

A photograph of a garden scene. In the foreground, a gravel path leads from the bottom center towards a large, white-framed greenhouse on the left. The greenhouse is built on a stone base and has a gabled roof. To the left of the path, there is a lush garden bed with various plants, including tall yellow flowers and red flowers. To the right of the path, there is a well-maintained green lawn. In the background, there are dense green trees and a stone wall. The overall scene is bright and vibrant.

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[www.devongardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.devongardenstrust.org.uk)

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## Welcome to our New Members

### *From the Membership Secretary*

We are delighted to welcome Caroline Bradshaw (Lifton), Susan Miller (Ivybridge), Katherine Rogers (Collaton Raleigh), Judi Smith (Dunsford) and Saul Walker (Plymouth) as members.

*Thank you for supporting Devon Gardens Trust!*

Shirley Tamblyn

*Front cover photograph* - The peach house at Spitchwick Manor. See page 6.

*Rear cover photograph* - Reed Hall Gardens, Streatham Campus, University of Exeter. See page 26.

## FROM THE CHAIRMAN - Dr Ian Varndell



I hope that readers of this section will not be too disappointed to see my name still attached to the post of Chairman. In July I completed three years in the role, and I have agreed to serve for one further year to enable our newly appointed Vice Chairman, Dianne Long, to complete some projects before taking the reins in 2016. I am delighted that Dianne (pictured left) has accepted the invitation to become Vice Chairman and I look forward to working with her. She has already made significant contributions to the work of the Trust and with her expertise, experience and enthusiasm she will drive the DGT forwards.

I am also thrilled that Michael Hickson, a founder member of the DGT, has agreed to succeed Sir Malcolm Field as our new President (see pages 4 and 5). At the 2015 AGM we also said farewell to Celia Jenkins who has served as our Education Co-ordinator for several years. Celia's commitment to the Trust is greatly appreciated and she steered the DGT's involvement with the Growing Devon Schools Partnership which is now making significant progress with school communities across this large county. Celia will be greatly missed, but I am very pleased that Iain Park, Head of Estates at the University of Exeter, will report on education matters to the Council of Management.

**The Gardens Trust** – the new organisation formed by the merger of the Association of Gardens Trusts and the Garden History Society was formed at a busy joint meeting in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 24th July. Information about the new trust can be found on pages 20 and 21 of this newsletter.

It has been a thoroughly enjoyable Summer with some delightful (and dry) garden visits. In addition to the AGM at Castle Hill, DGT members were welcomed at Brinshill (pictured right) in Mamhead, Spitchwick Manor and at Northlew Manor. Our sincere thanks to all the owners who have so generously allowed us to enjoy their wonderful gardens.



Finally, I would like to thank all the trustees, members and helpers who have worked hard to promote the activities of the Devon Gardens Trust. I'd particularly like to thank John Clark for his tireless work as Conservation Officer and the Committee Chairmen for ensuring that we remain as one of the most active and creative county gardens trusts. Please spread the word and encourage your friends to join the DGT!

Ian Varndell

e. [chair@devongardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:chair@devongardenstrust.org.uk)

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

## Castle Hill, Wednesday 1st July 2015



Lady Arran welcomed 65 delegates to the 27th AGM. In her amusing address she explained that she and the Earl were planning to move out of the main house so that their eldest daughter Lady Laura, her husband James Duckworth-Chad, and their young family can take on the task of managing Castle Hill. DGT Chairman Dr Ian Varndell presented Lady Arran with a bouquet and this was followed by a presentation to outgoing President Sir Malcolm Field to commemorate his 8 years as President (see left). A bouquet was also presented to Celia Jenkins who retired as Education Co-ordinator.

Dr Varndell then chaired the Business Meeting which followed the traditional format. Two resolutions were presented to those present:

- *that the Devon Gardens Trust supports the merger of the Association of Gardens Trusts with the Garden History Society.* This was unanimously approved.
- *that Article 47 of the Constitution on the rotation of Trustees be amended.* This was unanimously approved.

The financial statement was presented by Hon. Treasurer Mrs Shirley Tamblyn and was unanimously approved as a true record of the Trust's finances to the year ended 31 March 2015. Thanks were extended to all the DGT's trustees for all the work they carry out to promote the Trust's activities.

