

## May 2023 Meeting – Maggie Piper “the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan”

Our season of talks concluded with Maggie Piper’s fascinating insight into two of the most popular visitor attractions in Cornwall, the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan. The attractions, only 10 miles apart, are linked by the involvement of Sir Tim Smit.

The initial idea for the Eden Project dates back to 1995, when Tim Smit appointed a local St. Austell based architect. When the architect appreciated the scale of the project that Tim Smit had in mind, he dropped out and the Nicholas Grimshaw architectural partnership took over. Nicholas Grimshaw specialised in designs using glass and plastic, and this technology was put to excellent use in the design of the Eden Project Biomes. There was no money available to pay for the construction work, but Sir Robert McAlpine undertook the project without a contract on the understanding that they would be reimbursed if the project was a success. The challenges were immense. Building the Biomes required 230 miles of scaffolding, the Outdoor Gardens, Rainforest and Mediterranean Biomes cover an area equivalent to 35 football pitches, and as much of the site is 50 feet below the water table, flooding was a frequent problem.

The visitor centre and toilets opened in May 2000, providing some income, and the full site opened in March 2001. The Tropical Biome offers the chance to experience plants and trees normally found in South East Asia, West Africa and tropical South America, while the Mediterranean Biome is home to species found in California, South Africa, Western Australia and the Mediterranean.

The Eden Project is an educational charity and as well as providing various school programmes Eden aims to build relationships between people and the natural world. The project is expanding beyond Cornwall and there are new developments all over the world, including Morecambe, Dundee, Chad and China. Eden Project Cornwall has diversified and now offers a wedding venue, youth hostel, glamping, and outdoor concerts. The Who are playing there this July! Geothermal energy is also being explored and it is hoped that this will be able to power the Biomes.

The Heligan Estate dates back to the 1600s. Owned by the Tremayne family, the gardens fell into disrepair after the First World War. Restoration began in the 1990s, and was the subject of a Channel 4 television series at the time.

The gardens include giant rhododendrons and camellias, raised from seed collected in India by the plant hunter Joseph Hooker. As well as extensive restored fruit and vegetable gardens, there is also a restored pineapple pit, heated by rotting horse manure. One of the first pineapples produced was gifted to the late Queen. An exciting rope bridge crosses the area known as The Jungle, and winding paths link a network of delightful gardens.

Before the First World War there were 22 full-time gardeners at Heligan, but 16 of them were killed in the war. The Thunderbox Room in Heligan is a designated Imperial War Museum memorial where the signatures of the Heligan gardeners are written in pencil on the wall above the date ‘August 1914’.

Two very different award-winning gardens, well worth the journey to Cornwall. Ardleigh Annual Flower and Produce Show will take place at 2pm on Saturday 19th August at the Village Hall. The show schedule is available from The Ardleigh Convenience Store and Craft Nurseries. This is a great opportunity to show off your skills in a wide range of gardening, baking, wine-making and handicraft skills, or just to come along to the Village Hall and admire the wide range of entries.

Annual membership of Ardleigh Horticultural Society is just £5. If you join at the Annual Show in August your membership will include free admission to all the monthly meetings on the programme up to May 2024 plus admission to the 2024 Annual Flower and Produce Show.