



# taplow court

## a buddhist sanctuary

Despite its small proportions and the fact that it was originally created by an Italian garden designer, the Japanese garden at Taplow Court is one rich in history

Kaifusô

Sunlight sparkles on the dancing water,  
Spring warms the garden wall,  
Plum buds smile like red lips,  
But the gate-willow has not yet  
Grown her eyebrows.

(Otsu Renju)

The Japanese garden at Taplow Court Grand Culture Centre is not strictly a traditional Japanese garden. It would be better described as a Japanese style garden. What makes it interesting and worthy of observance is its location within the UK headquarters of a lay Buddhist organisation, whose practices and teachings run parallel with the philosophy of the elements found in a traditional Japanese garden.

Located near Maidenhead, Taplow Court is a beautiful setting. The grounds extend over 85 acres, many parts commanding glorious views across the Thames Valley. The site is steeped in 2000 years of history and has, for much of its existence, been a place of religion, music and the arts. Apart from the small Japanese Garden of Gratitude, the



Taplow Court

grounds also contain a formal and traditional rose garden, the Ikeda Gardens. There is also an Anglo-Saxon burial mound known as Tappa's Mound and a fresh water spring known as Bapsey Pond where it is said that St. Birinus baptised his Saxon converts.

Taplow Court has a rich and varied history, but since 1988 has been the property of Soka Gakkai UK. Soka Gakkai International is a lay Buddhist association in over 115 countries, founded on the belief that we all possess the capacity to create value in our lives, that we are all capable of living life to the full while contributing to the well-being of civilization. *Soka* is a Japanese word meaning value creation, *gakkai* means society. The organisation embraces the philosophy and teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, a 13th-century Japanese Buddhist sage and scholar. Through faith, practice and study, Soka Gakkai members come from all walks of life, and represent the full spectrum of age, sex, cultural and political persuasion. They seek to enrich and broaden their outlook on life to one motivated by humanistic and humanitarian concerns. Moreover, members develop the ability to live with confidence and to create value in any situation. Members contribute to the betterment of their communities, societies and the world

THE GARDEN OF GRATITUDE  
Presented by the members of N.S.U.K.  
to welcome  
Mr Daisaku Ikeda, President  
Soka Gakkai International  
and Mrs Ikeda  
on their first visit to  
The Taplow Court Grand Culture Centre  
May 1989





Pool, Taplow Court

through activities that promote friendship, peace, culture and education.

According to tradition, Buddhism began when Shakyamuni sought a way to transcend human suffering, in particular the four sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. In a moment of profound religious inspiration, he awakened to the fundamental reality of life and the universe, a condition known as enlightenment or Buddhahood. Based on this realization, Shakyamuni taught a way for all people to overcome suffering by challenging negative or difficult circumstances and thereby fulfilling their potential.

The Japanese style Garden of Gratitude was opened in May 1989 to welcome Mr. Daisaku Ikeda, President of Soka Gakkai International, and his wife on their first visit to Taplow Court. The Vice-General Director, Kazuo Fujii, explains how the garden was conceived and created: "We purchased Taplow Court in 1987, greatly supported by our organisation in Japan, and we have refurbished on three occasions. We spent a lot of money to refurbish and our members gathered together to discuss how to express our gratitude to our International President. The idea came up to make a Japanese garden corner, so that when they visited, they felt a little bit of Japan. We had spontaneous donations by our members and we made a fund. At that time we tried to find a Japanese garden specialist, but none of them wanted to commit to such a small size that was quite far away and I guess they wanted a much grander plan. Anyway, we asked an Italian gardener to do it, and he did his best, ►

The fountain and pool taken through the four-eyed fence (yotsume-gaki)







Curious feline facade at the base of a stone lantern



Garden of Gratitude viewed through the Torii gate

The pond



and it has become a wonderful little feature when people visit Taplow Court. I think we did our best."

Although the Garden of Gratitude may not have been designed and created along traditional and philosophical lines, the result is nonetheless pleasing. It can be seen perhaps as a *kanshō niwa*, a contemplation garden; a garden to be viewed rather than entered. The garden appears as a *hira-niwa*, a flat garden against a backdrop of vegetated hills or *aoyama*. In viewing the garden, its plantings, stones and water cascades, there is (whether by design, or pure accident) a sense of *Shumisen* — the 'immovable mountain at the center of Buddhist cosmology'. In traditional Japanese gardens this would perhaps be represented by an upright ►

Waterlilies







Cascade in the stream





stone, one of the earliest known features in the gardens of Japan. Here however, there is a sense of *sansui*, a 'mountain and water' throughout the garden. *Sansui* is one of the most important transcendental concepts underlying garden art and painting, quite relevant therefore in relation to the underlying philosophy of Soka Gakkai.

In a sense, the positioning of this garden within other fine gardens is exactly within context. Consider this statement by Soka Gakkai: 'In each locality, the character of the culture centre will be representative of the people it serves.' Here, at Taplow Court, the visitor cannot help but be aware of the history and magnificence of Taplow Court and it is perhaps right that the Garden of Gratitude should not be presented in isolation of its surroundings. In the Japanese sense, there is a feeling of *ikedori* which roughly translates to a borrowed landscape where there is good reason to draw the outer landscape into the garden by 'capturing it alive'. The word *meisho*, meaning famous views or places, is also relevant within the context of this part of the Thames Valley and in particular Taplow Court.

There are a few elements within this garden that merit particular interest. Unlike the still-water hand washing *chozubachi* described at Capel Manor last month, the one here is constantly fed by a dripping supply. Although situated next to the entrance, this basin is more in the style of a *tsukubai*, a water basin normally found within a tea garden. The constantly running water serves to remind us that time is constantly moving on.

The Garden of Gratitude may not have been designed with the inner soul in mind. But the sensed tranquility and philosophy of this magnificent location coupled with the

activities of its guardians make a visit to the Taplow Court Grand Culture Centre an experience not to be passed by. 🌿

Soka Gakkai welcomes visitors to Taplow Court at all times. The centre is freely open to visitors on Sundays between May and July and by appointment at all other times. Taplow Court is located between Slough and Maidenhead, about three miles from Junction 7 of the M4. For further details please contact:

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The Chozubachi has a constant dripping water feed



The magnificent Taplow Court viewed from the Garden of Gratitude