Our guest speaker was Mr John Sales, former Chief Gardens Adviser to the National Trust from 1973 to his retirement in 1998. His gardening life started at Hidcote in the 1950s where he admitted that they were "*amateurs at garden conservation*", and that the National Trust "*did not take to gardens early on*". John is unsentimental about gardens, commenting that they are about "*continuity and development*". His view is that one needs "*to have a renewal of gardens every generation*". During his talk he showed many slides of the gardens at which he worked and advised. The list is impressive – Powys Castle, Blickling, Biddulph Grange, Stourhead, Sissinghurst, Great Dixter and Nymans. About Sissinghurst he praised Norah Lindsay as the inspiration for Vita Sackville-West's magnificent garden. Lindsay was a socialite who recreated the gardens at Sutton Courtenay Manor in Oxfordshire. When her marriage failed in 1924 she was facing financial ruin so set about designing gardens based on commissions gained from the upper echelons of English society, but leaving no drawings of her work. She had no botanical training, but a strong 'garden sense' – an important attribute according to Mr Sales.



Finally, he said that “*a lot of good things come out of storms*” – referring to the Great Storm of 1987 that devastated Nymans, but which allowed them to replant and revitalise a landscape that would have otherwise gone unaltered.

During the delicious buffet luncheon, John Sales (pictured left) was presented with a copy of Todd Gray’s *The Art of the Devon Garden*. After lunch all attendees were encouraged to explore the beautiful Castle Hill gardens, the Holwell Temple and the newly refurbished 18th century kennels which have been dedicated to the memory of Lady Arran’s mother, Lady Margaret Fortescue.

Our grateful thanks are given to the Earl and Lady Arran for their wonderful hospitality.

## Welcome to our new President – Michael Hickson VMH



The Devon Gardens Trust is extremely fortunate to have appointed Michael Hickson as our new President, succeeding Sir Malcolm Field who served the Trust admirably for eight years. Michael Hickson is well known to many DGT members and returns as President some 27 years after founding the Trust.

His biography is impressive. In the late 1950’s he gardened in Devon at Dartington and at The Garden House. This was followed by a brief period at Notcutt Nursery (Suffolk) and Hilliers. He moved back to Devon in 1963 to take up the post of Head Gardener at Knightshayes Court. He retired in 2004 and in recognition of his 40 years’ service Michael’s Wood was named after him. In 2010 he was awarded the prestigious Victoria Medal of Honour (VMH) by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). Michael was a founder member of the Devon Gardens Trust and the Devon Group of Plant Heritage (NCCPG). He is a trustee of the Fortescue Garden Trust (Buckland Monachorum), member of the RHS ‘Woody Plant Committee’ and ‘Trials Forum’. He serves as a senior RHS judge for show gardens and floral exhibits at the Society’s major shows, and since 1989 he has been a member of ‘Le Jury les Mérites de Courson à Chantilly’ which meets twice yearly. Currently, Michael is engaged in landscape designs and consultancy for clients across the country. When time allows he likes to relax in the garden at home with his endlessly patient wife Lena, with whom he enjoys travelling.

## VISIT REPORT

### Spitchwick Manor Gardens, Thursday 11th June 2015

A single-storey Devon Longhouse, facing into the hillside to shelter its inhabitants from the weather, is known to have stood on the current site since the 11th century. Mentioned in Domesday, 'Spicewite' was entered as 'King's Land, formerly held by Earl Harold'. By the thirteenth century the estate had grown to 8000 acres but population decline as a result of disease led to farms and land being sold off for small sums with a concomitant reduction in the size of the estate.

The Longhouse has been enlarged and changed over the centuries – at least eleven phases of aggrandisement have been identified. Major changes to the house and gardens were made by John Dunning, first Lord Ashburton, who purchased the estate in 1769 shortly after becoming Solicitor General. In addition to building Gate Houses, with a grand beech avenue leading to the Manor House, he formed a large (2.7 acres) vegetable garden and created a stream-fed plunge pool of granite construction for his wife – Elizabeth Baring – which is situated in a beautiful woodland setting a short distance from the house. 'Lady Ashburton's Bath' is a delightful feature of the park, although none of the visitors decided to take a plunge!



*Spitchwick Manor.*

Dr Thomas Blackall, an eminent surgeon in the City of Exeter, bought the estate in 1867 and did much to improve the house, adding several outbuildings and, probably, making changes to the Lower Walled Garden and other structures that are present today. The glasshouses, which were heated by a coke-fired boiler, were almost certainly installed during his period of ownership. In 1901 the estate was purchased by Frederick Struben a geologist and gold-miner. He died in 1931 and his widow sold the property to the Simpson family in 1934.



