THE STORY OF THE GARDENS
庭の物語
Hearn was born on the Greek island of Lefkada on June 27, 1850, to an Irish father, Charles Bush Hearn, and a Greek mother, Rosa Cassimati. At the age of two, he and his mother came to live in Dublin while his father, a military surgeon, remained overseas. But two years later Rosa returned to Lefkada in poor health and Patrick was left in the care of his father’s aunt, Sarah Brenane. From the mid 1850s, Patrick spent much of his childhood summers in Tramore with his now guardian, Mrs. Brenane, who regularly visited her friend Elizabeth Hearn Molyneux.

Sarah Brenane retired to Tramore in 1867 and was buried there in 1871. The very last time Patrick saw his father was on the beach in Tramore, when he was seven years old. The young Patrick learned to swim in Tramore and passed many happy hours listening to fishermen’s stories of storms and shipwrecks. His biographer, Nina Kennard, attributed Hearn’s life long love of the sea to his days in Tramore. She described Tramore Bay as “presenting scenes striking and grand enough to stamp themselves forever on a mind such as Lafcadio Hearn’s”. Another biographer, Vera McWilliams, wrote that his times by the ocean were “the happiest moments of his Tramore days, and his Tramore days were the happiest of his youth”.

............Continue on through the Japanese Entrance Gate
From the age of thirteen to seventeen, Patrick attended a Jesuit-run boarding school at Ushaw, in Co.Durham. There Patrick frequently won first prize in English composition and he was strongly drawn to the Greek and Roman classics which excited his vivid imagination.

This area can be interpreted simply as a transitional, gathering space. But it also contains several rock features and landscape structures which hold a deeper symbolic meaning, pointing towards the, as yet unknown, exotic future life of Lafcadio Hearn. The rock formations to the south-eastern side of this space depict the outline of the four main islands of Japan. The paved path transecting the area resembles a swimming koi fish. On the north-western side, the rock formations represent the legend of the turtle and crane, depicted in 17th century gardens at Konchi-in Temple, Kyoto.

In Japan, the crane is a sacred bird, the symbol of peace and long life. The turtle, is the symbol of strength and endurance. Together the turtle and crane represent cooperation, peace and longevity.

........Continue onwards to The American Garden
3. THE AMERICAN JOURNEY

In 1869, when Patrick was nineteen, he was sent to Cincinnati, Ohio, to find work

Without any trade or profession, he quickly became homeless and destitute. An English printer, Henry Watkins, befriended him, provided shelter and introduced him to the world of printing and journalism. Hearn looked to Watkins for the rest of his life, as a mentor figure, referring to him as “Dear Old Dad”.

In time, Patrick became a well-known reporter, essayist and translator from French. His first short-lived marriage (1874) was to Alethea (‘Mattie’) Foley, a young black woman born into slavery. Their union was in defiance of prevailing Ohio law and caused him to lose his job. In 1877 Hearn went to New Orleans where his reputation continued to grow over the next eight years.

Hearn’s American journey is reflected through a prairie type landscape of tall grasses and trees flowing riverlike across the plain. This reflects the long journeys of his early adult life, first across the Atlantic and then down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. The rocks to the right of the entrance to this area reflect the father/mentor relationship between Patrick and Henry Watkins.

...........Continue onwards to The Greek Garden
The Greek garden is a reminder of Hearn’s birthplace and of his yearning for his mother Rosa, whom he lost at the age of four, when she returned in poor health to the Island of Lefkada. As a young writer in Cincinnati, Hearn adopted his middle name ‘Lafcadio’, by which he was known for the rest of his life.

The Greek garden is a grass banked amphitheatre, planted with herbs of Mediterranean origin. At its centre stands an old olive tree planted beside a small well. These elements symbolise the story of the foundation of Athens, when the two Greek Gods, Poseidon and Athena, laid claim to the patronage of the city.

Asked to offer a foundation gift to the city, Poseidon struck the earth and created a well with his trident. Water shot forth, but the water turned out to be salty and of no value.

Athena, in contrast, used her spear to plant an olive branch. The branch instantly blossomed into an olive tree, the universal symbol of peace and prosperity.

Athena’s gesture won the day, and the city was named for her.

...........Continue onwards to Arrival in Japan
5. ARRIVAL IN JAPAN

In 1890 Hearn travelled to Japan on a one-off assignment for *Harper’s magazine*. He was quickly captivated by the country and stayed on to work as a school teacher in Matsue.

Hearn married Setsu Koizumi in 1891. They had three sons and a daughter. He adopted Japanese citizenship and with it, the Japanese name Koizumi which means a little spring. These events are marked in the garden by the rock formation surrounding the source of a natural spring. The words from Sean Dunne’s poem – ‘Loneliness ended in Matsue’ capture the significance of this period in Hearn’s life.

Hearn’s articles on Japan soon began appearing in *The Atlantic Monthly* and other publications in the United States. Hearn’s most intellectually prolific period was from 1896 to 1903, as professor of English literature at the Imperial University of Tokyo.

He rapidly became known as the West’s great interpreter of Japan. His outstanding achievement was to describe a country in the throes of Meiji transformation from its own perspective. His other outstanding achievement was his translation of Japanese folktales, and this work remains on the Japanese school curriculum to this day.

It is proposed to build a ceremonial Japanese Tea house in this area.  

........Continue onwards to *The Stream Garden*
The stream flows from the source of the spring past two dramatic natural rock formations. The first of these is a rock grotto which reflects a beautiful story told by Hearn of his experience at the Cave of the Children’s Ghosts at Kyu-Kukedo-San, the Ancient Cavern near Kaka-ura.

