

Graham *digs* Lancashire



We meet the
master-craftsman
head gardener who
came home to Pilling.
Amanda Griffiths reports

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN COCKS

Gardener Graham White has worked for lords and ladies, a countess, several bankers and an extravagant American billionaire. His work has been admired by many, not least the Prince of Wales.

Not bad for a chap who first became interested in plants during a childhood playing in Blackpool's Stanley Park.

In the last 20 years he's worked in everything from an one acre rectory garden to a 20,000 acre estate. He's even been put forward as head gardener at the Prince's Highgrove Estate in Gloucestershire.

But it all started in his native Lancashire. 'My favourite garden designer is a chap called Thomas Mawson,' he says. 'He was probably the Diarmuid Gavin of Edwardian times, and he was born and grew up in Scorton and was educated in the Lake District.'

'He travelled the world designing gardens. Playing in Stanley Park as a boy probably gave me my first inspiration for gardening but it was only years later at college that I found out it was Mawson who designed it.'

Graham's first job was as undergardener to 'Old Tom' ('there's always an Old Tom or equivalent in any garden,')

Graham White in the Italian Garden at Blackpool's Stanley Park, where the garden designer first found his inspiration



Above: A typical garden plan Graham puts together to help clients

Left: One Graham did earlier, Ruffside Hall



he says) at Clifton Hall, between Kirkham and Preston. After gaining qualifications at Myerscough College, one of his most notable roles was as head gardener at Easton Grey House, once the Wiltshire home of former prime minister Herbert Asquith and just a few miles from Highgrove.

‘Walled gardens are a particular favourite of mine so I was delighted to restore the two acres at Easton to its former glory,’ says Graham.

‘The estate was owned by an American billionaire property developer. Their lifestyle was incredible. The New World Symphony Orchestra was flown in for a party one night. It was like living on the set of *Dynasty!*’



Graham White sitting on a bench dedicated to his grandfather in Stanley Park

Eventually the lure of Lancashire was too strong and Graham moved back to Pilling last year with wife Ruth and their ten-year-old child. He admits his garden at home isn’t the best example of what he can do - with all the time spent away redesigning other people’s gardens his own is a little neglected.

‘We were both born in Blackpool, although Ruth spent a lot of her childhood in Sussex,’ says Graham. ‘We have wanted to come home for about 15 years and thought now was the time to do it before our child started secondary school.’

‘Lancashire is where I belong. We have travelled all over the place but coming home was fantastic. It’s the best county in the country - and I’ve worked in them all!’

He is developing his own business, English Country Gardens, (www.englishcountrygardens.net), a consultancy which sees Graham and his team working with existing head gardeners and their teams to develop and refresh the gardens.

‘We can do anything from redesigning a top country garden at a stately home to a cottage garden, although it does tend to be the larger gardens we work on,’ he says.

As well as designing, Graham also offers bespoke one-to-one garden training so that other gardeners can learn the tricks of the trade.

‘This type of work is wonderful,’ he sums up. ‘You know it will be around for 100 or more years until the next chap takes over and, if you do it right your planting could be around for 500 or more years!’ 🌹



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