*Spitchwick Manor c.1902. Courtesy of Rod Kruger | [www.heritageportal.co.za](http://www.heritageportal.co.za)*

The current owners are the third generation of Simpsons to live at Spitchwick Manor and they have done a great deal of improvement to the house and to the gardens. A rose garden stands in front of the house and a camellia walk, magnolia lawn and new rookery have been created. Patrick and Jane, the current owners (pictured on page 9), gave David Austen roses an exhaustive list of features that they required ... they must be fragrant, floriferous, disease-resistant and their colours had to fall within a red palette. The result is stunning, with Shropshire Lad, Sophy's Rose, Munstead Wood, Sceptered Isle, The Alnwick Rose, Darcey Bussell and Lady Salisbury amongst others, surrounding a circular pool with fountain.

In mid-June the garden was ablaze with colour from azaleas, iris, lupins, poppies, camassias, geraniums, candelabra primulas, foxgloves and campion. The roses were coming into their full flowering period and the many Acers planted throughout the garden and woodland added great variety of form and colour.

Our thanks are extended to Jane and Patrick for opening their garden and being such delightful hosts.

# Spitchwick Manor Gardens



*The rose garden bordered with lavender.*



*Victorian glasshouses and ancient apple trees within the Lower Walled Garden.*





*Lady Ashburton's Bath.*



*The woodland garden.*



*Jane (centre) and Patrick Simpson with DGT Events Co-ordinator Jane Cumbley-Kerslake.*

# HESTERCOMBE WELCOMES ITS MILLIONTH VISITOR!

Hestercombe Gardens, near Taunton, is celebrating its millionth visitor since it was opened to the public in 1997.



*Left to right: Beth Jefferies, Hestercombe marketing manager; Patsy & David Hinchliffe, millionth visitor; Philip White, Hestercombe Gardens Trust Chief Executive.*

On Wednesday 24th June, Hestercombe welcomed David Hinchliffe of Corfe, Somerset, as their ‘VIP’ millionth guest and presented him and his wife Patsy Hinchliffe with a bottle of champagne, together with a year’s family membership and a voucher for £50 to spend in the shop and plant centre.

Welcoming the millionth visitor, Philip White MBE Chief Executive of Hestercombe, said: *‘Reaching a million visitors is an exciting landmark and it is hard to believe that 20 years ago the valleys were engulfed by trees, the lakes silted up and the buildings destroyed. Here’s to the next million!’*

The Hestercombe Gardens Project was initially launched by Philip White in 1995, to restore the Landscape garden back to its former glory.

April 1997 saw the three gardens, designed by Coplestone Warre Bampfylde, Lord Portman and Edwin Lutyens, opened up to the public for the first time in 125 years, attracting an incredible 32,000 visitors in that first year. In 2003 the Hestercombe Gardens Trust took over management of the whole site and was awarded a £3.7 million grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund to continue the restoration and to purchase and develop the stables in order to create a visitor centre with café and shop. The house was finally acquired from Somerset County Council through the Community Asset Transfer scheme in 2013. Hestercombe now boasts over 80,000 visitors through its doors each year.

With the famous planting schemes of Gertrude Jekyll, and her collaboration with designer Edwin Lutyens, the gardens of Hestercombe are truly stunning. Throughout the summer Hestercombe hosts a number of family events, guided walks and trails and theatre productions, making it a great day out for people of all ages.

Hestercombe’s tagline “Paradise Restored” sums up why so many visitors are drawn to the house and gardens, making it one of the top destinations in the South West.

# GRAND CHALLENGES: DIGITAL FUTURES, VEITCH GONE DIGITAL

By Dianne Long

A unique part of Exeter's and national garden history was brought to life by a team of undergraduates during the first week in June.

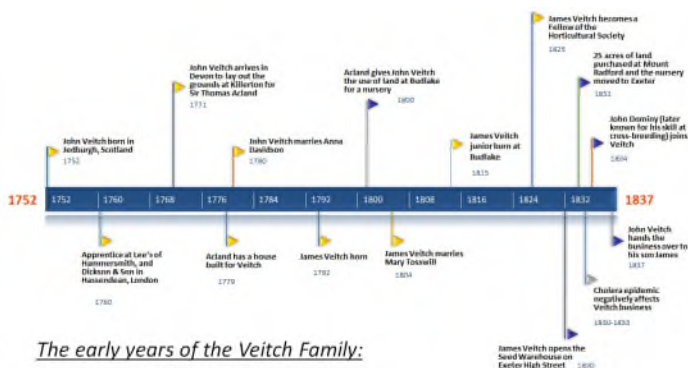
Five University of Exeter students embarked on a *Digital Futures* Grand Challenge to see how archives relating to the Reed Hall gardens at the Streatham Campus could be translated into a digital format and how the information could be made more relevant and accessible.

