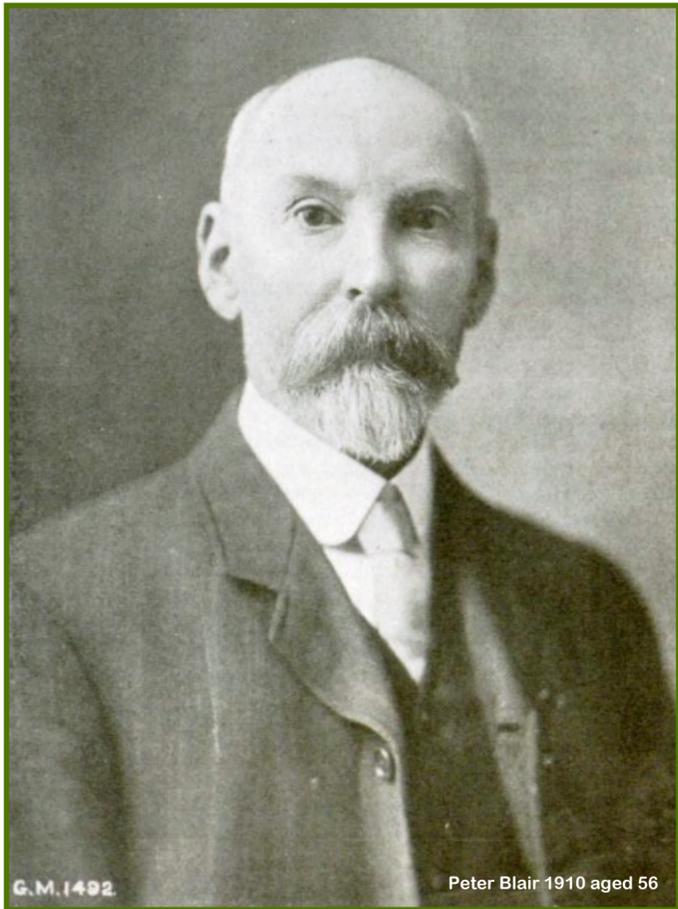


Peter Blair - Trentham's Last Head Gardener



Peter Blair 1910 aged 56

Peter Christie Blair was born in 1854 in Largo, Fife, Scotland. His father Thomas was a gardener and in 1871 Peter, aged 17, was living with his parents and siblings and listed as an under gardener. By 1881 he was working at the world-famous Veitch plant nurseries in Chelsea and in 1886 he succeeded Zadock Stevens as head gardener at Trentham. He lived with his second wife Charlotte and children, *Alexander, *Ethel [*from his previous marriage], Laelia, George and Doris, in the Gardener's House adjacent to the kitchen gardens north of Longton Brook.

Trentham's kitchen gardens came into prominence in the mid 1800s under the innovative head gardener George Fleming, with the creation of large glasshouses, including the 600-yard long glasshouse structure, known as the Trentham Glass Case. The glasshouses included a vinery, pineapple and melon pits, an orange and fig house, a peach house and an orchid house. Peter Blair made various alterations within the kitchen gardens including the rebuilding of several old hot houses. But by the late 19th century the Trentham estate was in decline and, after the Hall was demolished in 1911, the gardens were developed as public pleasure grounds. The glasshouses were eventually dismantled to make way for new buildings such as the ballroom.

South Shields 1895 - Exhibitor

CUT BLOOMS.
24 Japanese, 12 varieties—T. J. Wheeler, gardener to Mrs Mitchell, Jesmond Towers, Newcastle, 1; E. Shotton, gardener to Mr H. Andrews, Swarland Hall, Northumberland, 2; J. Corbett, gardener to the Rev. Marquis of Normanby, Mulgrave Castle, 3; Peter Blair, gardener to the Duke of Sutherland, Trentham Gardens, Stoke-on-Trent, 4.
Twenty-four incurved—12 varieties—G. Shotton, 1; James Coultas, gardener to Ald. Hardine, 2; J. P. Hollyhurst, Darlington, 2; Peter Blair, 3; George E. Smith, Floral Cottage, Paull, near Hull, 4.
Eighteen Japanese, 12 varieties—T. J. Wheeler, 1; Peter Blair, 2; G. Shotton, 3; R. E. Pattefor, gardener to Mr J. White, the Cedars, How Fell, 4.
Eighteen incurved, 12 varieties—G. Shotton, 1; Jas. Coultas, 2; P. Blair, 3.
Twelve Japanese, different varieties—Peter Blair, 1; Geo. Burdon, gardener to Mr G. B. Cockburn, Ludgate Lodge, Birkenhead, 2; R. E. Pattefor, 3.
Twelve incurved, twelve varieties—G. Shotton, 1; J. G. McKenzie, gardener to Rev. R. Burden, Wylam-on-Tyne, 2; Peter Blair, 3.

