

Restoration House Temple

The gardens of Restoration House have been transformed over the past 25 years in the ownership of Robert Tucker and Jonathan Wilmot. The gardens themselves go back to at least the late C16th and the most ambitious period of construction appears to have been in the first half of the C17th when a formal Italian garden was created, probably utilizing the natural spring, which was the reason for initially settling this unprotected land outside the city walls.

Archaeology which led to the discovery of this Italian garden began in 2008 and in 2011 planning permission was granted to rebuild the garden walls, terraces, steps and gates on the excavated footings. As this involved the demolition of 4 nearly completed townhouses and the rebuilding of an elaborate and complex brick and knapped flint Tudor wall as well as 7 other walls, all of great substance, the task took on Herculean dimensions.

During the rebuilding of these walls the contemporary sculptor Matthew Darbyshire created a life size copy of the Farnese Hercules, which went through several iterations of scale and change of materials before becoming the symbol of our endeavour to create this lost Italian garden. Since being erected on the High Terrace in 2015 Hercules has presided over every phase of further construction, exemplifying the ongoing power of this image and its relevance.

Though there are still parts of the Tudor wall that need rebuilding this is at present denied us by factors beyond our control, these walls being party to 3 neighbouring properties. Nevertheless with its water cannons, water railings, fountain ponds, superb green plats, amazing brickwork of all the walls and of the Gazebo and the Chalice, combined with the strong presence of classical sculpture, the garden has been variously described as 'a masterpiece' (Sir Timothy Clifford) and 'breathtaking'.

The final element in this mix is the building of the Temple to the Source, that natural water which enabled and inspired the creation of the garden. To this end three English oak columns, dating from the C17th and of the Tuscan Order have provided the impetus, being set up according to the dimensions and proportions of the Orders within a new green oak framework of plinths, pediment and entablature. Situated at the highest point of the garden and adjacent to Hercules, the intention is to highlight the ongoing relevance and beauty of classical iconography within a newly created garden. Just as the garden itself has been built up from surviving elements of the original design, so too has the temple.