This was the first year that the DGT had partnered with the University on Grand Challenges, a multi-disciplinary project mainly for first year undergraduates. The Trust suggested the Reed Hall site because of its historic significance as a major Veitch landscape with many original plantings.

The team delved into a wealth of archive documents and images belonging to both the University and DGT. In addition, they were able to consult with Veitch expert, Caradoc Doy and Iain Park, DGT Trustee and Director of Grounds for the University, to clarify details on Veitch history and plants.

The intense week's activity resulted in an impressive five separate outputs:

- Profiles of ten key Veitch individuals.
- Brief biographies of seven of the plant hunters associated with the Veitch business.
- A virtual tour/app of the gardens at Reed Hall.
- Filmed interviews with Iain Park and Caradoc Doy.
- A meticulous timeline of the Veitch family and their businesses from the birth of John Veitch in 1752 to the death of Mildred Veitch in 1970 and the purchase of the business by St Bridget Nurseries.



*The early years of the Veitch Family:  
1752-1837*



*John Veitch,  
the founder of the firm.*

Their work can be seen on the DGT website:

[www.devongardenstrust.org.uk/?q=node/428](http://www.devongardenstrust.org.uk/?q=node/428)

At the end of the intensive week, the team presented their work to other Challenge teams, senior members of the University and to representatives from partner organizations.



L-R: *Sophia David (Postgraduate Facilitator), Ellie Broad, Dr Clare Greener (DGT), Emma Prevignano, Imogen Crarer, Doug Buck, Beth Howell and Dianne Long (DGT).*

Thank you to a great team for showing us in DGT what is possible both in sifting through the records and how such information can be made more interesting especially in a digital format.

## How many trees on earth?

In a recent article in the Science magazine *Nature*, there are roughly 3 trillion trees on Earth — more than seven times the number previously estimated — according to a tally by an international team of scientists led by ecologist Thomas Crowther. The study also reported that human activity is detrimental to tree abundance worldwide. Around 15 billion trees are cut down each year, the researchers estimate; since the onset of agriculture about 12,000 years ago, the number of trees worldwide has dropped by 46%.

# CASA DE MATEUS, VILA REAL, PORTUGAL

By Janet Anderson



Many of you will remember the Mateus Rose wine bottles fashioned in the shape of the leather water bottles carried by soldiers in the First World War. The Baroque Casa de Mateus palace in Northern Portugal is as splendid in real life as it appears on the labels.

Our first impression of the palace was in the reflection of the main façade in the formal pool which was constructed in the 1930s.

The palace and grounds were all created with harmonious symmetry in the early eighteenth century and included the magnificent inlaid wooden floors inside the house, the stone courtyards and the formal gardens.



Upon entering the gardens one sees every bed surrounded by low beautifully pruned *Buxus* hedging. Walking further one finds many gravel parterres containing Box topiary forming tapestry like designs some of which reflect the ornate ornamentation on the façade of the house. All parts of the garden are connected by symmetrical steps and walkways.

Although most of the modern garden was laid out in the mid twentieth century it was designed in the style of the earlier romantic era. The Cedar Tunnel is a famous feature, 35 metres long and 7.5 metres high and requires specialised gardening equipment to keep it in shape.

Even in the rain, our visit to Casa de Mateus was a real joy and much to be recommended.



## EVENTS

### October 2015 to January 2016

#### OCTOBER

Thursday 22nd October 2015

RHS Rosemoor, Great Torrington, EX38 8PH



A wonderful chance to catch autumnal colours at one of Devon's foremost gardens - RHS Rosemoor.

ENTRY TO THE GARDENS IS FREE TO MEMBERS OF THE DEVON GARDENS TRUST ON THIS DAY ONLY.

A guided tour is available at a nominal charge (£3.50 per person). Arrival - anytime from

10a.m. Guided tour of garden - 11.15a.m. Lunch and refreshments are available at the various outlets in the gardens. **Booking is essential** (see enclosed form, or visit the DGT website).

#### DECEMBER

Thursday 3rd December 2015

Christmas Luncheon - The Buckerell Lodge Hotel, Topsham Road, Exeter



This year we have selected a venue situated close to the centre of Exeter for our now traditional Christmas Luncheon.

The Buckerell Lodge is located on Topsham Road, close to the junction with Barrack Road. There is a large car park at the Hotel, and there are bus stops close by.

We are delighted that our guest speaker is a DGT member and bursary awardee who recently obtained his RHS Master of Horticulture (M.Hort.) qualification.



