Broadwoodside, East Lothian

HENRY NOLTIE

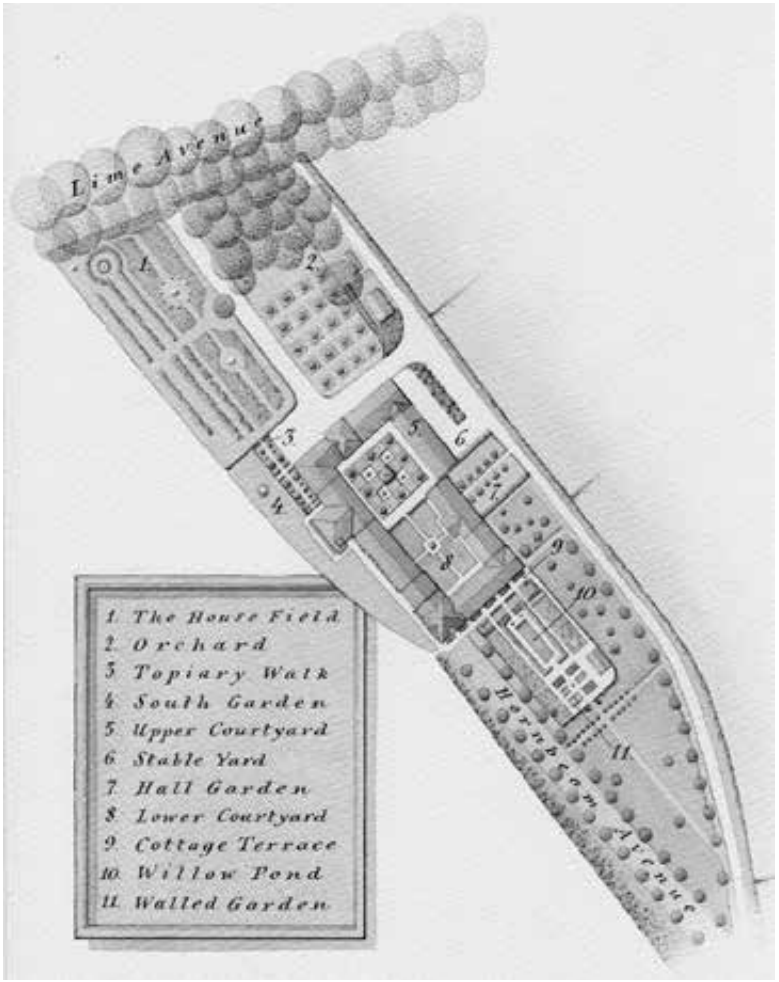
The Broadwoodside garden is all about setting, both macro and micro, in relation to the landscape and to the architecture of the buildings at its heart. In fact it really comprises three gardens – an inner (or privy) courtyard garden, a landscape garden of grand extent, and an intermediate one that links the two. It is therefore necessary to do some scene-setting.

For my visit I chose a gloriously sunny late autumn day. Not the best time for the plants, which are mainly spring and summer flowering, but ideal for the revealing of structure. In any case a botanist can leave his hand lens and vasculum at home as the plants are chosen not primarily for botanical interest, but for architectural reasons – for their colour and form. Heading east from Edinburgh one veers away from the Firth of Forth, the volcanic plugs of North Berwick and Traprain dead ahead, passing through the planned villages and the fields enriched by the improving lairds, Cockburn of Ormiston and Fletcher of Saltoun. Ten thousand pinkfeet were circling and landing on a field of golden stubble, among them an added thrill in the form of a detachment of fifteen clown-faced barnacle geese. The facets of the chocolate clods of new plough glistened in the sun; other fields were already scored with lines of bright green shoots of newly breerd winter barley. The trees of the woods and hedgerows glowed gold and russet. The low billow of

the Lammermuirs loomed ever nearer on the southern horizon and the trees became richer and richer as one approached Gifford, something of an arboricultural paradise. The village is another stronghold of improvement, in this case by the Hays of Tweeddale from their once-great estate of Yester: Broadwoodside was originally one of its major farms on which the 8th Marquess practised his pioneering technique of 'deep-plough' cultivation.

Just before entering the village a carved wood sign announces both the entrance to the drive and that it is home to a distinguished typographer. As the drive descends a gradual slope, flanked by species-rich and well-groomed hedges, a quartet of inscribed plaques read BEEP DUMBS, EMBED PUPS, DUMB PEEPS, SPEED BUMPS: a foretaste of more to come in the way of wit and sculpture. A nod towards the Magus of Little Sparta, though with slightly more restraint. To the east lies the 'broad wood' of birch and oak, now community-owned: habitat of the chanterelle. Suddenly what looks like a small village comes into view on the gentle rise beyond the hollow of a scarcely detectable rivulet, named on maps, surely ironically, as the Speedy Burn. The low buildings are a farmhouse and steading, rescued from dereliction in 2000 by Robert and Anna Dalrymple; of honey-coloured stone, variously but harmoniously roofed with red pantiles and grey slate. At one end is an eye-catching element – a cube of buttermilk-clad stucco, capped with an ogee roof that betrays the hand of its architect Nicholas Groves-Raines. Beyond these the incline continues towards a ridge along which strides a magnificent avenue marking the old road to Gifford, the fields beyond dropping to the valley of the Beugh Burn from which, looking over towards Eaglescairnie, rises a multi-coloured canopy of deciduous woodland.