In this cave, the spirits of small children, are said to be looked after by the god Jizo-san. The children are fed by a fountain of milk. In the mornings, visitors can see small heaps of mounded stones and little footprints made by the playing children.

The second natural rock outcrop forms the backdrop for a pond that provides the ‘ocean’ setting for the story of Urashima Taro. He was a fisherboy who saved the life of a small turtle. In gratitude, the mother turtle magically gave him fins to swim underwater to the Palace of the Sea King where he fell in love with the king’s daughter. He found himself in the land of eternal youth and the story thereafter is similar to the Irish legend of Oisín’s visit to Tír na n-Óg.

........Continue onwards to The Woodlands
“That trees, at least Japanese trees, have souls, cannot seem an unnatural fancy to one who has seen the blossoming of the umenoki and the sakuranoki. This is a popular belief in Izumo and elsewhere.”

Thus wrote Lafcadio Hearn in his essay ‘In a Japanese Garden’, published in 1892. Of the cherry-trees (sakuranoki) in his much-loved garden in Matsue, Hearn wrote:

“When, in spring, the trees flower, it is as though fleeciest masses of cloud faintly tinged by sunset had floated down from the highest sky to fold themselves about the branches. This comparison is no poetical exaggeration, neither is it original: it is an ancient Japanese description of the most marvelous floral exhibition which nature is capable of making.”

“The reader who has never seen a cherry-tree blossoming in Japan cannot possibly imagine the delight of the spectacle. There are no green leaves: those come later: there is only one glorious burst of blossoms, veiling every twig and bough in their delicate mist: and the soil beneath each tree is covered deep out of sight by fallen petals as in a drift of pink snow.”

..........Continue onwards to The Garden of Peace and Harmony
8. The Gardens of Peace & Harmony

The garden stream continues downhill to a canal situated at the lower Eastern end of the site. An Azumaya has been designed for a space at the southern end of the canal, in which water lilies and lotus flowers will be planted. It is proposed to build this structure in 2016. This will provide a space in which to sit and meditate in the peaceful setting of the lotus pond.

This area reflects Hearn’s literary success and recognition in Japan, his contentment in family life and his delight in his own Japanese garden in Matsue, about which he wrote:

‘Verily, even plants and trees, rocks and stones, all shall enter into Nirvana’

The water flows from the canal over a waterfall to the biggest pond in the gardens. A rock formation in the shape of a crane’s neck provides a jetty over the pond and a place from which to watch reflections in the water, reminiscent of Hearn’s story The Fountain of Eternal Youth.

...........Continue onwards to A Living God
9. THE STORY OF A LIVING GOD

The mountain path leading towards Journey’s End, reflects a famous Japanese story recounted by Hearn. It is the story of a real event that happened many hundreds of years ago.

One autumn evening Hamaguchi Gohei, a village headman, was looking down from his house on a hilltop, when he felt a tremor, and he saw the sea darken and run away from the land. He also saw all the villagers run in amazement to the seashore. He quickly told his grandson to set fire to the newly harvested rice stacks. The fire drew all the villagers rushing uphill from the beach to quench the flames. Then on the edge of the horizon a long dark line appeared.

“That long darkness was the returning sea, towering like a cliff, and coursing more swiftly than the kite flies’.

As they looked down on the sea engulfing their village below, the people realized that a tsunami had struck and that Hamaguchi’s action had saved their lives. They built a temple to Hamaguchi who became a Living God. It was Hearn’s story that first introduced the word tsunami to the West.

..........Continue onwards to Journey’s End
Lafcadio Hearn died of heart failure in Tokyo on September 26, 1904, aged 54. He is remembered here in the words of Waterford poet, Sean Dunne.

A Shrine to Lafcadio Hearn, 1850-1904

Like an artist painting on rice grains, he tried to trap Japan in a story: his one good eye so close to the page he might have been a jeweller with a gem.

So much to tell: kimonos and cranes, cemeteries to stalk at evening, slow shoals of candles – souls on rivers beneath a massive moon.

Even the sound of sandals on a bridge stayed in the mind for an evening, matching the shadow of fishermen on still waters: a painted print.

Or a face smiling to hide its grief, the touch of passing sleeves part of a plan that maps the future, a heron seeking the heights on a wall.

Loneliness ended in Matsue: that raw pain no longer gnawing like the Creole songs on a sidewalk in New Orleans. Instead he heard a flute’s clear note.

He was a lantern drifting from the shore, dissolving in the tone of a struck bell. Sipping green tea in Tokyo, he heard ghost stories from an impossible past and died past fifty from his Western heart.

Afterwards, he was a story still told, set firmly as rocks in a Zen garden. Incense burns near cake at his shrine.

In the sound of sandals on a bridge I hear him sometimes, or catch him in the swift calligraphy of a scroll, or in the curve of a rough bowl.

A breeze through a bamboo grove, his memory passes for an instant. Snow falls on his grave and on plum blossom. He is fading like a fisherman in mist.

(Sean Dunne, 1956 – 1995)
This garden celebrates the life and work of Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904). It follows his life path from Greece, to Ireland and then to America where he was first recognized as a gifted writer. It was in Japan that he became truly famous and the gardens reflects this in design, choice of plants, and particularly in the usage of rocks.

As Hearn, himself, wrote, “In order to comprehend the beauty of a Japanese garden, it is necessary to understand—or at least to learn to understand—the beauty of stones”