**Ian Smith** (pictured left) is an Associate Lecturer for Bicton College based at RHS Rosemoor and is in the process of renovating a walled garden in Fremington, North Devon.

Ian will talk about the *History and Future Uses of a Walled Garden in North Devon*.

A booking form is enclosed with this Newsletter. Please return the form to the DGT Office (see form for details) before **Friday 20th November 2015**.

## JANUARY 2016

**Thursday 14th January 2016**

**Chelsea Physic Garden - connecting people with plants for three centuries  
an illustrated talk by Christopher Bailes**



Christopher Bailes was curator at Chelsea Physic Garden from March 2011 until his retirement in 2014. He began his gardening career in 1971 as gardener for Hugh Johnson at Saling Hall and in the following years worked at Kew as Supervisor in the Tropical Section, Manager at the Eric Young Orchid Foundation and as Editor of the *Orchid Review*. He joined the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) in October 1988 as Curator of Rosemoor Garden. He is a member of the RHS Orchid Committee, President of the Devon Branch of Plant Heritage and a Trustee of the Fortescue Garden Trust which owns and administers The Garden House in Yelverton.

**Where:** Rowe Hall, The Mint Methodist Centre, Fore Street, Exeter, EX4 3AT.

**When:** Thursday 14th January 2016 at 11a.m. (Doors open at 10.00p.m.)

**Cost:** £5 (DGT members)/ £6 (non-members) to include refreshments before the talk.

Please book before **Friday 8th January 2016**. To book, please complete the booking form enclosed and return the DGT Office.

To book events please complete and return the enclosed booking forms or contact Dr Ian Varndell, Devon Gardens Trust, Northernhay Office, Exeter Community Centre, St Davids Hill, Exeter, EX4 3RG (t. 07769 335506; e. [events@devongardenstrust.org.uk](mailto:events@devongardenstrust.org.uk)) or download booking forms from [www.devongardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.devongardenstrust.org.uk)

## A TOUCH OF MEXICO IN PAIGNTON

*Furcraea longaeva* is a yucca-like plant native to parts of Mexico. It is monocarpic – flowering once in its life at 10-25 years of age, setting seed, then dying.

The *F. longaeva* flower spike can reach 4m in height and to see one of these plants in flower in the UK is rare, but to encounter three of them flowering simultaneously in a small garden in the centre of Paignton is nothing less than astonishing. Masses of creamy-white flowers with a pale green flush were borne on pendulous branches, and the three Paignton plants started flowering in May 2015. After flowering bulbils form and these fall to the ground before the main stem dies.

Dentist Dr R J S Bulmer, whose surgery in Palace Avenue was curtained by the flowers, was rightly proud of the magnificent display and he prepared information sheets which were given to patients who expressed an interest in the plants.





## VISIT REPORT

### Northlew Manor Gardens, Thursday 16th July 2015

Tea and cakes under a large Beech tree in front of the beautiful Northlew Manor was one of the many highlights of this visit. This five acre garden with its beautiful lily pond, shade walk, orchard, vegetable and cutting garden is, above all, a place for the whole family to enjoy - admirably demonstrated by the cricket stumps proudly planted in the lawn.



*Northlew Manor.*

Head Gardener Karen Rawson has been at Northlew for ten years and clearly loves working in the gardens with the support of owners Philip and Alex Crosthwaite Eyre. Karen admitted that she looked forward to returning to the garden whilst on holiday.

The current landscaping close to the house was designed by Georgia Langton who also laid out the gardens at The Orangery in Mamhead. White Hydrangeas and Hebes are underplanted in the Shade Walk, and the views into the surrounding countryside are skilfully directed. Ivy (*Hedera sp.*) has been used extensively as a low evergreen hedge. There is much new planting in the garden, as well as many old trees, but the eye is drawn to the flowing lines of the lily pond which was close to being carpeted with flowers.



*The lily pond framed by trees along the Shade Walk.*



*Emerging from the Shade Walk.*



# Northlew Manor Gardens



*The visitors enjoyed tea and cakes in the shade of a magnificent Beech tree.*

## Grants Awarded to Four Organisations

Four grants totalling £3,359 have been awarded to organisations based in Devon.

**Growing for Life**, based at Ocombe near Paignton is a horticultural project operated by the Shekinah Mission aimed at ex-offenders and recovering addicts. The £1000 grant will be used to purchase tools and equipment.

**Okehampton Community Garden** aims to bring together members of the community to support and encourage gardening of all kinds, especially the growing of food. The project will encourage the sharing and development of talents, the learning of new skills and will provide training for members and the wider community. Awarded £1000 for general purposes.

