

COTEHELE



Sir Richard Edgcumbe and his son Piers made alterations to the house and also laid out the garden, the bones of which can still be seen today. Sir Richard had been knighted after supporting Henry Tudor against Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. In the middle of the sixteenth century, Sir Piers Edgcumbe built a new house at Mount Edgcumbe which replaced Cotehele as the family's principal seat. Colonel Piers Edgcumbe returned to Cotehele during the Civil War and lived there until his death in 1667. During the Second World War, Mount Edgcumbe was partly destroyed and the 5th Earl returned to Cotehele. On his death in 1945, the 6th Earl gave the property to the Nation in lieu of death duties and it was then passed to the National Trust.

Leaving the Car Park, there are signposts to Cotehele Quay with its old lime kilns to the South while the house lies to the north east. Walk past the bowling green which is opposite the entrance to the coffee shop under the arch, to arrive at the main courtyard of the house, divided by four grass rectangles. Back under the arch, turn right to the late 15th Century cobbled Retainers' Court which is enclosed to the south and west by what was the dairy and still-room, to the north by the chapel and to the east by the west wing of the house.

An arched gateway leads to the North Garden with its probable Tudor layout. It's divided into three terraces; the lower terrace to the south links the Meadow to Mrs Julian's Garden (named after a previous tenant); the middle terrace has a central rectangular pond while the Upper Garden or Terrace has a battlemented wall underplanted with a mixed border. This was known as the Italian Garden in the

middle of the nineteenth century and was developed from the Old Orchard recorded on William Doidge's estate map of 1731, [Cornwall Record Office] with terraces, flower beds, gravel walks and a central pond.

Interestingly, if you go into the house today and up into the Tower, you will notice that there are windows on only two sides of the room while three can be seen from the garden. The cornice runs all the way round so I asked the volunteer if she could explain why there was no window overlooking the garden. Apparently relatively recently, the National Trust discovered that behind the tapestry there was a panel behind which was another room. [The room is open to visitors on 'Behind the Scenes' days.] Was this a refuge for the Edgcumbes during the Civil War or was it created during the fifteenth century for Sir Richard to escape from supporters of Richard III?

To the west of the North Garden is the Orchard with a large sculpture of a hand holding the earth while across the field to the north, is the Prospect Tower. [This is currently closed for restoration work]. It's three storeys high and was probably built in 1789 with a late twentieth century staircase which leads to the top parapet. The climb up forty-one steps is steep and dark although there are torches available for use at the bottom of the stairs. A similar tower was built at Mount Edgcumbe which could be seen from the Prospect Tower at Cotehele but unfortunately it was demolished in the early twentieth century.

It is not known when the terracing in front of the house was built although it has changed little from a pre-1862 photograph in the 1989 National Trust guidebook. From the terrace, steps lead down to a path which follows the stream down the valley to the Quays. The area is filled with mature rhododendrons and other ornamental shrubs as well as the stew pond, a rustic timber and thatched summerhouse, a domed fifteenth century dovecot, a holy well and nearer the River Tamar, the chapel built by Richard Edgcumbe c1484 in thanks for his escape from Sir Henry Bodrugan [Trenowith], a Yorkist. The Rebellion to remove Richard III had collapsed and Bodrugan had been ordered to arrest Edgcumbe. Allegedly, after Edgcumbe's hiding place in the woods surrounding Cotehele was discovered, Edgcumbe threw his hat into the river. On seeing the hat float by, Bodrugan thought Edgcumbe must have drowned and called the search off.

This area of the garden was developed throughout the twentieth century with the addition of ponds and further planting.