

**Review of Adrian James' 'Three West Country' Gardens for Exmouth and District's U3A monthly meeting via 'Zoom' on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020 <https://adrianjames.org.uk/>**

Adrian started his talk by saying how impressed he was that our U3A were offering so many video conferencing sessions and this in turn meant that we were able to book Adrian from Worcestershire without entailing any travel expenses. Adrian spoke clearly and eloquently about Marwood Hill Garden in north Devon, Mapperton House & Gardens in Dorset, and Yeo Valley Organic Garden in Somerset so much so that we could imagine that we were there with him. Via his wonderful photographs, his pertinent labels for each one and his well-chosen words we travelled through each garden admiring the views.

We were interested to hear the fascinating histories of the gardens. For example at Marwood the late Dr Jimmy Smart who developed the gardens after the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW was awarded the Royal Horticultural Society's prestigious Victoria Medal of Honour. We could only admire his ability to find the time whilst working as a general practitioner and anaesthetist to develop his creative ideas along with Malcolm Pharoah the then Head Gardener. Adrian showed us the glorious view of Marwood Church from the tree trail, the superb National Collection of astilbes, the blue hydrangeas, the eucalyptus grove and the huge umbrella plants (*Darmera peltata*) and much more so we could envisage a visit there to explore these majestic gardens.

Mapperton was entered in the Domesday Book in 1086 as Malperetone. Unusually from the 11<sup>th</sup> century until 1919 it only belonged to four families linked by descent in the female line. Grade 11 listed it is now the home of the Montagus, currently the Earl and Countess of Sandwich. Adrian peppered his talk with a few entertaining anecdotes and recalled how on to his way to a private viewing of the garden he suddenly wondered what was the correct way to address an Earl? Fortunately the Earl was not there to greet him and he could explore the garden as a true photographer looking for the best viewpoints. A rather lovely feature was the plaque to all those who had worked on the garden; something that would be good to see in all gardens open to the public.

Lastly to the artistic, contemporary Yeo Valley Organic Gardens owned by the dairy producing family. Closed now until April 2021 like the other gardens it definitely looks worth a visit. Adrian took us through the magnificent 'rooms' to the gravel garden dug over to a depth of 6 foot to remove bindweed, we admired Adrian's photographs of the beautiful blossom petals carpeting the grass in all their glory and bespoke gates with tasteful decorations of garden tools and huge pots with ornate frames to show off the plants. Then the carefully laid out 'accessible garden' with vegetables sown neatly on diagonal lines and an impressive area set out for different stages of composting; so much to find out about.

Altogether, a tempting vision of three West Country gardens. Thank you Adrian.

Review by Christine Chittock, Chair and Speakers' Coordinator, Exmouth and District U3A.