

# The Culpeper Garden Restoration

## A Leeds Castle Information & Activity Book

The Culpeper Garden was originally designed by the renowned Russell Page in 1980. It sits on an oddly shaped sloping plot of land, which for many years was the Castle's kitchen garden and where fruit, vegetables and herbs were grown.

Russell Page re-imagined the space, creating a refined cottage-style garden full of colour and seasonal interest. It is named after the Culpeper family, owners of Leeds Castle in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The enclosed garden is framed on three sides by the warm red brick of old estate buildings and a high wall, while the remaining side looks out over the Great Water. The flower beds, edged with low box hedges, are arranged in a formal pattern and separated with brick pathways so that visitors have the impression of walking through a field of flowers.



**Hedge Bindweed**

Over the years, invasive plants such as hedge bindweed and ground elder have spread widely. They have smothered the beds and hedges and become entangled in the roots of the shrubs and plants, meaning that now the garden needs a period of restoration due to being so overrun with weeds.



**Ground Elder**



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## Russell Page – Who was he?

Russell Page was a famous garden designer who loved plants, colours, and making outdoor spaces beautiful. He was born in 1906 and grew up in the English countryside, where he discovered a love for nature. Later, he studied art in London and Paris and used what he learned to design gardens all over the world.



From 1945 until 1962, Russell lived and worked in France. He was involved in all types of gardening projects, from small private cottage and town gardens to public projects and huge parks.

He first worked at Leeds Castle in the 1930s, when he carried out landscaping for Lady Baillie, but it was 50 years later that he created the Culpeper Garden.

Lady Baillie had died in 1974, leaving the estate to the Leeds Castle Foundation. The Castle and grounds opened to the public in 1976, following necessary alterations such as car parking areas. The 1980s brought about the creation of the Great Water, which Russell Page oversaw, as well as the transformation of the kitchen garden into the cottage garden style Culpeper Garden.

Russell Page believed that making a garden was like painting a picture – every tree, plant, and path was chosen carefully to work together. His partnership with Lady Baillie helped turn Leeds Castle into one of the most beautiful gardens in England, and his ideas continue to inspire gardeners everywhere.

## Excerpts from Notes by Russell Page:

Of the Castle...

*The charm of Leeds... There is no more romantic site in the world. The warm colour of the Kentish ragstone of which the Castle is built is set against the cool mirror of the wide moat, which lies at the bottom of a ring of slopes, beautifully wooded by Capability Brown in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.*



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Of the garden...

*The shapeless but sunny plot, once a vegetable garden, is being transformed into the kind of flower garden at which the English excel. A simple pattern of paths has been established to enable you to walk this way and that through a field of flowers. The garden will be filled with lilacs and old-fashioned roses, with irises and cottage pinks, poppies and lupins, with lavender and many other favourites, to make a walled-in enclosure of scent and colour. The garden we are making will be called the Culpeper Garden after a famous owner of Leeds.*



The garden is now undergoing a period of restoration. The plants have been removed – some of them stored to continue growing in pots, while the bindweed and elder are cleared and the beds left empty for a time until we are sure that the bindweed and ground elder are gone.

During this time, we are creating temporary displays in the cleared beds. Our gardens team have been growing plants from seed, choosing climate resilient plants to extend the flowering season and provide colour for our visitors and nectar and pollen for our insects and pollinators.

For spring, 15,000 tulip bulbs have been planted with different varieties growing and flowering at different times.

For summer, various plants have been grown from seed in the Leeds Castle greenhouses, including...

*Sweet Peas, White Laceflower, False Bishops Weed, Zinnia, Black Eyed Susan, Purple Coneflower, Flowering Tobacco, Calendula, Cosmos and Cornflower.*



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## Quick Questions

1. Why do you think Lady Baillie wanted Russell Page to help with her gardens?

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2. What makes a garden special to you?

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2. If you could design a garden at a castle, what would you include?

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## Creative Task

### Design a Mini Garden!

**Draw a small garden in the box and include:**

A water feature

Flowers

A path

Something “magical” that would surprise visitors!

