



kew gardens

Richard Hill visited the Japanese landscape that can be found within
Kew gardens, steeped in history and tranquility

Even Sparrows
Freed from all fear of man
England in Spring
Takahama Kyoshi (1874-1959)

This *haiku* (poem), inscribed in Japanese characters, in a granite block of stone can be found in the Japanese landscape gardens at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The poet, Takahama Kyoshi, is considered to be one of this century's greatest *haiku* poets, and he was inspired to write this on a visit to Kew in 1936. The granite block is just one of many interesting features to be found in the Japanese landscape at Kew.

Pride of place goes to the magnificent *Chokushi-Mon* (Gateway of the Imperial Messenger), a four-fifths size

FURTHER INFORMATION

Although famed for the beauty of its gardens, Kew is a leading centre for science and conservation. It contains the largest and most diverse collection of living plants in the world — more than 40,000 different kinds, including 5,000 species of Orchids. The collection of 9,000 trees, representing more than 2,000 species and varieties, makes it one of the world's most important, fully documented, living libraries of trees.

replica of the Karamon of Nishi Hongan-ji in Kyoto. It was designed and constructed for the Japan-British exhibition in London in 1910 and was later presented to Kew. The gateway has been restored a number of times since, the latest completed in 1995. It sits at the summit of a ►

General view of the Japanese garden



Photo: by kind permission of Kew gardens

There are many striking images in this garden such as karetakei (rocks resembling waterfalls), hashii (bridges) and the kare-ike (dry pond) combine to make a spiritually calming and reassuring landscape



magnificent Japanese landscape.

The gateway, built in the architectural character of the Momoyama (late 16th century), has ornately carved woodwork depicting stylised flowers and animals. The most intricately carved panels depict an ancient Chinese legend, illustrating the devotion of a pupil to his master. The gateway is constructed mainly of *Chamaecyparis obtusa* (Hinoki Cypress), a living specimen which grows nearby. This was planted here in June 1976 by his Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko. Now Emperor and Empress of Japan, the two revisited the garden last year, to experience tranquility in what was otherwise, at times, a controversial state visit.

Toro (stone lantern) in the Garden of Peace



The magnificent dry stone kaito shiki (stroll around garden) consists of many symbolic features. It is a typical kare sansui, (dry landscape garden) where gravel is used to represent water and karetake, where rocks are used to resemble a waterfall

Chamaecyparis obtusa was introduced to cultivation in the UK in 1861 and is one of the five protected trees of Kiso. These are protected under a conservation scheme in the forests of Japan in the 18th century. It is sacred to the Shinto faith and honoured for its close grained, durable and aromatic wood.

Within the Japanese landscape at Kew, several other specimens can be found which, within Japanese culture and customs, hold a central role. Some are hallowed to specific sects or are granted royal status, while others personify particular characteristics. For example, Cherry blossom signifies perfection and Camellia flowers symbolise the degrees of deliverance. The Japanese garden also hosts two cultivars of Kurume Azaleas. According to Kew literature, these evergreen Azaleas probably arose as hybrids of *Rhododendron* species native to the volcanic mountains on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's islands. When the famous plant collector, E.H. Wilson, visited the area in 1918, the breeding of Kurume azaleas had already been underway for several centuries. Of the 50 cultivars Wilson introduced to the USA, two, Hinode Giri and Kure-no-yuki, are grown in this Japanese landscape.

One of the most fascinating features of this landscape is that it is not enclosed. Unlike other Japanese gardens we

FURTHER INFORMATION

The gardens at Kew are open to visitors every day, except Christmas Day and New Year's Day. The gardens open at 9.30am, closing times vary with seasons. Entry is free for blind or visually impaired visitors, and for wheelchair users. Season tickets are also available. Further information is available from: The Friends of Kew, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3AB or by telephoning 0181 940 1171.



Carving detail on the Chokushi-Mon

have visited in this series, this landscape seems generously unimpeded amongst the 300 acres of ground at Kew.

The southern range of the landscape consists of an magnificent dry stone *kaiyu shiki* (stroll around) garden. The sparking white gravel symbolises a still and sedate sheet of water, overcrossed by bridges adjoining rocky islands. So real and surreal is the illusion that it effectively conjures an inner feeling of calmness and peace. Behind the dry stone garden is a rocky hill leading up to the peak attopped by the *Chokushi-Mon*. Between the two lies the Garden of Activity, symbolising the majestic natural scenery of waterfalls and hills. Again, gravel and rocks express the vigorous movement of water flowing and falling. The western slopes represent the mountainous regions of Japan.

On a higher plane, on the north-east side of the *Chokushi-Mon*, is the Garden of Harmony and to the north-west, the Garden of Peace.

The garden of peace is reminiscent of a *roji* (tea garden). The area contains

traditional *nobedan* and *tobi-ishi* stone paths linking the various key elements such as the *toro* (stone lantern) and *tsukubai* (water basin).

There is *ma* here — a sense of time and space. From the level of the *Chokushi-Mon* is a quiet view across and around Kew. Strikingly, a few hundred yards to the south-east stands one of the best known features of the Kew landscape, the 150ft (50m) pagoda. According to Kew horticulturalists, British gardeners are indebted to Japan for many of the most popular plants now grown in their gardens. Some of the finest flowering trees hardy in Britain are derived from Japan, amongst them the most welcome plants of spring, the early Magnolias — *M. stellata* and *M. kobus* — and the many beautiful cultivars of cherry which have been cherished for centuries in their native land. Plants exchanged with Japanese institutes or collected by Kew botanists, are still being added to the collections today.

Tobi-ishi (stone path) winding through the garden of peace



FURTHER INFORMATION

Those wanting a preview of Kew can purchase a new official video, *A Journey Through Kew*. Using rare archival material and aerial footage, the video, introduced by Anna Ford, takes a tour through the 300 acres of the world's leading botanical garden including the Japanese Gateway and the 10-storey Pagoda. *A Journey Through Kew* costs £14.99 (plus £2 postage and packing), and is available from Kew and many garden centres or by mail from: The Newnham Video Collection, PO Box 17, Plympton, Devon PL7 5YG; telephone credit card line: 01752 345424 or by e-mailing enq@twofour.co.uk.



Photo: by kind permission of Kew Gardens

For the Emperor and Empress of Japan, a visit to Kew Gardens last May provided one of the more tranquil chapters in what was, at times, a controversial visit to the UK

The Chokubashi-Mon at the summit of the Japanese landscape

