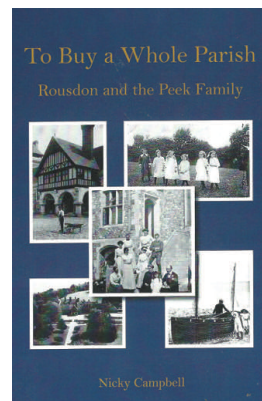


## Book Reviews



**Nicky Campbell, *To Buy a Whole Parish: Rousdon and the Peeks*, (Wheatears Books, Colyton, £14.99 2015). Obtainable from [nicolafcampbell@btinternet.com](mailto:nicolafcampbell@btinternet.com).**

Nicky Campbell is to be congratulated on the quantity of information that she has amassed during over ten years' research into the history of the tiny parish of Rousdon in East Devon,

later combined with Combyne. Her account is inevitably dominated by the mansion built by Sir Henry Peek from 1869 and owned by his family until 1937. There are details of the construction of the churches, estate buildings, school and finally the house itself. Sir Ernest George was the architect, while the grounds and gardens were designed by Robert Marnock; the last major commission of this leading landscape gardener. Marnock had been employed previously by Sir Henry at Wimbledon House. Parkland planting was intended to enhance the views, both inland and across the Undercliff to the sea. Around the mansion were pleasure gardens for recreation and beauty, including shrubberies, rockeries and a small lake. The magnificent four acre walled garden had south facing gazebos for the sea views and contained ranges of glasshouses, including an orangery. To the north were the more practical buildings, a frame yard and a palm house. Sir Henry's son, Cuthbert, was a keen traveller and astronomer, so in 1884 an observatory and meteorological station were built, operated by a resident astronomer. A collection of nearly 800 stuffed birds was installed by Sir Henry: his son and grandson added to the accumulated exotic items in the purpose built museum.

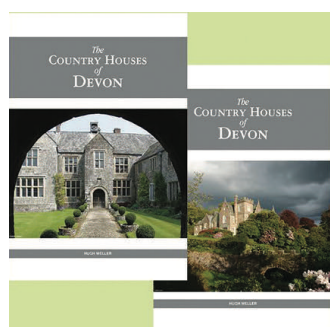
This book is equally concerned with the social lives of the Peek family, the very different experiences of their estate workers and tenants, and how they interacted. Lengthy quotations and personal reminiscences illustrate the attitudes of their times and there is an appendix gathering together the information found about members of the estate staff. The philanthropy of Sir Henry included a personal interest in the estate families: he provided a school and master and introduced nourishing school meals for a penny. In 1876 these were probably the first in England, served from a kitchen where the schoolgirls were expected to help and the boys supplied vegetables from the school garden. Celebrations of seasonal, family and national events were marked by entertainments with food, drink and presents for all, to which the recipients responded with toasts, speeches and gifts. The Peek family were generous employers and appreciated by the tenants: the children's letters of thanks are collected in an appendix. However when a gardener returning from a tea provided by Sir Wilfrid took a sprig of musk [rose or mimulus?] for his own garden, he was instantly dismissed from job and cottage.

The estate and all the families involved with it began to change with the coming of the railway, opened in 1903 with

a station at Combyne, and then the 1914–18 war further altered the social structure: thirteen men died and about forty returned, several permanently disabled. Sir Wilfrid stayed away from Rousdon for long periods and his son sold the estate in 1937, soon after he was of age, ending nearly 70 years of Peek ownership. Allhallows School moved in from Honiton and closed in 1998. The buildings have been sensitively adapted to provide modern residential accommodation, mainly within the historic buildings, and unsightly structures have been removed.

Nicky Campbell has given a fascinating insight into an exceptionally close nineteenth century community, providing enjoyment and information for readers. Better proof-reading and footnotes, rather than endnotes, would have enhanced the experience for this reviewer but the overall achievement is most impressive.

*Carolyn Keep*



**Hugh Meller, *The Country Houses of Devon*, (Black Dog Press, 2015), two hardback volumes in a slipcase. 1204 pages in total. ISBN 9780952434146.**

**£80 per set plus £9.99 p&p contribution from [www.blackdogpress.co.uk](http://www.blackdogpress.co.uk) or Lewdon Farm,**

**Black Dog, Crediton, Devon, EX17 4QQ.**

The long wait for this book makes it doubly welcome! The first plans for a study of Devon's country houses were made in 2000. Research in depth and visits to over 400 sites were understandably lengthy but the subsequent delays and changes to publication were frustrating and demanding. Hugh Meller amply acknowledges those who helped him to overcome all the obstacles. The final result is two beautifully designed books in a very attractive slipcase and containing a wealth of fascinating information.

