

Garden Recording by Devon Gardens Trust

INTRODUCTION

Carolyn Keep, Chairman of the Conservation Committee

After the sad death of Mary Clarke, the Trust was given her relevant papers. While we were sorting them, a copy emerged of a talk that Mary had given to the *Symposium on South-West Gardens* at County Hall, Exeter, on Saturday, 29 April, 1995. I had joined the Trust in the previous year, after early retirement. The event was impressive with over seventy participants and an array of garden historians to learn from. However the session that inspired me to become more involved was the one in which Mary Clarke, assisted by Jennifer Norton, told us about the garden recording programme. Of course Mary did not intend her text to be published but it is now an historical document which reflects the enthusiasm and dedication of the organisers and recorders. We felt that to include a slightly edited version of it in the first edition of the *Journal* would be both a fitting tribute to Mary and a reminder of how much has been achieved in twenty years. Therefore I have added a brief update on progress since 1995.

GARDEN SURVEYS, reprint of an article by Mary Clarke, 29 April, 1995.

One of the first committees to be set up by Devon Gardens Trust was the Conservation Committee, whose principal terms of reference are embodied in the second main objectives of the Trust that is: to preserve, enhance and re-create for the education and enjoyment of the public whatever garden land may exist or have existed in and around the county of Devon. So, what is this garden land, and where is it to be found?

The first task of the committee was to identify and record gardens of special significance in the county. We were lucky enough to have had some work done on this aspect before the Trust was set up. The Centre for the Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens at the University of York had already embarked on a national programme of surveys in 1985/6, first, to locate and describe parks and gardens of historic interest and to identify why they are of particular interest; and secondly, to collect information for the Centre's inventory. Already some 40 or more parks and gardens in Devon had been recorded through this programme. As a result, 33 had been placed on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England. Two of these were identified as being of Grade I standard - Bicton and Endsleigh - and twelve Grade II*, the remainder being Grade II. Since that time the Trust has succeeded in having a further three gardens recognised to be of Grade II standard. So we now have 36 gardens in the county of national significance. The fact that a garden is included on the register does not mean that there is any public right of access, other than along public rights of way, or unless the property is separately advertised by the owner as being open to the public. I should add that not all the gardens included in the original pilot survey by the York Centre gained a place on the English Heritage Register, but we were fortunate in having copies of the York records from which to begin our work.

A major job for the Conservation Committee of the new Devon Gardens Trust was to identify and record all gardens of significance in the county with the stated aim: that their existence should be known, and their conservation be assisted if the owner desires such assistance. In short, our intentions are caring, not threatening to owners, but supportive. These were the objectives of the Trust's programme of garden recording in 1989, and since that time some 90 gardens have been included.

Initially our intention was both to record on site and also to search the archives for background information. At that time we had some 250 members of the Trust, and we advertised in our Newsletter for volunteers to visit and record gardens, and for others to delve in the archives in Record Offices and search in the West Country Studies Library for background information. Some members came forward as a result, some showed interest in becoming involved when taking part in our garden visits, others through NADFAS. More were interested to do the work on site (and maybe have tea with the owners!) than to work in Record Offices and libraries – while some were keen to do both so as to produce a well-rounded record. Thus we had more sites than historical recorders until Dr. Todd Gray was appointed as Research Fellow in 1992 with a very broad mandate: to look at the archives and find out what information about gardens was there. The results of his work appear in his book: *The Garden History of Devon: an illustrated guide to sources* (1995).

But to return to our programme. Our volunteers were willing and able, but not specially qualified to undertake a task such as this. To get the programme launched, Steven Pugsley (now Chairman of Devon Gardens Trust) prepared a form for their use based on the York University form, but in some ways simplified, and we held training days to show our volunteers what was needed and how to recognise and record the information. The addition of literary references was included and here we found Ray Desmond's *Bibliography of British Gardens* a useful basis. David Richardson, the Trust's secretary, had extracted the Devon entries for us, and this proved invaluable.

The record form was subjected to a trial run by members of the conservation committee, who submitted their comments before it was finalised. We also took the opportunity to compare our form with those of other Gardens Trusts, and they with ours, and as a result I believe that our form is being used by at least two other counties at the present time.

So we came to set up the programme; first we decided that the more important objective was to identify and study as many gardens as possible so that, if house or road-building was proposed in a given area, we would know of the existence of important gardens that might be threatened and would be in a position to offer their owners help and information if necessary. To this end we did not waste time by going over again the 33 gardens and parks already on the English Heritage Register, but decided to look at other gardens of significance. Of necessity this was an ad hoc affair – we referred to the National Gardens Scheme booklet, and relied on our members telling us of gardens we should look at, especially those members who form a DGT network in contact with the Planning Officers in the District Council area in which they live.

