



ART IN THE OPEN AIR

The Barbara Hepworth Sculpture Garden in St Ives continues to evoke its famous creator forty years after her death, finds Emma Inglis

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS *Emma Inglis*

For the best part of the year, St Ives is a noisy place. The tightly packed houses and crowded streets teem with excited holiday-makers, the gulls scream overhead, the church clock peals to its own eccentric metre of time, dogs bark, and down by the harbour, a hum of traffic, people and boats reverberates well into the night. Yet at the bottom of a steep cobbled hill in the middle of town, behind cool white walls, there exists a peaceful haven of calm. This tranquil green oasis is Trewyn Studio and garden, where the sculptor Barbara Hepworth came to live and work in 1949 until her death 40 years ago this month.

A friendly rival of Henry Moore, with whom she studied at the Royal College of Art, Hepworth was one of the most important Modernist sculptors of the twentieth century. Her work can be found all over the world, but the best examples are to be seen at Trewyn in St Ives: her beloved former home and garden in Cornwall. Now managed under the auspices of the Tate, the garden is crammed full of her distinctive forms with their undulating curves, 'pierced eyes' and hollow spaces.

To wander around Trewyn is a joy: the garden is not large – only around

half an acre – but it perfectly combines the beauty of planting with Hepworth's stone and bronze sculptures. Birds abound, as do the butterflies, darting in late spring between great clumps of pink and violet cinerarias, pelargoniums and regal lilies. The sculptures beg to be touched: some are big enough to enter. The shapes seem oddly familiar; forms snatched from nature, assuring, comforting – blending seamlessly into their surrounds. It all serves to remind

'THE BRONZE SCULPTURES BEG TO BE TOUCHED'

you of Hepworth's skill as an artist: some of her pieces are so fluid that they appear not made but rather to inhabit the landscape.

'Finding Trewyn was a sort of magic', Hepworth wrote of the studio. She had bought it at auction: the building and small garden had, at one time, belonged to Trewyn House next door. Originally intended as a place purely for work, within a year the modest studio had also become Hepworth's home, when her marriage to the artist Ben Nicholson ended. There had been tensions in the relationship for some time. Before

coming to Cornwall the couple had lived in London, and Hepworth had enjoyed a growing reputation among the artistic elite. But four small children – three of them triplets – and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 saw the family flee London for Cornwall and move to a house in Carbis Bay, next to St Ives.

ENDLESS INSPIRATION

In Carbis Bay, relations between the couple became increasingly strained as a frustrated Hepworth was forced to put domesticity before art. The break-down of the marriage and the move to Trewyn saw Hepworth throw herself back into her work – easier now that her children were at boarding school – and re-establish herself among the artistic cognoscenti.

At Trewyn, Hepworth could carve in the open air, in all seasons, and connect with the community, the sea and the rugged Cornish landscape. She was in her element. The 'barbaric and magical' countryside of West Penwith, with its rocky hills, fertile valleys and dramatic coastline, had a profound effect on her. Not only was it a glorious reminder of the Yorkshire landscape of her childhood and endlessly inspiring, it also provided her with one of her 'greatest needs for carving: a strong sunlight and radiance

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The flowers of *Abutilon vitifolium* provide spring colour; pathways lined with established planting wind their way through the garden; undulating curves, 'pierced eyes' and hollow spaces are characteristic of Barbara Hepworth's work; the sculpture 'Cantate Domino' is set off by plants chosen for their form or leaf texture; circular apertures offer changing views in and out of the stone form; work is showcased in viewing spaces on high plinths within the garden; hidden away behind white walls, the garden in Trewyn is an oasis of calm

'TREWYN'S MILD CLIMATE AND SHELTERING WALLS ENCOURAGED THE KIND OF PLANTING FAMILIAR TO CORNISH GARDENS'

from the sea which almost surrounds this spit of land'.

A LIVING CANVAS

But her new home and its surrounds were not just a canvas for her art, they were a canvas for activity. The garden was her first, and there was much to do. Hepworth called on the help of gardening friends to design it. Chief among these was the composer Priaulx Rainier, who had a small garden nearby and possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of plants; and Will Arnold-Forster, author of *Shrubs For The Milder Counties*, who had created a beautiful garden at his home, Eagle's Nest, in nearby Zennor. Together the three friends planned a garden that would be a showcase for Hepworth's sculpture: a gallery *en plein air* (in the open air).

