

# THE POND GARDEN

By the Head Gardener



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**For those who were away from the Inn due to the third lockdown at the start of the year, hopefully the Garden improvements that we worked on in their absence, especially those to the pond, provided welcome new additions. Within this article, I wanted to reflect on the design of the new Pond Garden and give an insight into how it came to be.**

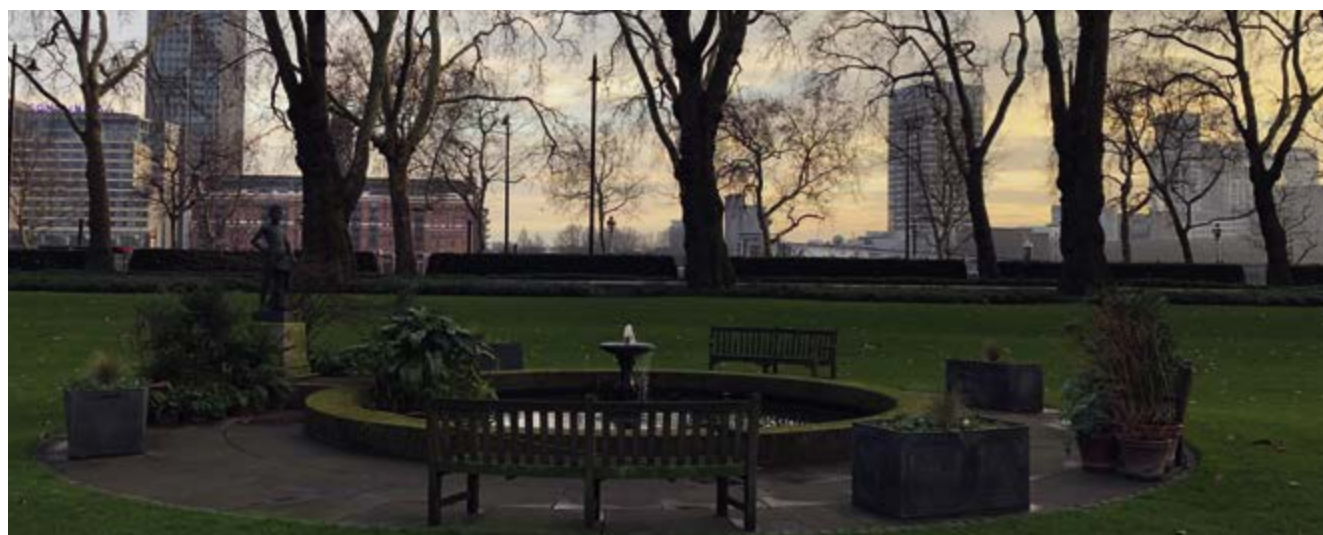
This project has been in plan for just over two years. On taking over the position of Head Gardener in 2018, I used the first year to evaluate with the team and the Masters of the Garden, the Garden's strengths, alongside opportunities for improvement. The Pond quickly stood out for improvement, not least as it had a leak. In addition, we felt the area was not in proportion with the rest of the Garden. The Pond's brickwork, which was added in the 1970s, was rather suburban and at odds with the grandeur of its surroundings. In winter, with the lack of planting to soften it, it looked especially stark and uninviting. Therefore, rather than just repair the leak, there was an opportunity to redesign the pond area to sit more sympathetically within the wider Garden. Thankfully, the Inn agreed and so we began the process of a new design for the area.

To begin, we set out parameters of what we wanted from the area. People are drawn to water, so we wanted the new space to have a feeling of seclusion (a 'garden room' set within the Garden) that gives small groups a place to gather, alongside individuals who may want to be alone. The glorious views out from the pond area, either back over the Garden to the Main Gates or outwards over the river towards Big Ben, were something we wanted to celebrate through the design. In addition, it was felt the choice of materials should unify with those in the wider Garden.

The overall scale of the area has been expanded to give enough presence within the Garden but without becoming too dominant. This was also to allow planting within the ground. Deputy Head Gardener Sophie and I used canes, plants from the nursery and benches to mark out and experiment with the scale to get a sense of what it might become. When it was clearer what we wanted, we asked James Scott from the Garden Company to draw up the design on our behalf.

For the new design, the statue of the boy holding the book with the Lamb quote "*Lawyers were children once*" which had previously been attached to the side of the Pond, has been repositioned into a bed to allow a circular walking route around the water. The Pond brick surround has been replaced with Portland stone to complement the Main Gates and Sundial. The surround has been made slightly thinner and higher to give a more elegant proportion. The paving has also been replaced with CEDEC to marry with the other path surfacing across the Garden. With the area enlarged, it allows different-sized seating alcoves, which are surrounded by planting. The largest seating area faces west towards Big Ben for sunset views and is large enough to accommodate a bench and two armchairs for small groups to socialise.

For the planting, we wanted to create the feeling of a green 'oasis' with the water as the focus. Again, it needed to pick up on existing elements across the Garden. Yew hedging was selected to link to the yew on the Broadwalk and the large yew topiary shapes either side of the Peony Garden. With time, the Pond's yew will be clipped into low, organic cloud shapes to enclose the new Garden, allowing a feeling of seclusion when seated, but allowing wide views across the Garden when standing.



The Pond Garden pre-works



The Pond Garden in spring



Pond construction, portland stone



Emily planting

We also wanted some verticals to ‘bridge’ the planting with our large veteran plane trees on the lawn. Multi-stemmed cherry trees, *Prunus x yeodensis* and *Prunus incisa* ‘The Bride’, were selected for this and for their stunning blossom in early spring. These have also been planted in other locations in the wider Garden to create one whole ‘picture’.

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The hard landscaping began in late summer 2019 and was carried out by the Garden Company, which was then followed by the entire team planting the area up before Christmas. Thankfully, the new Pond Garden has established very well through its first season. The clouds of blossom in early spring were pure joy and the understory planting is starting to knit together, with a calm and unusual selection of perennials. The improvement of this part of the Garden is already being felt, and its design and materials are sitting well within its wider surroundings. It has been with great pride that I have watched our new Pond Garden being enjoyed by so many this year, as those returning to the Inn have enjoyed catching up with friends, possibly with a glass in hand, by the water’s edge.

Sean Harkin  
Head Gardener

Blossom trees in spring:  
close up of *Prunus x yeodensis*

Armchair in the new Pond Garden