**Exeter Dissenters' Graveyard Trust**. £1000 awarded towards the fabrication and installation of gates at the site.

**Exeter Community Centre**. The Mulberry Garden at the ECC has been provided with three wooden seats so that tenants and visitors can enjoy this garden situated in the courtyard of a former 18th century Merchant's House on St Davids Hill.

# THE GARDENS TRUST IS LAUNCHED



THE GARDEN  
HISTORY SOCIETY

The long-heralded merger of the Association of Garden Trusts and the Garden History Society was approved on Friday 24th July 2015 in back-to-back AGMs held at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

At the AGT AGM, 24 CGTs voted in favour of the merger, with seven votes against and one abstention. Three CGTs failed to cast a vote. Shortly afterwards, GHS members voted almost unanimously in favour of the merger. The first AGM of **The Gardens Trust** was then constituted and the first Board elected *en masse* by the overwhelming majority of those present.

Dominic Cole OBE was elected as the first President of the new organisation and Gilly Drummond OBE has been appointed as a Life Vice President in recognition of her achievements with the AGT and with the County Gardens Trust movement over many years.

The First Board members (with affiliation in parenthesis and position in the new Trust) are:

**James Bartos** (GHS) - Chairman of the Trust | **Mike Dawson** (AGT - London) - Administration and Finance and Vice-Chairman of the Trust | **Sarah Dickinson** (AGT - Surrey) | **Jeremy Garnett** (GHS) - Honorary Secretary | **Marion Harney** (GHS) - Chair of the Conservation committee | **Kate Harwood** (AGT - Herts) | **Virginia Hinze** (AGT - Sussex) - Chair of the Events committee | **Sally Jeffery** (GHS) | **David Lambert** (GHS) | **Tim Richardson** (GHS) - Chair of the Education, Publications and Communications Committee | **Ian Varndell** (CGT- Devon) - Chair of the Membership Committee | **Lisa Watson** (AGT - Bucks) - Honorary Treasurer.

An interim website has been launched whilst a new, comprehensive and user-friendly, site is designed and built - [www.thegardenstrust.org](http://www.thegardenstrust.org)

The press release announcing the launch of The Gardens Trust appears below:

## THE FORMATION OF THE GARDENS TRUST: A POWERFUL NEW VOICE FOR BRITAIN'S PARKS AND GARDENS

July 24, 2015. Today, at their respective AGMs in Newcastle, the Garden History Society (GHS) and the Association of Garden Trusts (AGT) voted to merge to become The Gardens Trust, a new body created to harness the strengths of the two existing organisations. The main aims of the merger of the GHS and AGT are:

- To speak with a more powerful voice for the protection of parks, gardens and designed landscape;
- To play a key garden conservation role in the planning system as a statutory consultee;
- To provide support to strengthen the local activity of the County and Country Gardens Trusts;
- To be an internationally regarded centre of excellence in the study of garden history;
- To live within the means of the merged organisation and be financially sustainable over the long term.

The first AGM of The Gardens Trust elected a slate of 12 members of the Board, and a new chairman, Dr. James Bartos and a new Vice Chairman, Michael Dawson, were elected by the Board. Dominic Cole OBE, formerly chairman of the GHS, was elected President. Five sub-committees were established to reflect the areas of activity and interest of the new organisation, covering conservation, events, publications, membership and administration and finance.

The creation of The Gardens Trust is the culmination of some five years' work and discussion which also involved Parks and Gardens UK (the gardens database and website) and the Garden Museum. The move is fully supported by Historic England. The impetus for the merger was a sense that both the GHS and the AGT would be much stronger if working together, especially in terms of conservation activity. To that end, the Historic Landscape Project was formed in 2010 by the AGT to begin the process of devolving much of the responsibility for the conservation of historic landscapes to the County Gardens Trusts (CGTs). A small team of conservation officers travelled around Britain with the objective of establishing or consolidating conservation activity within different CGTs - an initiative that has proved extremely successful. The intention is that the CGTs will over time take on more of the conservation work within their regions, with the central Gardens Trust conservation team concentrating on larger or more complex cases or national policy.



