

Deborah, Duchess of Devonshire

Deborah Devonshire and the Creation of the Trust

Deborah, Duchess of Devonshire, was a rare combination of brilliance and modesty, grand yet humble, and elegant without ostentation.

An aristocrat by birth, her outlook was modern and progressive. Her personal mission was to safeguard that which was entrusted to her, whilst seeking to leave it in better condition for future generations to enjoy.

She created the Chatsworth we now know, as a beacon of living tradition. Its conservation, and repair go hand in hand with new ideas and progress, all in the centre of our beautiful county of ingenuity, industry, and history.

This is also the ethos of the Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust, a charity started by, and initially, cared for by her. Due to her modesty, her support for the charity is little known.

The DHBT looks out for our built heritage both, great and small, pivotal to good architectural preservation. We look after the most delicate, and the forgotten, as well as the grand, and the obvious.

The Duchess contacted Alan Bemrose, then Chair of Finance at Derbyshire County Council, and asked him if he would set up the Trust. She became the joint chairman of the Trust with Alan. Alan Bemrose was a shrewd choice. Visionary, dynamic and brave, he took the trust to the edge of what was possible.

The significant role the Duchess played in historic building conservation was not referred to in her lengthy obituaries, yet she played an important role in the Trust. Her ability to open doors, no one else could open, was an invaluable asset. Consequently, the Trust owes much to her crucial involvement. Hence, we honour her here now, in this anniversary exhibition.



Derek Latham and Harry Joyce reflect on the personal touch shown by the Duchess of Devonshire



“The Trust started its work well before the radical change of public opinion towards looking after old buildings. Houses like those of the Railway Terraces in Derby and the ironworkers' cottages in Golden Valley, Riddings were doomed and desolate. The Council of the Trust recognised their quality and set about restoring and transforming them into what they are now. This process has been repeated in many places throughout the county.

To bring a good building which is in a bad state back into use is very pleasing. Unless you have watched the long process from acquisition to the final fixing of our plaque, it is hard to imagine how much time and effort it takes.

When you read the following pages, you will have some idea of the obstacles which have to be overcome in every case. The patience, persistence and expertise of the members of Council in tackling these jobs has been wonderful to see. I hope their achievements have been their reward. It is certain that they are gratefully acknowledged by all of us who live in Derbyshire.”

Deborah Devonshire

