



Mystery in the park

Leamington's Jephson Gardens play host to the BBC's new murder mystery serial Mayo

In the heart of busy Royal Leamington Spa is an oasis of calm and beauty. Recently refurbished Jephson Gardens was voted 'Best Park in Britain 2004' by the Royal Horticultural Society. It provides people in and around Leamington with a stress free environment in which to unwind and relax.

In fact, it is so peaceful and calm with beautiful flowers and trees, ducks to feed on the lake and swans gracefully gliding by on the river, it's hard to imagine it could be the perfect setting for a murder!

Well, maybe not in reality, but with a little bit of disguise and a few additional features the gardens became the ideal setting for the BBC's first episode of its new detective drama series, Mayo, starring Alistair McGowan.

Location manager Mitch Ferguson commented, "Mayo is an 'off the wall' series, quirky and a little bit light-hearted, not too dark and not too heavy. Jephson Gardens provides just the right environment for the first episode. We needed a contemporary building that could be used as a fictitious therapy clinic and the glasshouse was just right. We also took over the restaurant for three days during filming and created an office in the middle of the botanical gardens. Because it is meant to be a fictitious place we didn't want the gardens to be easily recognisable. We didn't, for instance, film any of the movements."

Mayo is based on the books by Margery Eccles and impressionist Alistair McGowan plays the wise-cracking, brilliant detective Gil Mayo who is a master of crime-solving and a man obsessed with figuring things out, whether it's how gadgets work or who committed the

latest murder on his patch.

The series also stars Jessica Oyelowo as the sexy Detective Superintendent Alex Jones, along with Leo Brealey as Scenes of Crime Officer Harriet Tate and Huw Rhys in his first major role as Detective Constable Martin Kite.

The eight-part series began shooting last autumn in and around locations in Leamington Spa and continued up to a month ago. The first episode was screened on BBC One last month.

Mitch said, "I have filmed in and around Leamington and Warwickshire before on other series: Dangerfield, for instance and also Doherty and Pascoe. We describe these areas as 'film friendly' because people here have a lot of enthusiasm. Obviously we need co-operation when we are filming and during the shoot in Jephson Gardens everyone was very helpful."

The unique contemporary design of the glasshouse has attracted quite a lot of attention. A Civic Trust award for the building was presented in October 2005. "It adds a new dimension," said Nigel Bishop of Warwick District Council who trained at the botanical gardens in Edinburgh. He said, "It was built on

the site of the original nursery and its aim is educational. It is still being developed and we have recently finished more work on interpretation. The exhibition shows the plant life system and how it evolved. We have labelled all the plants with their country of origin, Latin names and common names, and we have shown how plants are used, for instance commercially and for medicines. The glasshouse is controlled biologically so there are no chemicals used. This is in keeping with Warwick District Council's policy and we feel it is the only way forward."

Nigel continued, "The glasshouse is looked after by David Cheshire of Warwickshire College, so this provides a link with education and it is intended for both adults and children. The studio which is situated inside the glasshouse is used for courses run by Warwickshire College and where appropriate they link work in with the national curriculum. The studio can also be hired out for exhibitions such as art or sculptures."

The gardens are listed as Grade II on the English Heritage register of historic parks and gardens. The park has come a long way since it was first

