INTRODUCTION

It took some time following Japan’s opening to the western world in the mid-nineteenth century before people in Britain were inspired by Japanese gardens to want to replicate them in Britain, but with the rise of Japonisme in the late nineteenth century the desire to have a ‘Japanese garden’ grew. These ‘expressions’ of Japan were extremely diverse, ranging from carefully constructed replicas striving for authenticity to a nod to ‘the fair Japan’ with the addition of such novelties as a randomly placed lantern, bridge or bronze crane. An area could be designated ‘Japanese’ for containing nothing more than plants from Japan. There could be just one feature such as a bridge or lantern, or even a tea-house. These could be the genuine article imported from Japan, or a local interpretation designed by estate staff. For the more enthusiastic owner the skills of a Japanese designer were called upon either from Japan, or from London.

There were a variety of motivations and influences in the creation of Japanese-style gardens in Britain, including new plant introductions and aspects of Japanese arts; however, the major inspiration for these gardens came from travellers visiting Japan, and the desire for a garden as a fashionable addition to an estate or a commercial enterprise. Japanese-style gardens were created as holiday mementoes on the estates of those who could afford to travel to Japan and who returned with the appropriate ornaments and even designers. The Kyoto Exhibitors’ Association for the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition was well aware of the demand by foreign visitors for items such as ‘stone or bronze lanterns, bridges, and rocks’, which were taken home ‘to decorate gardens on strange soil’. The gardens often offered no serious insight into the gardens of Japan but reinforced
the stereotypes in the minds of wealthy Victorians and Edwardians of their expectations of a Japanese garden.

The archetypal Japanese-style garden in Britain was a pastiche based around an irregular water feature that was outlined with rocks and included planting areas for irises and water lilies. The water would be crossed by at least one bridge, possibly a representation of the red bridge at Nikkō, a stone slab or stepping-stones. These bridges were part of a network of informal paths that encompassed pools and various features, including a ‘teahouse.’ Although contemporary commentators saw that Japanese ornaments were not enough to create an accurate interpretation of Japan, Lawrence Weaver a journalist for *Country Life*, observed that:

> The disposition of a few typical ornaments, of a bronze stork here and a stone lantern there, does not make a Japanese garden; it only makes an English garden speak with a Japanese accent.2

The authenticity of Japanese-style gardens was frequently raised in the literature of the time, but, despite reservations, in 1909, ‘the reign of the Japanese garden in this country’ was seen to be ‘a very real and lasting one’ with a ‘decided trend towards the Japanese style of garden ornament’.3 Japanese-style gardens with their informal design successfully managed to integrate with other garden styles, such as the naturalistic woodland, water or rock gardens, though there were examples where areas were distinctly set aside for attempts to produce authentic replicas of the gardens as they appeared in Japan.

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Some creators of Japanese-style gardens were keen to attempt the challenging task of making accurate representations of Japanese gardens, and so there were opportunities for Japanese artists and garden designers to provide consultations and designs thus allowing the incorporation of the symbolism and cultural references which many critics felt the gardens lacked. The earliest example that appears to have involved Japanese skills was the garden of Saumarez Park, Guernsey, c.1890. Here, as workmen were unable to reconstruct a temple sent back from Japan by James St. Vincent de Saumarez (later 4th Baron de Saumarez) who had been Second Secretary in the British legation between 1875 and 1880, he requested the legation to find a carpenter with some English who would be willing to work abroad.5 A Japanese man, ‘Mat San’ was found and not only erected the temple but stayed for a further ten years setting out a ‘Japanese’ garden around a Japanese house that was imported for his accommodation.6 ‘Mat San’s’ ability with English