In my capacity as chairman of the Conservation Committee at that time, I wrote to the owners of gardens brought to our attention in this way, enclosing information about the Trust, describing the purpose of the surveys we were undertaking, and requesting their permission for two of our volunteers to visit to make an on-site record and to take some photographs of the garden's main features. I am happy to say that the garden owners were very co-operative, welcomed our members, showed them round and provided information. Our committee appointed a co-ordinator, Mrs. Jennifer Norton, who matched recorders with gardens and kept immaculate records of who was doing what.

In the course of the next four years some 90 gardens were recorded. Here I must emphasise again that the gardens were not recorded in depth – we had no professional people to attempt a record of that kind, and the results were as uneven as one would expect from volunteers of varying ability and

experience. But they are all useful guides to gardens in our county, and if a threat should arise we would know at a glance what further information must be sought before we can offer to help to safeguard a site. So we set out to record as many gardens as possible, in an unsophisticated manner - and here I might add that some other Garden Trusts have approached the work in a different manner altogether, studying fewer gardens but in greater detail, according to the professional personnel available to them.

At the same time as our volunteers were completing a form in relation to a garden, they were taking photographs of the site - of the house in its garden setting, garden buildings, ornaments and other features (including close-up of details where appropriate), viewed within the garden and from the garden, details of planting features, borders, specimen trees and so on. They were asked to take colour transparencies on Kodachrome 64 or Fuji film, and colour prints using Kodacolor 100 - some used black and white to good effect, as well. Here, again, the quality achieved was not professional by any means, and the best had to be done with the light obtaining at the time of the visit, and the skills of the volunteer, but the results provided an indication of what constituted a particular garden. Then Dr. Dougal Swinscow appeared on the scene - qualified in medicine and an authority on lichens, he was an expert photographer and he offered his services. We asked him to supplement our efforts, but this time beginning with those gardens on the English Heritage Register, and progressing to the lesser sites. This he did with enthusiasm and skill, producing fine results. Very sadly he died in 1993 - a great loss to us all - before completing the large task before him. However, many of his photographs were included in our book published in 1994: *"Devon Gardens: an Historical Survey"*. So from site visits we have a mixed photographic record, some excellent, some less so, but they show us what is there, and some sort of photographic archive is being built up alongside the written record. More recently we have been able to identify more competent photographers from among our members, who will be involved in future recording.

Now to turn to the contents of the form prepared by Steven Pugsley. Information for the first part is provided by the owners: name of site, address, owner's name and details of district council, parish council (as the records and references are usually filed under parish councils), grid reference, the area of the garden and so on. Then follows the period and/or date, style or styles of design of the buildings (house, estate and lodges) and general features of interest. Then we come to a checklist of garden types and styles - formal, informal, Picturesque, Monastic, Jacobean, Victorian, Chinoiserie, Dutch, French, Italianate, Japanese, modernist or cottage - quite a variety of alternatives, and most gardens show characteristics of at least two styles. This is followed by a checklist of general parkland features, where they exist: (shelter) belt, boundary wall, gates, clumps, parkland, woodland, lake/river, earthworks or archaeological sites.

The next half page of the form is concerned with the history and description of principal existing garden features of special interest or associated with known designers. Here the key dates or periods in the creation of the site in its existing form is noted; the designers and others responsible for existing elements of the site; principal existing features such as main areas and views, land form and earthworks, water features, constructions, buildings and architectural ornaments, associations with well-known people or events. Our recorders need to be keen observers - and good listeners! A space in which to note the current use and condition of the garden follows, including notes on outstanding plants, major plant collections, notable rarities, particularly fine specimens (with date of planting if known). Fortunately some of our members

are also members of the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens, from which organisation they will have learnt a lot about plants and planting, if they did not know it already, but in future we are hoping NCCPG representatives will be included in the garden recording teams, to fill any gaps in our knowledge in this respect. This is just one example of co-operation between Devon Gardens Trust and NCCPG.

Finally, opening viewing arrangements are noted, together with the sources of information and location of records referred to. A lot of information is gleaned from the owners of the gardens, especially when the property has been in the hands of the same family for some generations, or when the owners have either created the garden or some of the features in it, personally. The same applies to the planting. Our recorders are encouraged to purchase plans, photographs, guide books, postcards, photocopies of illustrations and so on, as they may be available, and to note their submission with the completed form.

In this way we are building up an archive, both written and photographic. At the present time the completed work is being prepared in an appropriate manner - that is, in special folders, binders and photographic packaging - for lodgement in the County Record Office, where access will be limited to serious researchers of the subject.

