

Garden Architecture – Speaker Dr Helen Lawrence-Beaton

Our March meeting was really about a man, Thomas Archer, who became famous as an English Baroque Architect and when he was working, garden architecture was included with domestic architecture.

Dr Helen Lawrence- Beaton, our speaker, is an Architectural Historian and had spent her early years living near to the impressive Hale House. Hale House is in the tiny village of Hale, near to Downton. Thomas Archer, 1668 – 1743, bought land and designed the house and gardens in Hale in about 1715. Helen has studied Art History followed by an MA in Garden History and now has a PhD for her work investigating Thomas Archer’s career as a Garden Architect and Designer. We do know that his family was rich and that he took a European tour where he learned about garden architecture and garden design. The cascade house, in the magnificent Chatsworth Garden, is an example of his work. This was already in position 1696. We do know that he moved in elite society with people rich enough to employ such a person but finding documents confirming his involvement in designing their gardens can be difficult. Much can be learned by looking for his ‘signature features’ in designs from around that time. For example, he liked using split rooflines.

Chettle House is another good, fairly local example of his work. This privately owned red-brick manor house, in Queen Anne style, was designed by Thomas Archer for George Chafin in 1710. The village of Chettle is near to Blandford Forum in Dorset.

Helen had a most impressive portrait of Thomas Archer, showing him richly dressed and an imposing figure and this was a good introduction to this fascinating talk about a famous architect working in Baroque style and his influence on gardens and parklands.

Dorothy Richards