Everything is in balance and harmony, a magnificent double avenue of narrowly pyramidal hornbeams (currently at their ideal size) leads up to the buttermilk pavilion, but the drive curves to the right. Here the Hall Garden breaks out from the buildings, a *Rugosa*-hedged enclosure with a lime tunnel leading to a doorway, underplanted with phlomis, catmint, brunnera and some late colour from Michaelmas daisies. Opposite this even the post-and-rail fences



of Anna's paddocks have a sculptural quality – perhaps a fourth, minimalist, equine, garden. I headed on, making for the avenue for a view back to the house. The smaller gardens are linked to the greater by means of a series of sight-lines. Two elongated rectangular enclosures bounded by low, mortared walls stretch up the slope from the steading, divided by a gravel drive. Here, in a garden

where plants have to do what they are told, it was good to see the delicate white and pink stars of *Erigeron karvinskianus* allowed free rein to seed themselves. The right-hand enclosure is the Orchard, where guinea fowl from the adjacent poultry yard sunned themselves and clicked contentedly. In it stand three Brobdingnagian bronze apples by Brian Caster – one intact, one with a modest bite to reveal a golden pulp, the third consumed to its gilded core. The 'room' to the left of this upper drive, the House Field, in part a drying green, is divided into three compartments along its long axis. The central one, an *allée* that forms a vista from the kitchen, is defined by a clipped beech hedge that at its farthest end surrounds a conical red sandstone plinth supporting a massive cast iron finial rescued from the Holyrood Brewery in Edinburgh, demolished to make way for the Scottish Parliament. The grass to one side, covered in spring with cowslips, is the setting for two more sculptures: a bauble-pile in stone and glass (title: 'A Load of Balls'), and a horizontal diamond-shaped stone slab bearing the cod-Latin inscription ORE STABIT FORTIS ARARE PLACETO RESTAT. On the far side the wall forms a field boundary, edged with alternating *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer' and *Geranium macrorrhizum*, strong enough to push through the uncut grass.

Three (slight squiffy) Goldsworthy-esque stalagmite slate-stacks terminate the gravel drive, at the point that it hits the avenue. A leisurely rain of golden lime leaves fell from the trees, chaffinches spinked, jays screeched and blue tits churred as I turned left and made my way to the Temple. A columned portico added in the 1830s to the early-eighteenth century Strathleven House, banished in a recent restoration on the grounds of architectural purity and translocated to the other side of Scotland. Though sited to be seen from the house, to look in the opposite direction one gets the lie of the land and can make sense of the buildings – the two-storey farmhouse at the centre of the western range, facing and flanked by single-storeyed bothies and byres, the courtyard entered by an arch beneath a doocot on the short, north range. A walk round a large field completes a circuit of the 'landscape', taking in a visit to a small lake before returning for a closer look at the more strictly

horticultural zone. The lake, fringed with bur-reed and the brown-suede clubs of typha, was scooped from a boggy hollow, home to meadowsweet and codlins and cream. It is surrounded by weeping willows from under which cruised a pair of magnificent galleons, snowy white against the muddy water and belying their 'mute' epithet with none-too-friendly hissing grunts. Overlooking the lake stands a ruggedly handsome summerhouse in untreated larch in what I suppose is ur-Doric, copied from those designed by the Bannermans for Highgrove (based on Marc-Antoine Laugier's theory of 'The Primitive Hut').

The courtyard, which turns out to be double, is entered through the arch beneath the doocot. The livestock that would once have inhabited it have been banished but for a single exception. In the centre of the Upper Courtyard stands a grand pagoda of a cage, the summer residence of William the African Grey parrot. The cage encloses the shredded remnants of one of nine standard and trimmed Norway maples, each at the centre of a section of a five-by-five chequerboard, rising from its own evergreen ground-cover (including pachysandra, rosemary and yew). Each tree bears a mischievous, taxonomist-confounding, nametag: 'willow', 'cherry', 'walnut', and so on. On the east side an open loggia contains a large refectory table for summer dining, large potted plants, and an Emily Young angel-head; THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL is inscribed in the cement at one end. The courtyard's walls are clothed with climbers, including brambles, *Clematis* 'Bill MacKenzie' and wisteria. The second, slightly narrower, Lower Courtyard is simpler, with four grass rectangles around a central rivetted and verdigris'd copper cauldron that is seasonally planted – bulbs in spring, currently with winter ferns. Into this quad, from its eastern side, is the 'outshot' of the most notable architectural feature of the complex, a rare example of a late seventeenth-century ingleneuk chimney in the original farmhouse. A late red admiral butterfly cruised past as I headed into the nerve-centre of the garden, for the lower storey of the baroque cube is a meticulously ordered potting shed. On the bench lay a large notebook in the beautiful handwriting of the master – the means by which Guy Donaldson, who has tended the

In the Upper Courtyard, Broadwoodside.

garden from its inception, receives his weekly instructions. It reveals exactly how the balance and order is maintained: nothing is left to chance and current tasks included the lifting of dahlias and the putting to bed of the pots of agapanthus and *Argyranthemum* 'Madeira Primrose'.