UPDATE by Carolyn Keep

At the end of 2005, the Trust deposited all its archives at the Devon Record Office, Great Moor House, Sowton, Exeter, where most of them are accessible to genuine researchers through the Trust Chairman or the Conservation Officer and Chairman. At this point 333 known sites of some interest were listed, which certainly did not mean that they had all been surveyed. Another 26 have been identified subsequently. Since 1998 our Conservation Officer, John Clark, has been responsible for a Devon Local Register of sites considered important in a Devon context. Each of the 160 entries has a brief history, attached to factual information about the site already in the public domain. Most have been surveyed by a recorder. The Local Register is in addition to the English Heritage Register of sites of national importance, currently listing 53 parks, gardens and designed landscapes in Devon. Each of these has a comprehensive expert description, including sources and with an attached map to define the historic boundaries.

The fundamental pattern of garden recording has changed very little but the rate has necessarily slowed down. The addition of public parks was undertaken from 1997 and is largely completed. All gardens are constantly changing and a significant number of sites have been altered considerably since the first survey. Some of these have been updated but more need to be revisited. So there are still opportunities for members to enjoy the kind of experience that Mary described so well. We intend to arrange a day in the autumn of 2008 to explore the ways enjoyment of a garden can be enhanced by an awareness of its history. Although this is not the primary aim, if anyone is thereby inspired to accompany an experienced recorder, we should be delighted.

Garden Information from Sale Catalogues

Carolyn Keep, Chairman of Conservation Committee

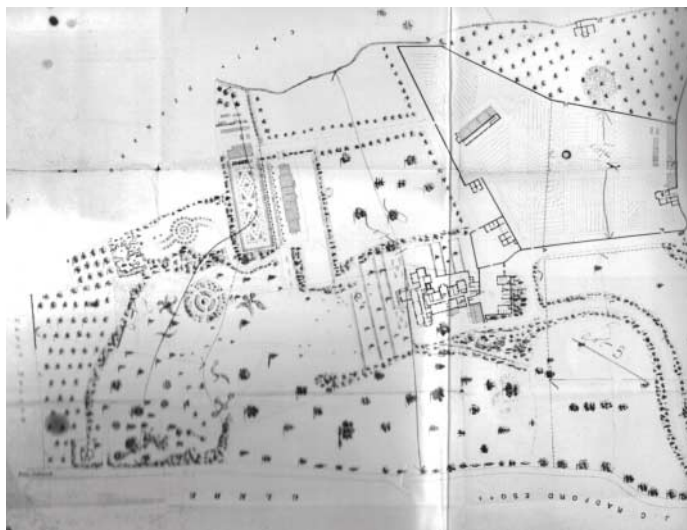
The Devon Record Office at Great Moor House, Exeter, holds a large collection of house sale catalogues, mainly donated by Rippon and Boswell in the 1950s. The North Devon Record Office at Barnstaple, the West Devon Record Office at Plymouth and the Devon and Exeter Institution also hold smaller but significant collections. The Devon Gardens Trust was launched in 1988. As interest in the garden history of Devon grew, the Trust undertook in 1992 to support a pioneering work in this field. With the backing of a number of other interested bodies and overseen by DGT and the University of Exeter, Dr Todd Gray researched widely into appropriate archives. His findings were published by the University of Exeter Press in 1995 as *The Garden History of Devon: An illustrated guide to sources*.¹ The detailed information to be found in sale catalogues was soon revealed and before the end of 1993 Liz Ward had volunteered to co-ordinate a DGT group to investigate them further.² Margery Rowe, who was then the County Archivist as well as a member of the Trust, was a great help in setting up the project and continuing to help the volunteers using these resources. This happy co-operation with the Record Office has been maintained by John Draisey, who succeeded Margery.

A year later there was an appeal for more volunteers but Liz was able to report that 234 descriptions had been entered on standard DGT forms. She had also begun a database of the properties.³ Soon afterwards, volunteers were working in the Barnstaple and Plymouth Offices as well as Exeter, which was then in the city centre. By 2000 there were no more records coming in from the North and West Offices but Exeter was a much greater task and is still not quite completed. Some researchers soon found that the recording did not appeal but others thoroughly enjoyed handling documents that are often most attractive. The format, type and illustrations plus plans and maps all vary considerably and provide insights into the history and decorative fashions of their time. When working through a box of catalogues, the next one might be a farm sale and not relevant or a grand estate with fascinating insights into, not only the gardens, but the rooms and social customs. Sometimes one is familiar with the site too. The only DRO listing available is on paper and includes items that do not exist, discreetly indicated by brackets! A few are not Devon properties and were initially recorded as such on our sheets but later this practice was dropped. County of origin can be identified in the listing. Some items are fragile because water damage had affected the stored items at some point before they were deposited.

