

HERITAGE GARDEN RESTORATION AND MAINTENANCE



Anthony Thake

The Pratt Foundation/ISS Institute Overseas Fellowship

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ISS Institute

Suite 101
685 Burke Road
Camberwell Vic
AUSTRALIA 3124

Telephone

03 9882 0055

Facsimile

03 9882 9866

Email

issi.ceo@pacific.net.au

Web

www.issinstitute.org.au

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ISS Institute
101/685 Burke Road
Camberwell 3124
AUSTRALIA

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Executive Summary

Heritage garden restoration and maintenance is an important issue worldwide. Gardens are part of our history and give us a window into the past, and once lost are impossible to replace. If we are to preserve this heritage link then funding for maintenance, restoration or reconstruction and skill and knowledge enhancement needs to be allocated.

Currently in Australia we have a short history of heritage gardening compared with overseas. Even so, there are many gardens in need of restoration or reconstruction to bring them back to their original condition. Not only are these activities important, but the ongoing sensitive maintenance of these gardens is vital for their continuing preservation. Managers and administrators of these gardens need to be convinced to allocate resources for this maintenance, restoration and reconstruction as well as skill and knowledge enhancement. These places are important community assets in an increasingly urbanised environment. They are capable of generating income through a variety of sources that would improve their priority ranking, allowing this work to proceed. Heritage gardens, if neglected, can be quickly lost and almost impossible to recreate.

If we are to restore these gardens then there are international agreements and local legislation that control/guide what is done. Historical research is the first crucial step in this process and unless there is evidence from the past it is very difficult to complete an authentic restoration of a heritage garden. Climate change and finding qualified gardeners are other challenges to this process.

Within the Amenity Horticulture training package there are skill gaps in the area of heritage garden restoration and maintenance. At diploma level the only relevant unit is about planning the process of restoration, but not actually completing the restoration work. High level skill to sensitively maintain heritage gardens, project work to link planning with practical restoration work and environment change affecting restoration work needs to be in place.

The Overseas Fellowship provided the opportunity to investigate these skill gaps through visiting heritage restored gardens like Hampton Court and Heligan. Other activities were discussions with the National Trust concerning heritage garden restoration and maintenance, maintenance gardening at heritage sites like the Kew Botanic Gardens and Levens Hall, and also investigating the education issues surrounding heritage gardens at Writtle College, Nottingham Trent University and the Kew Botanic Gardens.

There is a long history of gardening in the United Kingdom; this creates its own challenges in terms of restorations. Restorations can be large or small and all require extensive historical research to ensure an authentic process. There also needs to be consideration given to subsequent maintenance challenges following these works. Gardening and garden visitation is very popular; this brings pressures to historic gardens. Climate change is starting to have an effect on gardens, so planning is being put in place to adjust to changing circumstances. There is a continuing challenge to recruit, train and retain gardeners to look after these spectacular places.

Through the Fellowship opportunity Thake has gained valuable insights about how heritage garden maintenance and restoration is carried out in the United Kingdom, including an education aspect. This experience will allow Thake to pass on ways to address skill deficiencies in horticulture which will benefit our industry. Restorations can be large or small, and there is a growing popularity of gardening and garden visits to those gardens encompassing a long gardening history. In addition there is a move to utilise more organic processes in heritage gardens and a greater awareness of how climate change can impact this area.

There is a great potential benefit to the industry by sharing this knowledge with others through talks with community groups, industry groups both locally and Australia-wide, and with members of the general public.

Heritage garden restoration and maintenance, and the capabilities to do so, are of vital importance if we are to preserve these sites into the future.