Beyond the garden pavilion, approached through a second, smaller, arched pend lies something resembling a traditional walled kitchen garden (the protecting wall blocks the shrill east wind), though comestibles are relegated to its further end. The centre is occupied by a tranquil water body, strictly rectangular – more a short canal than a pond, its crisply cut stone lip softened by an enclosing fringe of osiers. Borders to either side are filled at this season with *Hydrangea paniculata*, salvias and 'Margaret Merril' roses. The wood of the upper panel of the door that leads out of the garden is replaced with what has to be my favourite of the sculptures – three old-fashioned, four-tined, garden forks, alternating head-to-tail. Turning back, the tour is completed with the other break-out garden, that between the house and the field wall. Geometric planting again prevails, with alternating deep purple cotinus, the ghosts of *Euphorbia wallichii* and *Geranium psilostemon* (still in late deep-magenta flower) against the ivy-clad wall of the house, punctuated by doors and window frames painted in rich Indian red. The last compartment, the South Garden, around a tall and sea-worn trunk of burred elm crowned with a golden orb, retains its sense of presence and order, the borders with clumps of auburn osmunda, even if the dahlias were frost-blackened and the gunnera leaves deliquescing.

Postscript

ROBERT DALRYMPLE

For many years I harboured a guilty secret but, on reading an article in *The Times* that exactly echoed my own feelings, I realised I was not alone. 'I have always hated gardening,' wrote the columnist Damian Whitworth, 'It is hard to think of any other activity in which the disparity between the happy idea of what it might be like and the tedious reality is so back-breakingly vast. I love a garden. I love being in a garden. I love looking at gardens and reading about gardens. I love thinking about what my garden could be like. It is just the gardening that I can't handle.'

We bought the ruinous buildings at Broadwoodside on 30 August 1997 and are often reminded of the date, as the next day was the one on which Princess Diana died. It was clear from the scale of the venture that if we wanted a garden then a gardener was a necessity. Cometh the hour, cometh the man, and for more than twenty years Guy Donaldson has planted and maintained everything in the garden – and lived on site with his family.

As soon as architect Nicholas Groves-Raines had drawn up a scheme for the renovation of the ramshackle farm steading, we were able to take a pencil to the plans and to lay out the garden that had started to form in our minds' eye. I work as a book designer, so the articulation of two-dimensional space on a plan came easily. But what to plant?

What no one seems to tell you is that gardening is really, really difficult. To get a group of plants to give a pleasing display over successive seasons, and from one year to the next, is a demanding skill. The bigger the area, the more complex the task. That is what makes the most celebrated herbaceous borders, those at Newby Hall in Yorkshire for example, such dazzling feats. No wonder, in the sort of gardens you see illustrated in glossy magazines, that the role of the garden designer has gained such traction in recent years. By definition, experts can do it better. However, it is widely perceived that the most interesting and atmospheric gardens are the most personal ones. And personal means DIY.

The heart of the garden at Broadwoodside is the Upper Courtyard. This was the first area to be planted and we started from first principles – what one might term 'Grade 1 Piano'. Each of the eight square beds (described by Henry Noltie above) is planted with a single, contrasting, evergreen: plinths of yew and box, wall germander, pachysandra, *Ophiopogon bodinieri*, *Anemanthele lessoniana*, rosemary and box balls. How entertaining it was when these monosyllabic horticultural grunts were greeted by visitors as an exercise in chic minimalism.

The obvious next step was to get two plants to work together. In our previous garden, at nearby Bolton, I had noticed how a fortuitous pairing of *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple' and *Euphorbia*

wallichii looked good for an exceptionally long period. It was an easy thing to repeat this, to alternate them down down the longest bed in the garden – a narrow strip against the house, looking south over the fields. Again, this simple approach has often been mistaken for sophistication.

And this is the way we have gone on, with plants more likely bought from the excellent local wholesale nursery Macplants – or even B&Q – than from Crûg Farm. Most areas of the garden seem to work best when the idea behind the planting is immediately apparent; where a limited palette of plants is repeated *en masse*. In the Thug Bed in the Lower Courtyard, for instance, *Macleaya cordata*, *Eupatorium purpureum* and Japanese anemones have been slugging it out for more than fifteen years; more recently the equally invasive *Euphorbia cyparissias* 'Fens Ruby' has been introduced to clothe their ankles at the front of the bed, an idea stolen from Gresgarth. We have always been shameless in our plagiarism.

If all this sounds controlling and a bit joyless, fear not as discipline inevitably breaks down over time. Self-seeders spread, retail therapy is indulged. In a recent article my wife Anna was credited as a 'chaotic influence' and it is largely thanks to her that the garden never suffers from looking too regimented, in spite of its rigorously formal framework.

Map by Neil Gower.
Ink and gouache illustrations by Simon Dorrell.