On the forms are entered the location of the document and its reference number. The name of the property is usually clear, although at least one un-named catalogue was marked 'For private circulation only' and had to be identified by comparison with others.⁴ It was found to be Barcombe Hall, Paignton, demolished in 1989 despite considerable efforts by the Torbay Planning Officer and others to have it listed and so protected.⁵ Two sale catalogue photographs of these ornate gardens about 1907 were included by Dr. Gray in his book.⁶ Several properties share the same name, e.g. 'Belmont' in Exeter and Crediton. There are records for seven different houses in Devon called 'The Elms'. A divided estate causes problems and so do name changes. One of the best known is 'Streatham Hall', now within the Exeter University campus and renamed 'Reed Hall' but a magnificent private house and garden in 1903.⁷ A location for the site can usually be found in the catalogue but is often vague and varies between catalogues for the same property but of different dates. Even deciding whether a site is actually in Devon can be a challenge. The 'type of property' category is

supplied by the description in the catalogue and sometimes offered scope for the writer. A 'Residential and Sporting Estate' is precise but a 'Creeper-clad Bijou Residence' is evocative.⁸ Sales by auction are clearly dated but others may not be. Both the date and the name of the owner may be hidden in the small print at the back of older catalogues, which often have a legal history of the land transfers included. When the sale arose from a death, the former owner was often named e.g. 'the late Lieut-Col. Pennell', 'Thomas, Lord Graves, dec'd'.⁹

Where there are photographs and illustrations, these provide fascinating contemporary views of houses and gardens, some of which have since been altered completely. They are listed with brief descriptions e.g. Stoodleigh Court in 1925 was illustrated with photographs of the exterior of the house with pavilion, the lodge and gates, the topiary garden, and six views of the interior.¹⁰ By 1992 the catalogue contained only two interiors, two views of the house and garden, plus the courtyard.¹¹ Such comparisons are clearly valuable. A few catalogues are illustrated with coloured lithographs e.g. Winslade, Clyst St. Mary in 1882.¹² Useful information is obtained from maps, especially if these are large scale plans rather than copies of Ordnance Survey maps, which are available elsewhere. Garden layouts are often shown with sufficient detail for the positions of features to be accurately located. Inside a sale catalogue for The Knowle, Sidmouth, is a loose hand-drawn plan of the estate.



Part of the hand-drawn plan enclosed with sale catalogue 218/77 in DRO with permission from the DRO



From the sale catalogue 218/77 Knowle, Sidmouth, 2 July 1880 with permission from the DRO

Two-thirds is now private housing and the main house has been virtually rebuilt several times. There is a further recent threat in that it may cease to be the headquarters of East Devon District Council.¹³ On the plan of 1880 were shown the arrangements in the French parterre, which lay in front of the range of seven glasshouses, the Rosery, fernery, grotto, Rhododendron Garden and Italian Garden. Individual parkland trees were accurately positioned, and some can still be identified. Not only the glasshouses but the paths, beds and even the rows of crops were drawn in the walled kitchen garden. All of these were described in a wide variety of typefaces in the A3 document.¹⁴

A space on the record sheets for additional material is only used for items of special interest or to draw attention to queries. Mention of a particular designer, nurseryman (usually Veitch) or notable person would be entered here.¹⁵ This might be of local interest e.g. in 1904 Kingswear Castle's late owner was 'the Rt. Hon. C. Seale Hayne M.P., founder of Seale Hayne Agricultural College, Newton Abbot' or a national figure, such as the Watcombe Park Estate, where 'the site was selected by Isambard Kingdom Brunel'.¹⁶ Another unusual Torquay property was Duncan House, Old Torwood Road, which had been occupied by 'Dr. Hamilton Ramsay, well known as an accomplished and enthusiastic botanist and horticulturalist, creator of Rock Walk Gardens, Torquay'. The glowing account of the gardens included 'a lengthy description of the garden reproduced from the *Gardener's Chronicle* of 14 November 1903 and 23 February 1907'.¹⁷ Langleigh, Ilfracombe, had been occupied by the same family for over a hundred years, since in 1912 the recent owner was Miss J. C. Down. 'The lovely grounds surrounding the residence are particularly interesting on account of the fine trees they contain. These were planted by Admiral Down to commemorate the celebrated naval battle of Cape St. Vincent, in which battle Admiral Down served under Sir John Jervis, afterwards created Earl St. Vincent, and the trees are arranged in the order in which the British Fleet went into action' (14 February 1797).¹⁸

