

Travelogue Scottish Border Gardens

by James Smith

THIS SUMMER, A SCORE OF HPSERS headed off to a somewhat wet and oft overcast adventure of gardens and houses in Scotland and northern England.

House for an Art Lover

Our first stop was in Glasgow to visit a house designed by Charles Mackintosh, the Scottish version architect of Frank Lloyd Wright. It was completely done in simplistic design with Art Deco motifs in the paneling, lighting, fireplaces, and furniture. The house was called **House for an Art Lover**, and it was designed for a German competition at the turn of the last century, 1901. It should have won—but the architect, Mackintosh, didn't submit all the plans properly and was thus disqualified. The plans remained, but the house was never built until 1996. Mackintosh never got to see the house completed.

Crawick Multiverse

Our next visit was to an abandoned open coal pit which had been an eyesore to the landscape. The owner of the property spent £1 million to turn the wasteland into a restoration project called **Crawick Multiverse**. It now consists of several hillocks with huge stone boulders placed atop them in the form of a Stonehenge. (I guess one



Jill Evans in dining room of House for an Art Lover

could call it a Scotshenge.) There are stone formations throughout the property and to see them all involved a goodly amount of walking and climbing. It was so exhilarating and unique. The different hills, mounds, and stone formations were meant to represent various parts of the universe, hence the name Multiverse. The design is based around space, astronomy, and cosmology.

abandoned coal pit
metamorphosed into mounds
symbolized multiverse



Charles Leasure and Nadine McShane at Crawick Multiverse

Garden of Cosmic Speculation

This garden in Holywood was spectacular, stunning in its simplicity and originality of design, and contained practically no flowering plants. The entire garden, encompassing about thirty acres, was a series of hills, mounds, ponds, and bridges. To these were added designed earth- and metal-sculpted installations inspired by science and mathematics. The place was called **Garden of Cosmic Speculation**, designed by Charles Jencks. There were lots of curvilinear and flowing movements in the landscaping scheme, which even extended to the hedgerows. The one, more traditional garden did have flowering plants and was created in a formal classical format. It was the **Garden of the Six Senses**. The sixth sense was “intuition”, symbolized by a woman's head peering at a sensitized brain. Eerie! To follow through on the cosmic theme, certain sections of the extensive garden were called **Black Hole Terrace**, **Comet Bridge**, **Universe Cascade**, and **Quark Walk**. Several members of the group climbed the **Snail Mound** and claimed victory upon reaching the summit of this high circular mound. From there we had a superb overview of much of the



Penelope Malish at Garden of Cosmic Speculation



Fellow HPSers on Pyramid at Garden of Cosmic Speculation



Housesteads Roman Fort and Hadrian's Wall



Washington Old Hall Knot Hedge



Bowes Museum Silver Swan

eloquently designed landscape
forming the nucleus of the garden.

otherworldly site
curvilinear circulars
ponds, fields, mounds unite

Hadrian's Wall

We crossed into England at the town of Gretna Green, Scotland, (best known to the Brits as the place that English couples would run off to elope in order to get a quick wedding in years past) and then arrived at **Hadrian's Wall** in a virtual downpour. It had to happen. Until today, we had been able to escape the raindrops for the most part—in and out of showers, but walking to the fort and wall of Hadrian, a full half mile each way, it began to rain, quite forcefully. The pathway led up a hill, down a hill, across the flats and up another very steep hill to the ruin site. The fort ruins are just remnants of low foundations because, over the centuries, the stones were stolen and recycled by the locals. In fact, near the site there is a small village actually called Wall. I wonder where they got their stones to build their houses?

from Hadrian's Wall
stone ruins the legacy
Roman rulers fall

George Washington's Ancestral Home

That afternoon's stop was to the ancestral home of George Washington. It was in the small town of Washington (isn't that a coincidence!), a small manor house located beside the church which was built in the 12th century. Of course the president never was here (the family emigrated to America in the 1600s), but it was his historical family homestead. Already in England, the family was of substantial means. The in-house guide gave a quick rundown of the history of the village, the church, and the home. Then we were able to visit the rooms and the attached gardens.

from Washington's Hall
exodus of family line
new lives to install

Durham

Was that sun? Indeed! The sky was blue. Our hotel was a bridge away from the center of the old city of Durham and we were off to the spectacular romanesque **Cathedral of Durham**, built in 1093.

