The William Turner Garden

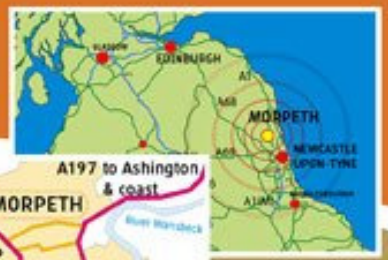
This commemorative garden honours William Turner, 'the father of English botany'. You'll see different features associated with gardening and medicine in Turner's lifetime, linked together by arbours and pergolas.

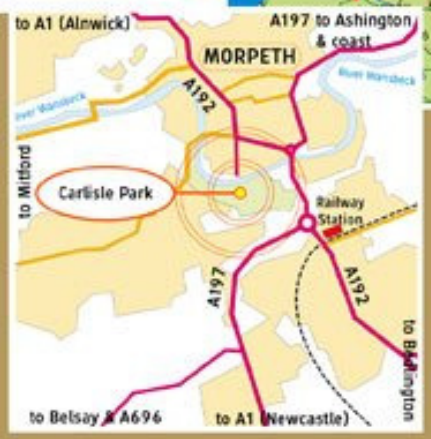
First is the physic garden, with its medicinal herbs. Then growing along the wall are plants introduced to England in the sixteenth century.

At the next level is a formal knot garden, a miniature version of something Turner might have created for his own garden.

Finally, climb the steep steps up the woodland bank and look down. The whole pattern is displayed just as Tudor Gardeners would have wanted.

How to get to the William Turner Garden





Access for all

The William Turner Garden is situated just inside the formal gardens entrance to Carlisle Park, in Morpeth town centre. The garden is open 8am-6pm or dusk, and closed Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Carlisle Park is open all year round.

Carlisle Park is a short drive from the A1. Metered car parking is available in Morpeth town centre. Morpeth's railway station and bus station are both within 15 minutes walk of the park. Bus services stop outside the park gates at Castle Square.

The William Turner Garden is owned and managed by Northumberland County Council. More information at: www.northumberland.gov.uk/williamturnergarden

or 01670 535203.

William Turner Garden, Carlisle Park, off Castle Square, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 1YD.

Images by Simon Fraser © Text by Marie Addyman

The William Turner Garden

Morpeth

NORTHUMBERLAND
Northumberland County Council

Please note new phone number from July 2012 – 01670 623509

William Turner (c1508-1568)
'the father of English botany'

Why is William Turner important?

Born in Morpeth 500 years ago, William Turner was the first Englishman to see that our plants need to have names that we all recognise, and he started to provide these during his lifetime.

In his time, some plants hadn't been identified at all, while others had different names in different countries. Very few people were able to work out if the plants referred to in old medicinal textbooks were the same as those growing here.

Turner set about the mammoth task of identifying as many plants as he could at home and abroad, and then writing up the results in English. Before Turner all descriptions of plants and medicinal herbs were in Latin, and few people could understand them.

Turner's Medicine

Turner was a doctor, and only had plants to prescribe as medicine. He prescribed potions of different herbs and then passed the prescription on to an apothecary, who made it up in his shop.

So that both doctor and apothecary would know they were using the same ingredients, Turner wrote up his research into a 'Herbal', which described each plant and showed how it was used medicinally.

Although medicine has changed, the work that Turner did on plants is essential for botanists, who can identify several species through his writings.

Turner's Natural History

Turner's religious beliefs twice drove him out of England. While in Europe, he worked as a doctor, but he continued his studies, comparing notes with distinguished colleagues not just about plants but about the fishes and birds he had identified.

Some of the species he had noticed long before he was to identify them, as a boy living in Morpeth. Throughout his work, he constantly referred to the woods and fields of Northumberland, particularly to the area around his home town.

His descriptions are so clear and accurate that several plants can be identified which are still to be found growing where he recorded them 500 years ago.

The William Turner Garden

Coltsfoot

Onions

The Physic Garden

Physic gardens, the forerunners of our Botanic Gardens, were initially created by Italian medical schools. Our garden shows how the creation of straight narrow beds enabled plants to be grouped clearly, so that medical students could recognise different specimens, identify their uses, and harvest them for making up lotions and potions. Many of the traditional plants grown here will be familiar to you, but some will come as a surprise. The beds illustrate specific uses, as you'll see from the individual labels.