Dr. James Bartos, the first Chairman of The Gardens Trust, was formerly a member of Council of the GHS and of its finance and general purposes committee. *'I am extremely pleased that both memberships have voted in favour of the formation of The Gardens Trust,'* he said. *'This is something we have been working on for some time, and I believe it will transform our ability to make a difference when it comes to the protection, conservation and understanding of our gardens and designed landscapes, helping to ensure their continued enjoyment into the future.'*

Dominic Cole OBE, first President of The Gardens Trust, became Chairman of the GHS in 2002. *'I'm delighted at this outcome,'* he said. *'I never really understood why we had two organisations doing much the same thing. Now the combined memberships of all the CGTs - all that knowledge and enthusiasm - can be merged with the specialist expertise and academic clout of the old GHS to become much more effective not just in conservation but in actively campaigning to protect our designed landscapes. I believe that this merger is a great opportunity for both organisations.'*

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Homeyards Botanical Gardens in Shaldon Wins HLF Grant



The Friends of Homeyards Botanical Gardens in Shaldon are delighted to announce a successful conclusion to their Heritage Lottery Funding application. They have been awarded £315,000 with which to begin the restoration of these beautiful gardens almost 100 years after they were created. Supplementary to this, a further £40,000 has been awarded to the Friends by Viridor

Credits through the Landfill Communities Fund specifically to help with restoration of the wall behind the Castle and disabled access. The Heritage Lottery Fund application was led by Jane Nicholls of Teignbridge Green Spaces team and brought together heritage conservationists, horticultural advisers and specialists on the resident wildlife, as well as the Friends group.



With funding now in place, the Castle where Mrs Homeyard entertained her friends will be sympathetically restored for use by both community and visitors, and the steps and pathways through the arboretum will be made safer and more accessible for all. The DGT has pledged funding for the purchase of 21 *Crataegus prunifolia* 'Splendens' trees to form an avenue along the long lower path. They will be planted in National Tree Week (28th November-6th December 2015).

## The Country Houses of Devon by Hugh Meller is Published



Hugh Meller's long anticipated compendium on the country houses of Devon was published on 17th July 2015 and a launch party was held at Fursdon House.

The book, in two volumes, is a magnificent achievement covering some 400 houses situated in the county of Devon which has taken Hugh – a stalwart of the DGT – some fifteen years to complete from conception to publication. A review is published on page 25 of this newsletter. Hugh is uniquely positioned to write this work. His background was as solicitor turned art historian and for fifteen years he worked for the National Trust as the curator of historic buildings in Devon.

The book is available to purchase from Black Dog Press and an order form is included in this Newsletter. We hope as many members as possible will buy a copy. *Pictured: Hugh Meller holding volume 2 of The Country Houses of Devon with DGT Vice President Carolyn Keep in attendance.*

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## Dominic Cole Appointed OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours



Dominic Cole, the last Chairman of the Garden History Society and first President of The Gardens Trust, has been awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to landscape conservation.

Dominic has been a passionate advocate for the designed landscape for many years and operates his own landscape architect practice in London. In a recent interview conducted by Tim Richardson, Dominic confessed that he missed the first week induction on the Landscape Architecture course at Leeds Polytechnic, “..so I've always said throughout my career that I still don't know what landscape architecture is, because I never got told”. The richly deserved honour shows that he has more than made up for the lost week in Leeds! The DGT sends its warmest congratulations to Dominic.



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## Death of the Earl of Devon

Hugh Courtenay, the 18th Earl of Devon, died peacefully on Tuesday 18th August 2015 aged 73. The flag at Powderham Castle, the family home of successive Earls of Devon for more than 600 years on the Exe estuary, near Exeter, flew at half mast following the announcement. Amongst his many interests, the Earl was a Life Member of the DGT. He is succeeded by his son, Charles, who becomes the 19th Earl. The Trustees and members of the DGT send sincere condolences to Lady Diana and family.

## CONSERVATION WORK COMMENCES AT EXETER DISSENTERS' GRAVEYARD

*September 2015.* Remedial work on the boundary and retaining walls of the graveyard has now begun, as well as the conservation work on the chest tombs and headstones. Much of the work to date has been carried out by volunteers, but a recent grant of £60,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund and matched funds from several organisations including the Devon Gardens Trust has enabled professional firms to be engaged to undertake specialist tasks.



*Volunteers creating drainage plinths to raise the memorial stones off the soil surface.*



*Conservator Andy French rebuilding a chest tomb commemorating the Gifford family.*

In late June a large hole opened in the single path that bisects the graveyard. Archaeological investigations revealed that the entrance to one of the brick-lined vaults lay beneath the path and this has now been made safe and cleared to allow surveying and recording to be carried out.



*The hole that appeared in the pathway ...*



*... reveals the entrance to a barrel-roofed brick vault.*

The Dissenters' graveyard is an important heritage landscape situated close to, but outside the City walls of, Exeter. Once the restorative work has been completed the site will be landscaped and will be opened to the public and maintained by the EDGT.

