

Notes on the Garden: The Double Borders

The Carolean Garden in which the double borders sit takes its name from the time of Kings Charles I and II. In 1634 John Fetherston inherited the house from his father, and set about creating the 'bones' of the garden we still see today. Later surveys and drawings of the Carolean Garden from the 18th century show paths around the outer edge and a central path running from the house to the Yew Garden, with topiary making an appearance at various times. Later still, photographs from the 19th century give us the impression of borders with full, rich plantings of 'cottage garden' flowers including hollyhocks, lupins and mullein.

Graham Baron Ash, the son of a wealthy industrialist, lived at Packwood from the early 1900s until donating the property to the National Trust in 1941. He was key in establishing the elements of a formal layout combined with richly planted, intensely colourful borders, for which Packwood has been famous ever since. Yet once he had finished restoring the house to his romantic vision of a historic home, he turned his attention to significantly altering the character of the garden.

In 1932 he wanted to create a more formal garden that he felt better reflected Packwood's earlier history. He did away with the borders completely and replaced this space with sixteen box edged flowerbeds planted with bedding and decorated with statuary. During World War II all of this was removed however to save labour, and an expanse of lawn was left in its place. This meant an important visual link between the house and the Yew Garden was lost for many decades until our present Head Gardener Mick Evans and his team were able to restore the borders.

As ever, we've put our own contemporary spin on them, whilst remaining true to the style and richness of planting that can be seen in earlier photographs. There is a 'matrix' used to help keep the layout and rhythm of planting consistent within each section of these long borders, without being monotonous. Every so often you will see architectural plants such as *Yucca recurvifolia* and *Stipa gigantea* repeated, their height and form punctuating the planting at set intervals. The season of interest begins early with these borders, as the soft white and pink tinged flowers of *Helleborus x ericsmithii* makes an appearance in late winter, followed by *Pulmonaria* and eventually, Packwood's famous *Alliums*. These gorgeous drumstick headed flowers appear en masse from late spring, studding the borders with their jewel like purple globes.

The colour scheme within these borders is probably my favourite of all the borders at Packwood. I particularly enjoy how the silvery textures from the leaves of the cardoons (*Cynara cardunculus*) subtly echo the silvery tones in the lead pipework running down the south front of the house. I love how as the season progresses, the softness in purple and blue shades earlier in the year starts to turn richer and more sumptuous. Even as the weather turns, the Michaelmas daisies cling bravely on and the columns of loosestrife turn fiery – there really is something to inspire you almost every time of year.

By Robyn Booth