INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH | SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

HISTORY OF GARDENS AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPES SEMINAR

Autumn Programme 2026

Gardens of Pleasure



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The Provincial Daimyō Garden of Early Edo Japan: Not Merely a Matter of Seeking Pleasure

Thursday 3 December 2026
6.00pm GMT

Hybrid session:

• Meeting Wolfson NB02, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

• Broadcast on Zoom

Image: Oka Minzan (attr.), Shukkei-en-zu (detail), colour on paper, c.1788–1800, Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum

In 1620, domain lord (*daimyō*) Asano Nagaakira (1586–1632) commissioned garden designer Ueda Sōko (1563–1650) to construct a villa estate supplementary to his administrative quarters at Hiroshima Castle. The garden would in time come to be known as Shukkei-en (Garden of Condensed Views). Centred around a spacious pond and comprising expanses of grassland through which a series of architectural structures were dispersed, Shukkei-en served as a tranquil space to which Nagaakira — and twelve generations of Asano daimyō thereafter — might retreat for respite upon completion of official duties. As such, the estate provided the setting for the Confucian principle of 'pleasure taken afterwards', the notion of allowing oneself the luxury of leisure time only having first ascertained the happiness and welfare of others.

This paper explores how 'pleasure taken afterwards' manifested at Shukkei-en in the formative decades of the garden (1620–1713). Working from the earliest extant drawing plans and textual accounts of Shukkei-en, the paper discloses the various forms of pleasure — solitary, social, aesthetic, and active pursuits — enjoyed by the early Asano daimyō in their villa garden. Incorporating analyses of often-neglected aspects and features of a daimyō garden reveals the designed landscape constructed by the founding generations of the Asano house to be more than a space for seeking out pleasure. Shukkei-en was equally a productive, resourceful and practical space comprising elements that came into being through

circumstances dependent on societal conditions inherently linked to both Hiroshima and the broader realm of Japan. What was born from necessity, however, would ultimately also bring pleasure.

After receiving a BA in Human Geography at the University of Hull, **Corrina Ellis** spent fourteen years living and working in Japan. Returning to the UK she took up volunteer work in the Ethnology department of World Museum Liverpool and the Japan section of the British Museum and completed an MA in History of Art and Archaeology of East Asia at SOAS in 2020. With an interest in the role of landscape and its textual and visual representations in the construction of political and social identity in early modern and modern Japan, she is now in the final year of her PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art, her subject being Shukkei-en (The Garden of Condensed Views) in Hiroshima. Corrina spent her fieldwork year as Guest Researcher at Kyūshū University in Japan. At the beginning of this year, she undertook a placement researching Japanese-style gardens in the care of the National Trust and she currently works as a Tour Guide for gardens in Japan and as an English instructor and proofreader.

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