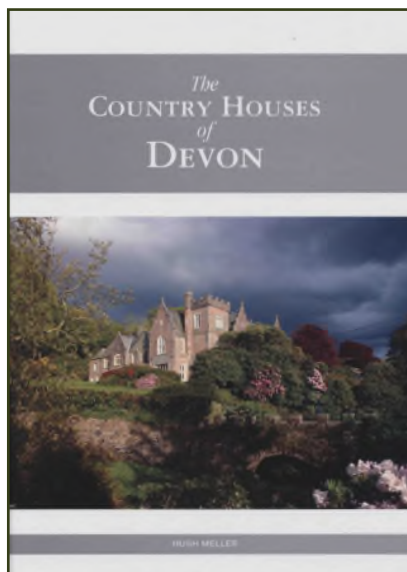
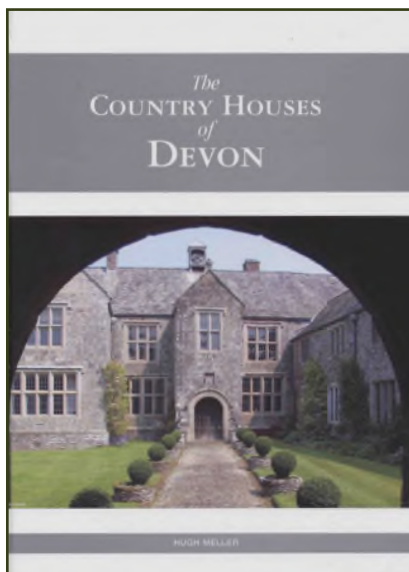


## BOOK REVIEW

# The Country Houses of Devon

By Hugh Meller

Black Dog Press (2015), 1204pp (2 volumes), £80.00



I heard about the book Hugh Meller was writing when I joined the Trust in 2012. “Ambitious” was one adjective often used. Another sentiment likened it to the painting of the Forth Bridge. By the author’s own admission the gestation period (“..over many years..”) and the number of houses warranting inclusion exceeded his original intention. But what a book he has produced!

Simon Jenkins in his foreword to the book describes it as “extensively researched” and “magnificent” – epithets aptly applied. Crammed into its 1204 A4-sized pages (the two volumes in their slipcase weigh 5.3kg) are 400 or so of Devon’s finest country houses. Tirelessly researched, each house is beautifully illustrated with monochrome photographs and location maps, many with floor plans, some with engravings and contemporary drawings, the text is woven with the author’s expert observations and, often forthright, opinions. At the end of the chapter on Saltram, Mr Meller offers this comment, “*All show a peaceful and rural landscape that surrounded Saltram until crudely shattered in the 20th century*”.

A number of the houses contained within The Country Houses of Devon were not mentioned by Nikolaus Pevsner in his *The Buildings of England, Devon* (1952, 1989) – including Thorn at Wembury which many DGT members will know largely because of the wonderful gardens cared for by Eva and John Gibson (see also *Devon Life* August 2015, pp. 82-86).

Within the first sixty pages Mr Meller summarises subjects and structures common to many of the properties – Building materials, Chapels, Gatehouses, Kitchen gardens and Receptions amongst others are discussed and described. These chapters are informative and the need for repetition in the individual house entries has been effectively avoided.

The grounds surrounding the houses are frequently described some, understandably, in more detail than others, but garden historians as well as those interested in historic houses will not be disappointed. I have thoroughly enjoyed dipping into the volumes – as the chapters are generally three pages in length it does not take long to gain an impression of each property, and all are furnished with a Reference list to facilitate further research.

It is works of this magnitude that demonstrate the profoundly rich history of the third largest English county. Without doubt there are houses missing from this book that would warrant inclusion, but Hugh Meller's book will become as important a work of reference to scholars of Devonshire as the writings of Nikolaus Pevsner, W.G. Hoskins, Todd Gray and Rev. John Swete and, subject to checking the integrity of your bookshelves, *The Country Houses of Devon* is highly recommended.

Ian Varndell

## A BRISK WALK AROUND STREATHAM CAMPUS



At the beginning of September members were treated to a briskly paced tour of the Streatham and St Luke's campuses of Exeter University with expert guidance from Director of Grounds and DGT trustee Iain Park.

A visit report will be published in a future issue of the Newsletter. Our thanks to Iain and Mandy for their time and expertise.

*Iain Park with members at the Cactus Garden planted in front of the Biocatalysis Centre.*

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