARDEN

Sir Robert Stewart KCVO, CBE, DL

“

The Japanese Garden was created, in 1908, my great aunt ('Grandaunt'), Ella Christie. I remember spending most Sundays in the 30s with her and my sister, Grizel. We would walk from the castle up the long, burnside path, through the lime avenue to the garden and have tea in the Tea House in the first floor of the Boat House. The interior was furnished with symbolic wood carvings. From the balcony one looked out onto the 'slopes of Fuji' and the Ochil Hills in the distance.



Queen Mary, a friend of Grandaunt's, visited in 1937 and I remember showing her the collection of china, oriental *objets d'art* and photographs of Ella's travels, by the 13th Century Tower. We visited the long gallery, where I held the light cable for her to see properly. I remember Ella giving The Queen a piece of china. We drove to the garden on the recently constructed 'Coronation' tarmac road; the garden was immaculate.

When my sister and I visited as teenagers, before and during the war, Grandaunt would explain all the meanings of the stones, the shrines and the lacquered lanterns. She explained how no one must meddle with the spring, which was the source for the water supply to the loch. She would sit in her revolving summerhouse, admire her creation and reminisce on her visits to Japan and the special trees in the garden. It was never boring and made a lasting impression on me. For her, who had travelled the world so often, this was her reward.

”



ABOVE
Queen Mary at Cowden, 1937, with
Robert Stewart in foreground and
Ella Christie on right.

LEFT
Robert and Grizel Stewart, Cowden, 1930

FAR LEFT
Robert Stewart at Cowden, 2012

FURTHER INFORMATION

For information on the Japanese Garden at Cowden Castle
please email: sara@cowdencastle.com or telephone Sara Stewart on: 020 7839 2792

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Florence Stewart at Cowden, c.1930

'The most important Japanese garden in the Western World'

Professor Jijo Suzuki

18TH HEREDITARY HEAD OF THE SOAMI SCHOOL OF IMPERIAL GARDEN DESIGN, JAPAN, 1925

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