



Fruits of his labours – Harrogate Library's archives show how much work it took Henry Ward and his team to create the Valley Gardens residents and visitors know and love today. (S)

The man who made the Valley Gardens

By John Grainger

THE man who laid out the Valley Gardens lies in an anonymous plot in Stonefall Cemetery – uncommemorated, but not for much longer.

His great-grandson, John Backhouse, plans to right that wrong by having a headstone placed on his grave.

Mr Backhouse said: "My great-grandfather, Henry Ward, worked for Harrogate Corporation for 35 years – 25 of them as head gardener – and I'm extremely proud of what he achieved. It's really upsetting that there is no recognition at all for him or his family."

Mr Backhouse was tipped off about his great-grandfather's role in the town's history by his mother, and subsequently unearthed a wealth of detail by digging in Harrogate Library's archives.

He discovered that Henry's son, Harold, John's grandfather, also worked as a Harrogate Corporation gardener under his father, but was killed in World War One and is commemorated on the Cenotaph.

Henry himself had emigrated to the United States at the age of 12, returned to join the army, served with the King's Royal Rifle Corps in the Zulu War and in Egypt, and came to Harrogate and married his wife, Ada, in 1885.

As head gardener he laid out bowling greens and tennis courts, and altered the layout of the Royal Hall Gardens four times.

Before he started work, the site of the Valley Gardens was said to have been "just a valley with very little garden about it".

Henry drained, levelled and planted it, completing works in 1903.

Mr Backhouse said: "He gave Harrogate an absolutely beautiful patch of colour and tranquillity and it is so sad he is not remembered in any way.

"But even if his work isn't commemorated, at least I can make sure that he is."

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Henry Ward, the gardener whose vision transformed the Valley Gardens. (S)