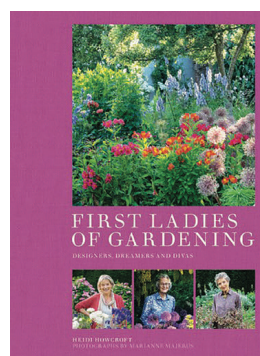
Having defined the country house as being the principal residence of an estate, Hugh admits to a few carefully chosen omissions and extras. Some of the included properties have been lost to fire or demolition but only a handful of the extant ones were inaccessible and the considerable contributions from most owners are generously acknowledged. As Simon Jenkins demonstrates in the Foreword, each reader will focus on their favourites but these volumes offer an extraordinary choice of the varied styles and settings for houses across the whole of this large county. The inclusion of obscure and complex sites adds to the enjoyment. The introductory sections begin with a masterly historical overview and then consider various aspects of the Devon country house: building materials, gatehouses, chapels, collections and recreations. Gardens, kitchen gardens and conservatories are of course included in the topics, as would be expected from a member of the Devon Gardens Trust Conservation Committee and former Trustee!

The individual entries follow a pattern but Hugh's elegant and accurate prose ensures that this is never a formula and the individuality of each property is skilfully illustrated, in

black and white images as well as words. The contributions of maps, plans and drawings made by Jane Schofield, Hugh's wife, add considerably to the interest and information offered. A detailed and lively history of the owners and the consequent effects on the architecture is followed by precise descriptions of the exterior and interior of each property. The reviewer's knowledge of architectural terms was considerably enhanced while reading these! To the particular delight of garden historians, the setting and the gardens are treated with equal respect in the description and in relation to the house and its owners. The effects of the geography and geology of Devon are another welcome inclusion, where appropriate. All entries have been unobtrusively and skilfully edited to occupy a number of full pages and to incorporate a block of precise numbered references. Quotations are used sparingly and effectively but the route to the originals is always to hand.

These volumes are a delight to handle and offer the accumulated information and wisdom of many years spent in the study and practical experience of Devon's country houses and grounds. Hugh Meller spent 26 years working for the National Trust in Devon, responsible for their historic buildings, and his personal interest in the history and variety of country houses has driven the research that underlies these volumes. He is to be congratulated on achieving the publication of such an outstanding contribution to the knowledge and enjoyment of our varied and fascinating county.

*Carolyn Keep*



**Heidi Howcroft, *First Ladies of Gardening Photographs* by Marianne Majerus, (Francis Lincoln 2015), Hardback. ISBN 9-780-7112-3643-1. £20**

This book subtitled 'Pioneers, Designers and Dreamers' contains fourteen chapters each of which features a favourite garden of the author, designed, planted or managed by a woman, frequently

someone who came late to gardening or who did not set out to become a gardener. The essential nature of each garden is described with the guiding principles and signature plants listed at the end of each chapter. The importance of teamwork is apparent in the majority of the gardens with the input of husbands, colleagues and gardeners being as important as the planting and design done by the ladies themselves.

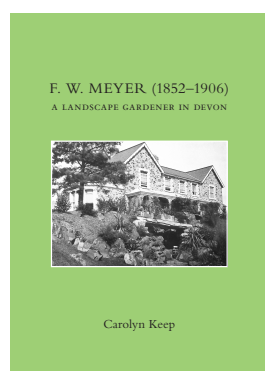
The first part of the book, 'Pioneers of design', features some of the *grand dames* of garden design from the twentieth century, although it omits others that one might expect to be there such as Penelope Hobhouse and Norah Lindsay. Roughly chronological, this section begins with Gertrude Jekyll, although much of this chapter features the work of Rosamund Wallinger in her recreation of Jekyll's designs at the Manor House at Upton Grey in Hampshire. Other influential twentieth century gardeners included are Vita Sackville-West (Sissinghurst), Margery Fish (East Lambrook), Rosemary Verey (Barnsley House), Beth Chatto (Elmstead)

and Mary Keen who used their own experiences to become garden writers. There is a chapter on the work of Beatrix Havergal of Waterperry School of Horticulture. The three year courses she provided were a finishing school for budding gardeners. Not only were basic theoretical and practical skills taught, but also specialisation and social skills. Two of her trained gardeners went to work at Sissinghurst for Sackville-West.