footbridge to the past
cathedral of Norman times
romanesque style cast

catholics here pass
evolving through centuries
gothic arches mass

Reformation change
saints and icons tossed away
simple service range

modern times emerge
traditions near lost renewed
religious rites surge

We entered the cathedral with all its history, unique architecture, stained glass windows (traditional and modern), and special artifacts relating to religion and the building. Already in the romanesque period and style, there were many innovative changes in this structure. In this church is the very first ever transitional archway showing the change from romanesque to gothic style architecture. That's quite a claim. The church has, thankfully, managed to save some traditional artifacts as well as all of its architectural beauty. St. Cuthbert, interred in the church, is the saint to northeastern England, thus the cathedral has long been held as a pilgrimage site.

Bowes Museum

The world famous **Bowes Museum** was established in the 1800s by a collector of art and his artistically trained wife—paintings by Albrecht Dürer, Tiepolo, el Greco, and Canaletto. What a place, a veritable palace. The most important and most famous piece in the museum is a life-size mechanical swan created out of pure silver. It stems from the 1700s and was even mentioned by Mark Twain in his novel *Innocents Abroad*. The swan moves its neck and head up, down, and around like a figure eight for exactly 33 seconds.

silver swan swimming
twisting neck in mating mode
seeks Leda abode

The haiku references the mythological story of Leda and the Swan, whereby Zeus seeks to seduce Leda by turning himself into a swan.

Thornton Hall

Thornton Hall in Darlington is a private garden open to the public. The manor house was built in 1550 with additions in the 1600s. Several of the windows were sealed over because of a window tax which was instituted in 1696. Over the last 25 years, two walled-in garden areas were picture perfect and had the most colorful selections of flowers, many of which were massed in clumps to provide more eye appeal. Each walled garden also had a small pond in it. The varied flower beds were most impressive and no photos could possibly do justice to this unique garden setting.

Crook Hall

Crook Hall was a most pleasant place, very walkable even though it was on a gently sloping incline overlooking the River Wear and the famed Durham Cathedral on the opposite side of the river. The estate had a medieval hall dating from 1208, but the remainder of the house was Jacobean style, built during the reign of King James I, (early 1600s). The house was quite intimate and is still used in part today for overnight guests. The gardens were small and intimate and interconnected with one another. The names alone for the various gardens were fascinating and vividly described each one. Thus there was a silver & white garden, a Shakespeare garden, a cathedral garden, a secret walled garden, a solar wing garden, a quiet corner garden, and even a maze.

rolling, rambling paths
divided by gardens quaint
artists' palette paint

Little Sparta

Little Sparta in Dunsyre, Scotland, is often referred to as a quintessential 20th-century garden. Poet Ian Hamilton Finlay started the garden in 1966-67 and incorporated his poetry into the many miniature garden niches. After his death, the property became a trust and is considered to be not only a prime garden site, but also the harbinger of art. The sculptures are called "poem objects," based on the idea of "concrete poetry." This combination takes the creative poetry process to the nth degree.

sympiotic surge
poetry in its extreme
art and nature merge

One of the inscribed stones stated merely: "man, a passerby". On three different posts were the following inscriptions:

*In the wood are paths which
mostly wind along until they end
quite suddenly in an impenetrable
thicket.*

They are called wood paths.

*Often it seems as though one
were like another, yet it only seems
so.*

As we travelled on the bus back to Glasgow airport, we all agreed that Scottish and northern England gardens are well deserving of their reputations. May your travels soon take you there.



James A. Smith, hails from the Pocono Mountains of PA. He probably developed his enjoyment of garden settings and plant diversity from his grandmother, a flower and plant enthusiast. As an academic, he spent many years studying and living in Germany, France, Spain, and the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia). Jim now takes pleasure in traveling and learning from the many exotic places and unique experiences he has encountered, most recently to North Korea, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Writing haiku verses to describe his wanderings, nature impressions, and topical themes has been a hobby of many decades.

Ed Note: All photos ©Jessica Smith.



Neal Wattles is at home in Thornton Hall Gardens.



Nora Morganstern enjoys The Uncommon Toad at Crook Hall.



Nadine McShane and Ilona Ontscherecki explore the Walled Garden at Abbotsford, a house built by Sir Walter Scott.



Little Sparta Arcadia