

The Japanese Garden Cowden Castle



‘The most important Japanese garden in the Western World’

Professor Jijo Suzuki, 1925, 18th Hereditary Head of the Soami School of Imperial Design, Japan

Ella Christie's Japanese Garden enjoys world wide prominence largely due to it being the only one of its kind to have been designed by a female landscape garden designer. To this day Japanese women are not allowed to be accredited with the design of a garden of this size. Cowden was maintained by Mr Shinsaburo Matsuo between 1925 and 1937 reinforcing the garden's credibility of not being a 'pastiche'.



Top: The Fuji Slope, Japanese Garden at Cowden, 1931

Above: Ella Christie, 1909, and in the Japanese Garden at Cowden, 1934

Isabella 'Ella' Christie of Cowden (1861–1949) was a formidable lady whose achievements include being the first western female to travel from Samarkand to Khiva and meeting the Dalai Lama. Between 1904 and 1905 she travelled to India and then to Kashmir, Tibet, Malaya and Borneo.

Although at times travelling in hostile conditions, her trunks contained dresses for parties (which included a banquet given by the Maharaja of Kashmir and dinner with Lord Kitchener then Commander in Chief, India). She camped in the snow at Chorbat Pass, sailed in a cargo ship full of pigs, travelled by packhorse and cart in the Kashmir wilderness, and trekked by foot for 60 miles in the Desoi Mountains. Aged 50, while waiting for a train at Dollar station Ella was asked if she was travelling to Edinburgh, the short reply 'No, Samarkand' perfectly encapsulates the fearless spinster who was fluent in four languages, including Finnish.

On returning from Uzbekistan—where she travelled via train, steamer, and droshky—she was in the first cohort of women to be elected Fellows of The Royal Geographical Society.

1861 Ella Christie born in Midlothian.

1861 John Christie, a keen arborist, bought Cowden Castle.

1904 On the death of John Christie, Ella embarked on a decade of travels to the Far East.

1906–7 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 Ella commissioned Taki Handa (who had been an instructor at Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts in Japan) to create Sha Raku En, 'the place of pleasure and delight' at Cowden.

1908–25 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.

1926 Ella's great nephew, Robert (Bobby) Christie Stewart, born at Arndean, two miles south of Cowden.

1925–37 Shinsaburo Matsuo was the garden caretaker until his death in 1937. That Ella Christie went to such pains to obtain the right skill and knowledge from Japan and that she was able to obtain faithful service from those strangers in a foreign land were the reasons for the success of the enterprise.

1920–49 The garden attracted many visitors, including writer and historian, Andrew Lang, novelist Annie S Swan, George Blake, and H M Queen Mary. The garden was opened regularly for Scotland's Garden Scheme. Alice Stewart, Ella's sister, was a founder of the scheme.

1949 Ella Christie died of leukaemia aged 87. The garden was put in trust for her great nephew, Bobby and maintained by estate workers.

1952 Cowden Castle demolished on the instructions of the estate trustees.



Bobby Stewart and his sister, Grizel, at the races in the 1940s



Cowden Castle



Taki Handa



1908



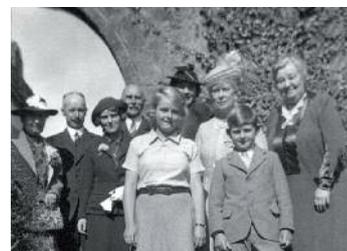
Shinsaburo Matsuo



1909



1909



1937

Queen Mary at Cowden, 1937, with Bobby in foreground and Ella Christie on right.

Sha-raku-en The place of pleasure and delight

In a sheltered foothold of a grassy range of hills that stretch from sunrise to sunset, lies the garden 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 Sha-raku-en, the place of pleasure and delight.

A Long Look at Life by Two Victorians
Ella Christie and Alice Stewart

1955 The Japanese Garden was opened to the public for the last time on May 28th, 1955, in aid of the Episcopal Church in Dollar.



1950s–1960s Bobby continued to give private tours and lectures to garden history groups. Intensive tree planting at east end of garden (birch, oak, sequoia).

1963 Teenagers scaled the walls, set fire to the wooden structures, and knocked the lanterns and shrines into the water during a night of mayhem. They were witnessed fleeing the scene by Mr Stirling at Castleton Farm.



Restoration



2012

2008 The garden was handed over to Ella's great, great niece, Sara Stewart.

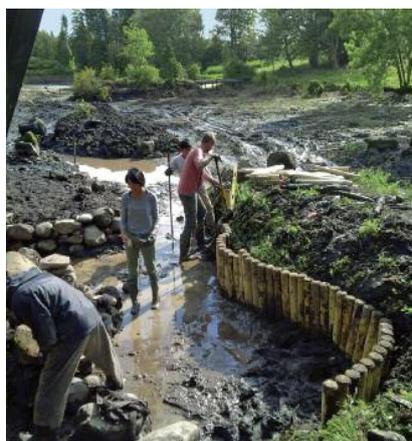
2012 The pond was dredged in order to clear the weeds and source the missing pieces from the lanterns. Garden included in Historic Scotland's *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*.

2013 Professor Masao Fukuhara from Osaka University of Arts visited Cowden. Renowned in his field—his many credits include winning Gold and Best in Show for his garden at the Chelsea Flower Show; restoring the Japanese Garden at Kew, London; and creating a Japanese Garden at the Rothschild Museum in the South of France—he was appointed to restore the Japanese gardens at Cowden.

2014 Restoration. Phase 1:
The southwest flat garden



2013



2014

The Future

Supporters

The restoration to date has been made possible by many extremely generous private donors. In addition, sponsorship from Historic Scotland, Baillie Gifford, John L S Grant, and John Swire and Sons has enabled the Trust to employ consultants to produce the application for the Heritage Lottery Fund Grant and also the Conservation Management Plans.

We are delighted to be officially collaborating with The Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh and to have endorsement from The Ambassador of Japan, The Consul General of Japan, and Tony Kirkham, Head of the Arboretum at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Construction Plans

Although over half way through the restoration, before we open to the public we need to commission the following:

▶ Education Pavilion & Landscaping	£180,000
▶ New Front Entrance & Drive	£120,000
▶ New Back Entrance & Connecting Drive	£32,000
▶ Island Azumaya & Island Landscaping	£28,000
▶ Second Welcome Gate & Landscaping	£26,000
▶ Summer House & Access Path	£24,000
▶ Arched Bridge & Access Path	£22,500
▶ Zigzag Bridge & Access Path	£15,500
▶ Heritage Stone Restoration	£9,000
▶ Three Benches & Landscaping	£5,000

Completion Plans

Cowden will be open between Easter and October for our visitors to see the fabulous Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Cherry trees in the Spring, plus the Maples and Acers in the autumn. There will be a woodland walk to enjoy and for those who would prefer to see the garden in the warmth, a permanent display of Miss Christie's Far Eastern treasures, a photographic history of the garden, film of the various stages of restoration and a small tea room with a veranda overlooking the water.

Both the Pavilion and garden will be available to rent for corporate events.

Lastly and, of equal importance, our aim is to encourage private tours for charities such as Maggie's Centres and Mind; we would like patients and their families to benefit from the pleasure the garden has given the Stewart family for over a hundred years.

www.cowdencastle.com