The second part of the book, 'New directions' includes contemporary gardeners: Rachel James who created the garden at Eastington Farm in Dorset; Gill Richardson and her wind-swept farm garden in Lincolnshire where she has developed varieties of *Astrantia*; Lady Xa Tollemache of Helmingham Hall, an amateur who is now a designer; Sue Whittington creator of a London garden; and Helen Dillon with her changing garden in Dublin. Here there is a change of emphasis in that the gardeners featured are either building on a legacy, enhancing existing designs or creating gardens to suit a particular personal ideal, frequently taking older themes and incorporating modern plantings.

This is a difficult book to categorise. It is beautifully illustrated in full colour and well-written. It introduces the reader to each gardener and describes some of the features of their gardens but, apart from including some lesser known gardeners, does not add greatly to our knowledge. No one garden or gardener is looked at in depth, there is no analysis of garden planting, techniques, similarities or differences. It does hint at the challenges of maintaining and refreshing historical gardens such as Kiftsgate Court, gardened by three generations of women and now under the management of Anne Chambers, or Helmingham Hall where some designs partially look back to the eighteenth century. It is however, a book to dip into and enjoy for the beautiful photography which shows the gardens at their summer best, and for those inspired to visit the gardens or to find out more about the 'ladies' included, there is a brief bibliography, addresses and website details.

*Clare Greener*



**F. W. Meyer, a Landscape Gardener in Devon (1852-1906), Carolyn Keep, published by the Devon and Exeter Institution for Devon Gardens Trust, 2015. ISBN 978-0-9930172-1-6. £6.99**

Carolyn Keep needs no introduction to members of Devon Gardens Trust due to her many skills and her excellent record in garden research. This important and long-overdue book covers the

life and work of the German-born Frederick William Meyer who was a talented landscape designer for the Exeter-based firm of Robert Veitch & Son. Meyer worked particularly, but not exclusively, throughout Devonshire which is the focus of this book. The author has found herself in a unique position to research this story partly by the chance of being shown some tantalising photographic plates some years ago of some unknown gardens landscaped and photographed by

Meyer, but also by her sheer tenacity as a researcher. She has uncovered the up-until-now untold story of one of Devon's outstanding landscape gardeners of the Victorian period and as a result rewards us with a fuller understanding of this hitherto rather elusive and modest character as well as the gardens he shaped and created.

Meyer was particularly passionate about rock and water gardens and shared his deep knowledge through many articles he wrote in leading gardening journals of the day both here in Britain and in his native Germany. Much of Robert Veitch & Son's success as landscape contractors during this period may well have been owed to Meyer. Some contracts undertaken by the business almost certainly would not have been successfully commissioned had it not been for the presence of Meyer's talents and skills within the firm. The fact that he remained loyal to Peter C.M. Veitch (who was head of the firm for most of this period), says much about his character and their business relationship but also possibly, the kudos attached to being part of this prestigious firm. This would have allowed him to undertake his work and writings without the constant pressure of managing his own business affairs, a burden we learn that his son would have had, in following his father's footsteps. Meyer was employed by Robert Veitch & Son for thirty years and was much-valued by Peter Veitch.

Meyer was also a plantsman and Carolyn Keep outlines some of the extraordinary lengths that he went to in order to create the perfect conditions for growing his beloved alpine plants for maximum success. Furthermore, we gain insight into his mastery as a landscape gardener and how he achieved his superb rock and water gardens and naturalistic features as well as a fuller understanding of his influence in this field. Some of his articles were published posthumously in a separate book, following his untimely death at the age of 54.

The sites laid out by Meyer are covered within three separate chapters although they would also have worked well in one chapter in either alphabetical or timeline order. If I have any criticism at all, I have to admit that I would have liked to have seen this book produced in a larger format so that the photographs and plans could have been enlarged, in order to more fully appreciate some of the details. Although the lack of an index is a disappointment, to compensate, the work is very well referenced throughout for those wishing to further explore Meyer's work in more detail.

This welcome book should be well-received by those interested in the history of Devon's gardens and of landscape design in Britain during the Victorian period and the people involved in this skilful work. It fills many gaps in our knowledge of not only one of Devon's foremost landscape designers of his time but a man whose influence was felt well beyond the county boundaries. Tantalisingly, we also learn that some of his sites outside of Devon are still to be identified. Those who are interested in Frederick W. Meyer may also wish to know that he is buried more or less in the centre of the Higher Cemetery in Exeter.

