The start of a new adventure

Sean Harkin, new Head Gardener

I am writing this on my recent appointment as Head Gardener of the Inner Temple. It's a bit of a cliché, but it really is a dream come true to have taken on this role. For this post I thought it would be good to introduce myself and share a few highlights of my previous work, giving you some background on who is taking over the helm of this precious garden.

Despite studying International Relations and Politics at the University of Sheffield, I soon realised after graduating that gardening was the right path for me. From there I haven’t looked back. My horticulture career has taken me to some of the most wonderful places across the world, working in Kirstenbosch Botanics, Hestercombe, RHS Wisley, Tresco Abbey Gardens, Kensington Palace and on New York’s Highline.

Perhaps the two most significant gardens I have worked in are RHS Wisley and Kensington Palace. Initially I trained on the Diploma in Practical Horticulture at Wisley, spending two years intensively working and studying whilst living in the gardens. I really loved it and later returned to work there, leading a team who cared for 12 acres of the ornamental gardens.

Prior to starting at the Inner Temple I managed the gardens of Kensington Palace, known around the world as the former home of Princess Diana. My time at Kensington coincided last year with the twentieth anniversary of the Princess's tragic death in 1997. For the anniversary I wanted to do something in the gardens that celebrated Princess Diana's life and legacy, an idea that led to the creation of a White Garden. This
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There are large boots to fill on Andrea’s departure, but I am excited to continue the wonderful work that has gone before me and to develop the Garden in the years ahead. The spirit of the gardens – of beauty and people’s enjoyment – will be in my mind as the team and I take the garden into the future.

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naturalistic scheme in the Palace’s historic Sunken Garden included forget-me-nots (Mysotis), white roses (Rosa ‘Desdemona’) and airy Cosmos (Cosmos bipinnatus). It was intended as a reflective place where people could come to remember the Princess. On the eve of the twentieth anniversary itself, I had the enormous privilege of showing TRH The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and HRH Prince Harry around the garden, as part of their public tribute to their mother.

So now to the Inner Temple. I have truly admired the Inner Temple Garden for a number of years, watching the work Andrea and the team have put in to transform this historic oasis. The High Borders have been rightly celebrated, and I have tried to call in regularly over the years to see what treats were in store. The Inner Temple Garden is a true plant person’s garden with layers of diverse planting and the highest horticultural standards. I have long dreamt of taking over as Head Gardener if the position were to become available, so it was with great anticipation that I heard that Andrea was moving to pastures new.

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