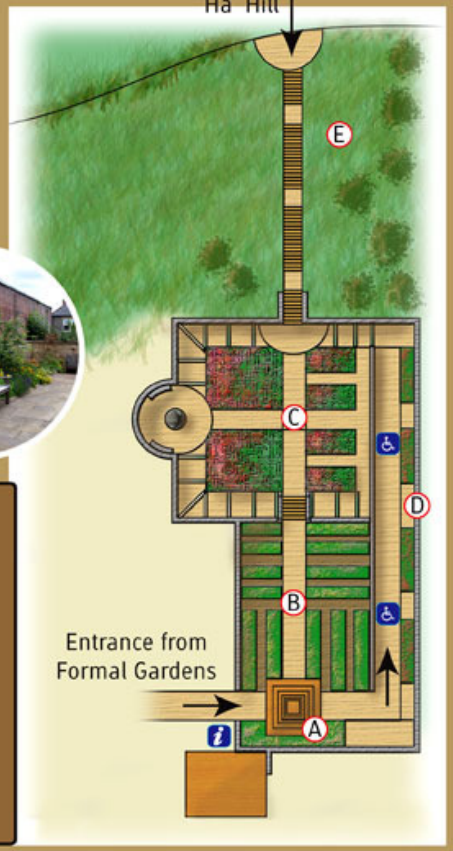
Useful Weeds

Old physic gardens include plants we class as wild flowers or weeds, not always suitable for an ornamental garden. We dig out plantain and coltsfoot and keep others under control. Coltsfoot has bright yellow flowers, and was used as a cough remedy but its persistent, thread-like roots are a nuisance. Borage, for the heart, and comfrey, still used as a bone-setter, are from the same family. Both have rough, prickly leaves, and attractive flowers, but borage seeds around, and comfrey (found in Northumberland) has almost indestructible roots.
Enjoy them here as part of early medicine.

Comfrey

William Turner's Plant Names

Several plants owe their names to Turner, who recorded local names and invented new ones. 'Monkshood' (*Aconitum napellus*) and 'Spindle Tree' (*Euonymus europaeus*) are from the Dutch. 'Loosestrife', from the Greek, describes both yellow-flowered *Lysimachia vulgaris* and purple-flowered *Lythrum salicaria*. Some early names have dropped out of common use; we say 'bluebell' rather than 'crowfoot'. He continually corrected any mistakes. At first, he thought the white-flowered plant called *Laus tibi* was related to the yellow one called 'daffadilly', but later realised both were species of Narcissus. Overall, Turner provided the first reliable record for about 300 plants, including heather, dead nettle, foxglove, cowslip, fennel, pennyroyal, privet, strawberry tree, pansy and houseleek.



- A Gazebo
- B Physic Garden
- C Knot Garden
- D Imported Plants (introduced around Turner's time)
- E Woodland Bank

Tulips

Elecampane

The Knot Garden

During the reign of Elizabeth I, wealthy owners created fashionable knot gardens. These were a design of interlacing hedges, often made of clipped box, but also from thyme, lavender, wall germander or cotton lavender. The hedges could be all green, or interweave different colours. The spaces between could be empty, decorated with coloured gravels, or filled with plants. A piece of topiary would finish off the design. The result would be something to show off to visitors from either the upper rooms of the house, or from a raised viewing platform outside, as we have made here.

From Medicine to Horticulture

We now grow many of Turner's medicinal plants for ornament. On the woodland bank, snowdrops, primroses and tulips evoke the spring for us. Fennel is used in cooking, but its feathery leaves and striking seed heads also enhance our gardens. Additionally, marigold cheers us throughout the summer. Later in the year, the most spectacular plant here is elecampane, grown in gardens for its bright gold flowers and dramatic height. Bistort's pink spikes are seen in the wild and in cultivation. Its other name, snakeroot, reminds us that, like elecampane, it was originally grown as an antidote to snake-bite.

Bistort