Last post on the eve of my departure

Andrea Brunsendorf, outgoing Head Gardener

It was only when I got the applause from 260 horticulturalists in the grand ballroom of Longwood Gardens, USA that I felt it was official. I had been invited to speak at Today’s Horticulture Symposium as part of my new role as Director of Outdoor Landscapes at the renowned stateside garden. I was speaking about the revitalisation of the gardens here at Inner Temple and sharing with them the balancing act I have had as Head Gardener, between my custodial responsibilities and the development of innovative planting designs that are relevant to modern horticulture.

Part of the preparation for this talk was to reacquaint myself with some of the historic milestones of the Inner Temple Garden. First, I looked back at one of my predecessors, Samuel Broome (1842-1870). Broome was famous for his chrysanthemum shows, which were truly outstanding and attracted all of London’s high society. Perhaps most progressively, and certainly closest to my heart, in 1858 he opened the garden in the evenings to the general public. There are anecdotes in The Times reporting that over 1,000 children visited at one time.

The advent of the Second World War brought with it some of the darkest days in the Garden, and for London in general. The Inn was bombed to smithereens by the Luftwaffe. It took 15 years to clear the rubble and prepare for planting the first trees... Gardening is all about resilience and new beginnings. Looking back I can see that repeated in the Garden’s history. As Boris, Hunter Temple and I pack our bags another chapter begins, not just for us but for the Inner Temple Garden too.

My original brief was to put the Garden back on the horticultural map. I have always followed my gut and for Inner Temple I gambled on creating something beautiful, which would inspire and capture the hearts of our visitors and raise our horticultural profile. You can’t ignore 800 years of history and you do need to stay true to the place while revitalising what’s in front of you.

I decided to leave the zany chrysanthemum shows in the past, but I have reinterpreted them with my own exuberant displays in the High Border. The planting uses, and occasionally abuses, the benign climate we have in the city to produce the longest flowering period possible. I have created a multi-layered plant experience by annuals to bulbs, biennials, perennials, grasses, exotic frost-tender plants, roses, self-seeders and even our shy English cow parsley.

The Masters of the Garden have always trusted me and supported my vision for a beautiful and inspiring garden. For the last five years we have been involved with the Chelsea Fringe. This alternative public...
who started as a volunteer, underwent our two year traineeship (and survived) and then progressed to Senior Gardener. Our partnership has been the most creative period I’ve had since my arrival and the garden is still reaping the benefits of that association.

I know my tendency to reach for the horticultural stars can be challenging for our small team, but thankfully they have supported me and interpreted my vision with such good grace and great patience.

As I head to Longwood, I will tuck the kindness and support of my friends, colleagues and members from the Inner Temple in my suitcase. I also hope to take some of the successional layering, soft, billowing planting which I developed in the borders here to my new job in the US.

The volunteer programme has been another innovation and a wonderful collaboration to widen the access to the Garden and my chance to give-back to the horticultural sector. The volunteers bring our team much needed additional help and fresh perspectives, while for them we provide the opportunity to learn and grow with us. Some have gone on to professional horticultural careers and I’m very happy to have been a small part of this.

One of my most precious collaborations has been with my wing-woman Amanda Dennis, who started as a volunteer, underwent our two year traineeship (and survived) and then progressed to Senior Gardener. Our partnership has been the most creative period I’ve had since my arrival and the garden is still reaping the benefits of that association.

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