

## Japan's Ambassador Turns Sod on New Hearn Garden



Pictured from left: Cllr James Tobin (Chairperson of Waterford Council), Japan's Ambassador to Ireland, His Excellency Chihiro Atsumi, Waterford Municipal Mayor, Lola O'Sullivan and Liam Cannon (Landscape).

Japanese Ambassador Chihiro Atsumi was the guest of honour at Tramore House on Friday last when he and Mayor of Waterford Lola O'Sullivan turned the sod on the Lafcadio Hearn Garden.

The 2.5-acre garden, which is due to open to the public next Spring, will commemorate the life of Irish writer Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (1850- 1904), whose 164th birthday coincided with the sod turning.

Hearn, who was known in Japan as Koizumi Yakumo, was considered one of the most distinguished and revered westerners to set down roots in Japan in the mid-19th century, spent his summers in Tramore with his Grand Aunt Sarah Brenane.

According to Nina Kennard, Hearn's first biographer, his love of the sea stemmed from his happy summers spent in Tramore; she wrote that Tramore Bay, visible from the site that shall bear his name as "presenting scenes striking and grand enough to stamp themselves forever on a mind such as Lafcadio Hearn's".

Addressing the gathering at the sunny if blustery event, Ambassador Atsumi stayed: "Lafcadio Hearn is probably the most well-known Irishman in Japan.

"I greatly welcome the chance this Memorial Garden will give to many people in Ireland to learn about his connection with Japan."

Echoing those sentiments, Mayor Lola O'Sullivan said: "This is an important project for the town of Tramore. This garden will be an attraction of great interest locally, nationally and internationally. It will enhance Japan-Ireland cultural relations and will effectively make Tramore Ireland's bridge to Japan."

The project received a grant of six million yen (€41,860) in funding earlier this year from the Japan World Exposition 1970 Commemorative. The project, which in total will cost €500,000 (with 65 per cent pledged through Waterford County and City Council, the JEC Fund, Japan, the Tramore Community Enterprise Programme and horticultural assistance from Teagasc

Kildalton College, was inspired by the 2012 visit of Mr Hearn's greatgrandson Professor Koizumi Bon.

A message of thanks from Prof Bon was read to the gathering by Sonomi Leslie of Tramore, who relayed the gratitude of Lafcadio Hearn's descendant that the peoples of Ireland and Japan are honouring his descendant in such a splendid, permanent manner.

Also speaking at the event, Tramore Development Trust Chairman Joe Stokes said: The project will add a new dimension to the international tourism offerings in South East Ireland.

"As a literary and cultural project, it will enhance the offering of Waterford's Viking Triangle, and as an historic garden project, it will play a key role in developing a world class trail including Mount Congreve and Lismore Castle Gardens in County Waterford, Woodstock Garden at Inistioge and Johnstown Castle Wexford."

The garden is to feature several separate areas, which will tell, in sequence the story of Hearn/Yakumo from his boyhood in Tramore through to his life and death in Japan and shall prove of great interest to Japanese, American and other international visitors.