*Caradoc Doy*

## Register of Parks & Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, Devon

1	A La Ronde (NT)	II	29	Lindridge	II
2	Arlington Court (NT)	II*	30	Lupton Park	II
3	St Bartholomews Cemetery, Exeter	II	31	Luscombe Castle	I
4	Barton Road Cemetery, Torquay	II	32	Mamhead	II*
5	Bideford Road Cemetery, Great Torrington	II	33	Northernhay and Rougemont Gardens, Exeter	II
6	Bicton	I	34	Oldway	II
7	Bridwell	II	35	Overbecks (Sharpitor) (NT)	II
8	Cadhay	II	36	Oxton House	II
9	Castle Drogo (NT)	II*	37	Princess Gardens and Royal Terrace Gardens, Torquay	II
10	Castle Hill	I	38	Plympton House	II
11	Castle Tor	II	39	Powderham Castle	II*
12	Civic Square, Plymouth	II	40	Rockbeare House	II
13	Coleton Fishacre (NT)	II*	41	Rousdon	II
14	Combe House	II	42	Saltram House (NT)	II*
15	Connaught Gardens, Sidmouth	II	43	Saunton Court	II
16	Dartington Hall	II*	44	Sharpham House	II*
17	Devonport Park, Plymouth	I	45	Shobrooke Park	II
18	Endsleigh	I	46	Simmons Park, Okehampton	II
19	Flete	II	47	Stonelands House	II
20	Ford Park Cemetery, Plymouth	II	48	Stover Park	II
21	GREAT AMBROOK ITALIAN GARDEN, IPPLEPEN	II	49	Sydenham House	II
22	Greenway (NT)	II	50	Tapeley Park	II*
23	HM PRISON, DARTMOOR, FRENCH AND AMERICAN PRISON OF WAR CEMETERIES	II	51	The Hoe, Plymouth	II
24	Hayne Manor	II	52	Ugbrooke Park	II*
25	Killerton (NT)	II*	53	Watcombe (or Brunel) Park	II
26	King's Nympton Park	II	54	Wood House	I
27	Knightshayes Court (NT)	II*	55	Youlston Park	II
28	Langdon Court Hotel	II	Sites in block capitals are recent additions – since 2013		

## Useful Websites

### **BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE LIBRARY**

[www.biodiversitylibrary.org/](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/)

Access to a variety of biodiversity literature such as historical journals openly available.

### **BRITISH LIBRARY**

[www.bl.uk/](http://www.bl.uk/)

The British Library's online catalogue includes the resources of their specialist map library.

### **THE BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE**

[www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/)

A useful resource for digitised local and national newspapers

### **DEVON COUNTY HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TEAM**

[www.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment/the-devon-historic-environment-record/](http://www.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment/the-devon-historic-environment-record/)

Twitter @DevonHistEnv

Includes details of the Historic Environment Record, helpful for planning issues and a major local resource of archaeological information.

### **DEVON HERITAGE SERVICES**

[www.devon.gov.uk/record\\_office](http://www.devon.gov.uk/record_office)

Information about the holding of the DHC and the North Devon Record Office. The services' online catalogue – which is not yet complete but which contains details of a very large number of maps – can be searched via the site.

### **HISTORICAL DIRECTORIES OF ENGLAND AND WALES**

[specialcollections.le.ac.uk/](http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/)

A collection of digitised trade directories, part of the University of Leicester's Special Collections Online, covering England and Wales from the 1760s to the 1910s.

### **HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE**

[historicengland.org.uk/](http://historicengland.org.uk/)

Formerly English Heritage. Archives include listed buildings and listed gardens.

### **THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/)

The official archive of the UK government. A comprehensive online catalogue includes maps.

### **PARKS AND GARDENS UK**

[www.parksandgardens.org/](http://www.parksandgardens.org/)

Database of historic parks, gardens, and designed green spaces of the United Kingdom, with descriptions and historical information.

### **THE WALLED KITCHEN GARDEN NETWORK**

[www.walledgardens.net/](http://www.walledgardens.net/)

For background, advice, pictures, events and register of walled kitchen gardens.

See also the Walled Kitchen Garden Grapevine an online forum at <https://wkgn.wordpress.com/>