**Devon Garden History Forum March 2015**

**Report on Feedback Received and Next Steps**

1. The Garden History Forum on March 21st 2015 was attended by 52 people (including speakers). The overall feedback received was that participants had enjoyed the day. They were enthusiastic about the event, the speakers and the opportunity to network with those who shared their interest. In addition to those who attended several people who were unable to attend have asked to be kept informed about what happened and any future plans.
2. 24 questionnaires were returned after the event. The questionnaire offered a range of options for further events. The numbers interested (out of the 24 replies) were as follows, in order of popularity:

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| Another similar conference | 24 |
| Informal meetings in local areas with other interested individuals | 18 |
| Workshop on what to look for in a garden | 18 |
| Seminar on maps | 15 |
| Research group on a specific garden feature e.g. dovecotes | 13 |
| Research group on market gardens, allotments & vegetable growing in WWI | 10 |
| Seminar on deeds and leases | 10 |

1. There was also a discussion held in the last session of the Forum. This generated the following ideas:
2. **The Estate** provides the context for many historic gardens, and understanding the history of an estate can cast light on the development and use of its gardens. This could be the subject for a workshop.
3. **Sharing and updating knowledge** helps all researchers. The conference has demonstrated the overlap between individuals and groups working on different projects. There would be advantages in holding a regular (annual?) event, perhaps moving around to different venues in the historic designed landscape. There may be a model of how this could work in the experience of East Devon local history societies, who get together annually to share information about what they are doing and to hear talks on a pre-determined topic.
4. **A register of research and researchers** should be created. This is something that the Devon Rural Archive at Shilstone are happy to become involved in. It should contain sufficient detail to be of use to other researchers including contact details.
5. As well as a register of research it would be useful to maintain **a register of people with specific skills** - experts and their expertise, on maps for example. This should be published in a place/way that is easy to refer to, for example DGT, DHS and DRA websites, DGT Journal etc. If forum members would send details of their area of interest and contact details to Julia Neville or Clare Greener as soon as possible, then a list can be quickly created.
6. The **list of gardens of historic interest** should be trawled to see which ones already have individuals or groups working on them. It might be possible to encourage local history societies to ‘adopt’ a garden and research its history.
7. It was regrettable that in spite of sending out invitations to a wide **range of garden owners, managers and gardeners, and to local authority staff** with an interest in the historic designed landscape, so few had attended. Perhaps it might be necessary to seek the opportunity to go out and recruit them at meetings held for their own purposes. Engagement with the Garden History Forum could be seen as part of their continuing professional development.
8. We must not forget the significance of sharing information with the **Historic Environment Record** for Devon’s historic designed landscapes. It can be a long process and groups working on a particular project might benefit from opportunities for mutual support and exchange of information with others working on a particular site.
9. It isimportant to **keep talking and sharing**! Groups might like to consider contributing to the DGT Journal. This could be developed into a more regular publication if there was sufficient interest and material.
10. **Next Steps**
11. All those who responded were in favour of holding another conference next year, and the suggestion was made that it should be held somewhere where members could explore a historic garden/designed landscape. If anyone would be interested in helping with the organisation of this (e.g. booking speakers, publicising the event, taking bookings) we would be very interested to hear from you.
12. DGT are already active in organising training. For example, there has recently been a Deeds and Leases seminar arranged on which some of those expressing an interest are already booked.
13. The idea of an informal chance to network locally might be combined with practical training, e.g. a workshop in what to look for in a garden, and with the suggestion made by one of the responders of linking with a local NADFAS branch. Again, if anyone would be interested in organising or helping to organise such an event, please get in touch. We’d be particularly interested to hear from anyone in North Devon as we know how often people work in isolation.
14. The project to research vegetable production during the First World War fits into a Devon Remembers project co-ordinated by the University of Exeter on Food and Farming in WWI Devon. DHS is already supporting this project and will make arrangements to get in touch with those who expressed an interest.
15. Systematic arrangements for developing registers of those gardens being researched, and researchers and experts need further thought but opportunities to develop these might be linked with the present DGT project to digitize records. Again, if anyone has time or skills to help with this, please get in touch.
16. An early initiative might be to take a list of historic designed landscapes which are not the subject of historical research at the moment and see whether these could be ‘matched’ to interested researchers.

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