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European Garden Award 2018/2019

1st Prize: BEST DEVELOPMENT OF A HISTORIC PARK OR GARDEN

BROUGHTON GRANGE, UK

Several years ago, while on a tour of an English garden our chairman, Alan Thornley, asked me if there are any differences between English and German gardens.

I answered that English gardens are always in best condition, perfectly planned with absolutely beautiful perennials, shrubs and flowers.

But my impression also was that English gardens were rather more developed in a traditional way missing some contemporary elements leading the gardens into the future.

It was a few years later, when I was looking for some inspiration to renew my own garden, that I discovered this image: A garden in a modern style, created with grasses and topiaries and obviously embedded in an historical surrounding. The photograph was taken in: Broughton Grange – a very warm welcome to you, Andrew!

The gardens of Broughton Grange include 900 acres park-, farm- and grassland. Lots of the garden structures go back to the Victorian era, so for example the knot garden, the long borders and the Yew Terrace.

It was in the early 1990ies when Stephen Hester, the owner of Broughton Grange, started to develop the gardens and commissioned Tom Stuart-Smith in 2001 to design a walled kitchen garden.

Tom Stuart-Smith, today one of the world's famous landscape architects and Gold Medal Winner at the Chelsea Flower Show, built the garden in Broughton Grange– as one of his earliest - with three terraces, each different with individual character but with similar features.

One of the terraces is planted with perennials and Mediterranean plants. Fruits, vegetables and flowers with a greenhouse in a corner: the heart of a kitchen garden.

Short clipped boxtree hedges meander through the next part, filled with dozens of tulips in springtime. They speak a very modern language but are also reflective of the parterre of historic gardens. The terraces are connected by a stone rill which carries water down to the centre of the garden, where the planting has a damp meadow character.

Each part of the garden is simply gorgeous, at any time. If it's flowering in the spring or summer, if it's in the autumn's atmosphere or also in the wintertime, when frost emphasizes the garden's structures – it's always wonderful to experience Broughton Grange.

Tom Stuart-Smith's design placing walls to two elevations, with a hedge on the third side and espalier trees creates different senses within the garden and intimate spaces. It's an amazing place in itself, but integral to the garden is Tom's respect and appreciation for the wider landscape with which the garden connects through high quality and design.

Precisely positioned hedges create viewpoints from which to admire the beautiful surrounding area of Oxfordshire, elements of the „borrowed landscape“ and „Ha-Ha“ enhance the wider sense of the garden and are read as part of the garden dialogue, simultaneously.

Tom's work was remarkable. On behalf of the whole jury I thank you, Andrew. Your and your team's skill and understanding has built on Tom's early design and ensures it looks incredibly good today.

The jury were deeply impressed by the amazing gardens of Broughton Grange which are perfectly maintained. Stephen Hester's decision to build a contemporary kitchen garden in historical structures proves courage and foresight. Also more than 15 years later the concept and the realisation of this design is convincing in its effect. This makes Broughton Grange to a very worthy recipient of the EGHN Award.

This brings me back to the start of my speech, and my missing contemporary development in English gardens: I must apologize deep from my heart, respectfully.

Recently my colleague Michael Walker contacted Tom Stuart-Smith to provide a few words on his work – purely on the basis being a finalist... Now I'm very pleased to commend the best regards from Tom Stuart-Smith to Stephen and you, he says: „Stephen Hester was a wonderful client and he showed great confidence in me for which I'm very grateful indeed. I'm also indebted to Andrew Woodall who has looked after the garden with such style for more than ten years. ... I hope people who visit it have a sensation that, rather like an individual in their world, the garden has a certain number of intrinsic qualities but is also greatly influenced by its setting; almost like the balance between nature and nurture, difficult to identify but always present“.

It's a great pleasure for me to present the award in the category „Best development of a historic garden or park“ and would like to ask you on the stage, Andrew.