

Transcription note: Some of the common plant names are given in square brackets after the Latin names in the document.

**Royal Horticultural Society,
Vincent Square,
Westminster,
London SW**

October 16th 1915

Report and Advice on the Garden at Balnagown Castle, Ross-shire, visited on October 13th & 14th 1915

REPORT

This Report is made by the Royal Horticultural Society's Garden Inspector as a result of his judgment on the matter submitted to him for consideration, and in all good faith that the opinions expressed are the best under the conditions prevailing in the garden he has been requested by the owner to report upon.

It must also be distinctly understood that this Report is made to the owner of the garden in confidence, and that neither the Society, nor the Council, nor any of its officers accept any legal responsibility whatsoever for, or upon, or in consequence of any advice or information it gives.

Sir Charles Ross, Bart.

Dear Sir

My report and advice upon your garden is as follows.

Carriage drive. The portion from the entrance lodge to the Castle is in fair condition. It is rather weedy in places and the grass verge, if mown at all, should be mown oftener. I noticed other drives that need repair, either by regravelling the whole surface or by filling the ruts with good hard material.

The trees growing in the park and along by the public road are well cared for.

The Castle. The sides facing the river and the wood would become much brighter if a few *Ampelopsis veitchii* were planted against these walls.

Italian garden. It was too late in the season for me to be able to form a good idea as to the floral effect of the borders, but they appeared to have been well filled with plants; and the

roses, which have been transplanted, have made satisfactory growth. The character of this garden, together with its proximity to the Castle plainly indicates the necessity of keeping it very neat and clean, but I noticed that the grass had not been kept closely mown nor the cypress hedge clipped, and that the paths badly needed regravelling.

Possible improvements. Viewing the site at this time of the year I may have been mistaken but the position appeared to me to be very shady, otherwise it might be brightened up by adding more flower borders, such as one across each end and another along the foot of the terrace.

If it is too shady for this an alternative but more costly scheme would be to enclose the garden with a low sandstone wall with balustrading, make a pergola with stone pillars where the present Rose Arches are, carrying it round the fountain, and another across the lawn at a right angle to the first, ending in a stone summer house overlooking the river.

Rock garden. This is overgrown with weeds and most of the rock plants have disappeared [sic]. The position is much too shady, and in my opinion there is no suitable position on that side of the river. On the opposite side of the river, however, the slope lends itself perfectly for such a purpose, especially below the group of 4 or 5 Scotch pines.

Your gardener said it was proposed to transfer the rockery to the edge of the adjoining pool. This would still be too shady and it would also destroy the character of the pool.

I pointed out two trees of no consequence, (an ash and an elm) which might be cut down and so throw more light on the pool.

Rustic bridge. This needs attention as the planks are not very safe.

Wood leading to the Kitchen garden. You have here the finest silver firs I have ever seen. It is said that some of the finest specimens in Great Britain are at Dunkeld house, where their height ranges from 95 to 100 feet, and from 10 to 14 feet in circumference at 5 feet from the ground. I think your trees must closely approach these in girth.

I noticed that in making the water carrier alongside the river some roots of one of the firs had been severed. As the roots are above the level of the water in the carrier it shows that the men might have worked under the roots and left them intact. The tree is apparently uninjured, but it is a pity to take any risk of injuring these magnificent trees which are – and I trust will long continue to be – the glory of your wood.

I pointed out two chestnuts which, having lost their tops, might be taken down to open up a splendid conifer which they are crowding. In the time at my disposal I saw little else with regard to the trees here which needed immediate attention, but I pointed out that the removal of useless, or stunted, small trees greatly improved the appearance of the remainder. I also thought that if a few of the alders which overhang the river were thinned out, more sunlight would be admitted, when waterside and Wild Garden plants might be planted and the riverside made more attractive.

The woodland paths need little comment. They are mossgrown, as such paths should be, and when you are in residence a weekly clearing up of fallen wood and suchlike should keep them sufficiently tidy. The shade is too deep for most plants to succeed, but in the more open spots *Anemone nemorosa* [wood anemone] and *sylvestris* might be planted, and experiments made with *Funkias* [hosta], *Acanthus* [bear's breeches], and such *Liliums* as *croceum*, *superbum* [swamp lily], *pardalinum* [leopard lily] and *giganteum*. Also snowdrops and daffodils, if they have not already been planted.