On the lower half of the sheet and over the page, if necessary, the researcher enters the garden description from the catalogue, which can range from pages of detail to a simple statement. However even these reveal what was fashionable and considered at that time to add to the value of the property. When the Right Rev. Bishop Kestell-Cornish was selling Salcombe Hill House in 1906, 'the grounds, which surround the house, consist of lawns, shrubberies, and tennis ground, with a good vegetable garden'.¹⁹ From the early twentieth century, asphalt paths were considered an asset worth listing and a rookery used to be considered a positive feature.²⁰ Costs have always been important and also relative, particularly between the World Wars.²¹ A few catalogues are for the sale of a nursery e.g. Sclater's, formerly Lucombe, Pince & Co in St. Thomas, Exeter in 1912.²² In 1919 Wrigwell Nurseries, Ipplepen, provided 'an opportunity for anyone, especially a discharged army officer'.²³ Market gardens can occasionally be identified.²⁴

About thirty people have been involved during this long project, although most of the nearly one thousand records were made by about fifteen dedicated recorders. Our thanks go to all of them and particularly to Lucy Henley, who has entered information from almost all the records on a database. So far the fields covered are the name and location of the property, the place of deposit and reference number of the catalogue, and the year of sale. The location of the site has needed some clarification, particularly within urban areas. However it is now normally easy to find a property, compare catalogues for the same site and identify duplication. For more detailed study, the record sheets are still needed. There are a number of potential research areas, such as the changes in the number, size and contents of kitchen gardens and glasshouses

or the recreations listed. Some sites offer lists of plants and trees grown, providing a fascinating study ranging from mundane hedge plants to exotics. Comparisons between catalogues of the same period or area could be interesting. Anyone interested in pursuing these ideas should get in touch with the Conservation Committee. Above all, these unique documents are evocative of their time and place.

References

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5. Correspondence, *Country Life*, Vol.183, No.13, 30 March 1989, p. 128, Maurice Logan-Salton; Vol.183, No. 21, p.196, Torbay Planning Officer, G.A.Marlton.
6. Todd Gray, *The Garden History of Devon*, p.36-8, plates 13,14.
7. Todd Gray, *The Garden History of Devon*, p. 189-191, plates 50, 51.
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9. Exeter DRO, 547B/14. Stockdale Papers, Devon and Exeter Institution, 21March 1833, Bishop's Court Mansion, Farringdon.
10. West DRO, 1096/280 Lot1, 1925, Stoodleigh Court.
11. Exeter DRO, 3372M/149, November 1992, Stoodleigh Court, 'Mansion House, former school'.
12. Todd Gray, *The Garden History of Devon*, plate 60, p.240.
13. Kingsley Squire, 'New EDDC HQ?', *Exmouth Journal*, (7 February 2008), p.17.
14. Exeter DRO, Z18/77, 2 July 1880, Knowle, Sidmouth.
15. E.g. Veitch: Exeter DRO, 547B/1392, 19 May 1916, Long Park/Longfield Park, Feniton; Exeter DRO, 547B/3513 Lot1, 25 May 1934, Alcyone, Dartmouth;
16. Exeter DRO, 547B/56ii, Lot 1, 31 May 1904, Kingswear Castle, nr. Dartmouth. Exeter DRO, 547B/334, 12 June 1901, Watcombe Park Estate.
17. Exeter DRO, 547B/36, about 1907, Duncan House, Old Torwood Road, Torquay.
18. Exeter DRO, 547B/966, 1912, Langleigh, Ilfracombe.
19. Exeter DRO, 547B/294, Lot 1, 1 June 1906, Salcombe Hill Estate, Sidmouth.
20. E.g. asphalt paths: Exeter DRO, 547B/1593, 24 April 1918, Boro House, Axmouth. e.g. rookery: Exeter DRO, 62/9/2 box 1/54, 9 August 1901, Gratton House, Bow.
21. E.g. 'inexpensive to maintain': Exeter DRO, 547B/1716, about 1918, Wonham House, Bampton; Exeter DRO, 62/9/2 box 4/15, 28 August 1927, Langdon House, Dawlish.
22. Exeter DRO, 547B/3494, 30 May 1934, Marsland, Bideford.
23. Exeter DRO, 62/9/2 box11/64, 25 April 1912, Exeter Nursery, St. Thomas.
24. Exeter DRO, 547B/1833, 11 June 1919, Wrigwell Nurseries, Ipplepen.
25. E.g. Exeter DRO, 62/9/2 box10/55, 6 April 1927, two market gardens in Magdalen Street, Exeter.