Turf replaced the old lawn; rockeries and terraces were built; a shallow pond was rescued and reconstructed; and a flurry of planting took place. Trewyn's mild climate and sheltering walls were a bonus, encouraging the kind of planting familiar to Cornish gardens: fuchsias, camellias, ferns and magnolias, as well as the more exotic ginkgo biloba, a Chusan palm, and a clump of bamboo with magnificent thick green stems.

The sculptures were placed on plinths in viewing spaces, set off by plants liked by Hepworth for their form or leaf texture. There was no scarcity of buyers: they came and went all the time.

Today, a heady scent of leaf and flower accompanies the steady stream of visitors that troop along the maze of overgrown narrow paths in this exotic paradise where plant and form coexist in perfect harmony. Sunlight dapples the downy underplanting and glints through

the leaves of thickly growing shrubs to reveal half-hidden bronzes, weathered stone and a pond speckled with cherry blossom. Shadow patterns break and reform across the garden. A curled-up cat dozes in the sinuous arc of a sculpture, delighting all who see it.

The paths arrive at a summer house (with daybed, where Hepworth would snooze), a greenhouse and at Hepworth's workshop: peer in and you can see the tools she liked to use, as well as her dusty overalls and a stack of plaster models from which bronzes would be cast.

Although Hepworth continued to work until her death, at the end of her life she was becoming increasingly frail. In 1966, a year after she was made a Dame Commander of the British Empire, Hepworth was diagnosed with cancer of the throat, and a fractured hip hindered her mobility one year later. But her sudden end, in May 1975, aged 72, still came as a shock: she died in a fire at Trewyn Studio, probably caused by her dropped cigarette. Mercifully, the garden – and its contents – was left undamaged.

Her family carried out her wishes to turn the house and garden into a museum, and in 1980 its management was taken over by the Tate. While many gardens learn to march to a different tune when their makers move on, the garden at Trewyn remains little changed. It continues to evoke its famous creator, maintaining its uncomplicated tranquillity and its bond of plant and form. The sculptures are just as Hepworth left them. A few more shrubs might have found their way into the garden – added by nurseryman and gardener John Anderson in the Eighties – but, for the most part, the garden people see today is the same one that Hepworth so loved.

CLOCKWISE. FROM RIGHT Barbara Hepworth's work 'Sphere With Inner Form', 1963, is sometimes interpreted as a child in a pregnant woman's womb, and awakens a sense of nurture and protection; Philadelphus in bloom in the garden, where plants and form coexist in perfect harmony; the artist looks out over her beloved St Ives, which provided her with so much artistic inspiration; this bustling Cornish seaside town became her home after she evacuated from London when the Second World War broke out in 1939, and she lived here

until her sudden death in 1975, aged 72; vivid pink phlox with their star-shaped flowers and captivating evening scent are a sight to behold in the garden at Trewyn; the bronze sculpture 'Spring', cast in 1966, is typical of Hepworth's work and sits in front of a wooded backdrop in the half-acre garden; 'Two Forms', created in 1969, is considered to be one of the country's most recognised pieces of sculpture and was designed by the artist after she was diagnosed with throat cancer – it is one of only six others like it that were cast





NEED TO KNOW

BARBARA HEPWORTH MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN

The museum and garden are open all year round; check the website for times. Admission £6 (£4 concessions); or buy the combined Tate St Ives/Barbara Hepworth ticket, which is £10/£6 concessions (01736 796226; tate.org.uk/visit/tate-st-ives/barbara-hepworth-museum).

GETTING THERE

By train to the mainline station at Penzance. From Penzance, travel by train to St Erth before catching the branch line into St Ives (firstgreatwestern.co.uk).

By car, take the M5 and then A30 across Bodmin moor. Leave the A30 just before Hayle and take the A3074 into St Ives.

By bus, you can get to St Ives via a number of routes offered by First (0871 200 2233, firstgroup.com).

WHERE TO STAY

Carbis Bay Holidays has two one-bedroom apartments in Chy-an-Kerris house in Carbis Bay, which was Barbara Hepworth's former home. Hepworth and Pelagos are available to rent individually or together, and both enjoy panoramic views across St Ives Bay from the shared terrace. Prices from £189 for three nights at Hepworth, and from £216 for three nights at Pelagos. Minimum stay three nights (carbisbayholidays.co.uk).