Flower Garden. Frost had cut the plants down, but judging from the kinds used and the growth made the effect was probably good. The grass on the surrounding lawn was fairly well mown. The roses in the adjoining beds suffer somewhat from the box edging being so high, in fact from a practical point of view the whole of the box edging in this garden is too tall and wide. This causes it to die off in places in the centre. When it gets in this condition it is the custom to take it up and replant the smaller and rooted portions, making the new edging about 6 inches high and a few inches wide.

Kitchen Garden. Good provision has been made for the winters supply of vegetables. Some of the crops are weedy, which may be partly due to the previous rains. Some of the wall fruit trees are old and useless and should be replaced by young trees. There are evidences of bad pruning in some of them, such as the spurs having been allowed to grow too far from the wall, and the presence of many dead snaggs of wood.

Some of the standard apple trees are also worn out and gradually dying, and should be replaced.

I noticed that your gardener had endeavoured to improve some of the trees by regrafting them with better varieties.

The trees are rather too closely cut back, and they would produce better and more fruit if the branches were allowed to extend a little.

Hothouses. These are in need of reputtying and painting. Unless the garden staff is ample it is a great handicap for the gardener to have to do the painting as this must be done in summer or early autumn when the gardeners are fully occupied in the garden. Taking in consideration the climatic conditions, the condition of the peach trees and vines is very good, and the plants in the other houses fair.

The water supply for the hothouses and to the tap in the kitchen garden is very deficient, and must casue considerable trouble in the summer whenever water is urgently needed.

Repointing walls. For the purposes of preserving the walls, and also for destroying the hiding places of destructive insects, the repointing of the Fruit tree walls should be undertaken when necessary. The work should be finished before hard frost appears, and, as it cannot be commenced before the fruit is gathered it is customary to undertake a part each year, until the whole is completed.

The low retaining wall outside the kitchen garden needs some repair in places.

Overleaf I give alternate schemes for the maintenance of the garden, as requested.

I. Scheme for Complete Maintenance.

Head Gardener

5 men

1 lad

Italian garden, conservatory and around castle	1 man
Hothouses and to help on fruit walls	1 man & 1 lad
Kitchen garden and fruit trees	2 men
Flower garden and flower borders adjoining	1 man
Head gardener to work where most needed.	

II. Reduced Maintenance.

Head gardener

3 men

1 lad

Hothouses and fruit walls	1 man & 1 lad
Kitchen garden	1 man
Flower garden and Italian garden	1 man
Head gardener to work where most needed.	

III. Still further reduced maintenance.

Head gardener

2 men

1 lad

Hothouses and fruit walls	Head gardener & 1 lad
Kitchen garden	1 man
Flower garden and Italian garden	1 man

Under scheme III you might expect the garden to be kept in a similar condition to the present year, except that it might be possible to keep the Italian garden better.

With the scheme II the garden should be kept in fair condition, including less weeds, tidier paths and lawns, and full crops of vegetables.

Under scheme I it should be possible to keep the garden clean throughout, flower borders and fruit trees well tended, hothouses well maintained, lawns closely mown and paths clean, edging neatly clipped, and full vegetable crops.

Although in each scheme the men have been allocated to certain parts of the garden, the head gardener must be allowed at his discretion to shift all or any one of them to other

parts of the garden temporarily where extra help is needed, or to clip the edgings and sweep the carriage drive, help with the mowing, clear up the paths in the wood and so on. With regard to the question of female labour, there would not be room for more than two in your garden on account of the long winter, when there is little work that women can do. Also, for around garden work a woman is not equal to an able bodied man, therefore you should allow two women for one man otherwise your garden will suffer.

Women of your own locality who have been accustomed to outdoor work would be useful, or still better those who have had a good training by undergoing a two or more years course in a horticultural training school. I must say, however, that if you are able to get men you will find them most satisfactory.

I am Sir

Yours obediently

C. R. Fielder

Inspector of Gardens Royal Horticultural Socy