London 1909 - Organiser

BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS.

Perhaps, to the ordinary visitor, the most interesting portion of the show is that given over to the wonderful horticultural exhibition. The King, when he visited it on Wednesday, told Mr. Peter Blair, the horticultural manager and gardener to the Duke of Sutherland, that he regretted that his time was far too short, as he would have liked to have spent a much longer period among the flowers. His Majesty also greatly admired Colonel Holford's wonderful collection of orchids and the equally magnificent collection of amaryllis lilies. Altogether the flowers are a really very beautiful collection, worth going a long journey to see.

Stoke on Trent 1918 - Judge

LONGTON.

DUKE OF SUTHERLAND'S CUP.—The judging for the handsome silver cup offered by the Duke of Sutherland for competition amongst the allotment holders and tenant gardeners on his estate in the Longton district took place last week. The competition was in connection with the best yield from a five yards' row of potatoes, and keen interest was shown. Councillor H. E. Lloyd had the direction of the competition, and the number of bags for the final judging were reduced to 11. Subsequently, the judges, Mr. Peter Blair, of Trentham, and Mr. McPhail, of Longton Park, awarded the trophy to Mr. W. Robinson, headmaster of the Dresden Schools, for a bag containing 55lb. Mr. W. Howard being a close second with a yield of 51lb. The winning variety was King George.

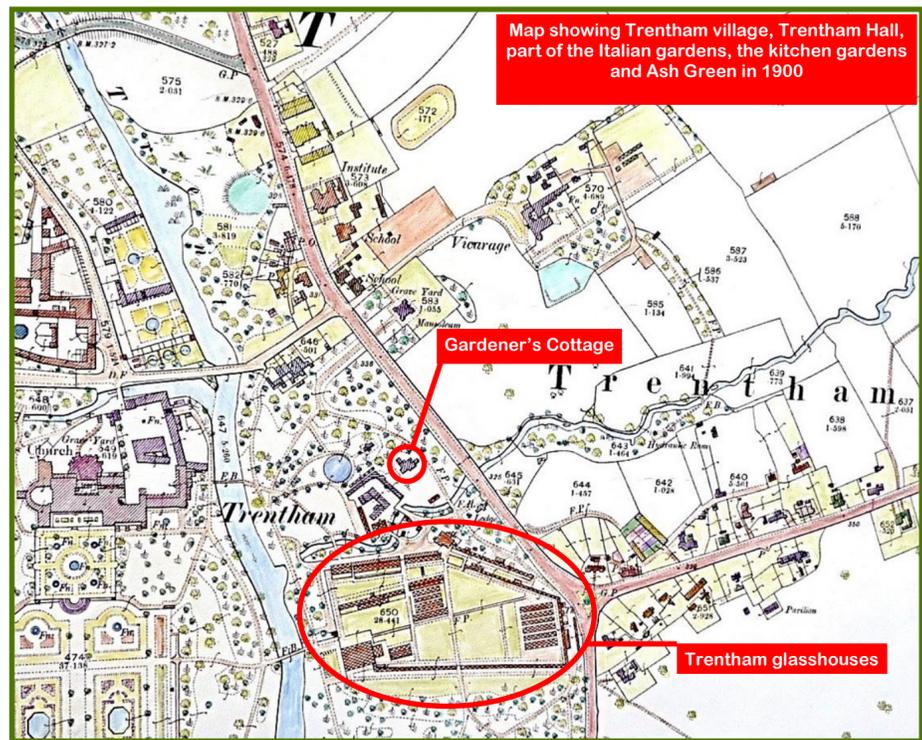
Newspaper snippets demonstrating Peter Blair's decades of horticultural involvement as exhibitor, organising manager and judge locally, regionally and nationally.



Two Blair children, probably Laelia and George

Peter Blair was gardener to the Duke of Sutherland for 30 years and at one time had a staff of 75 gardeners. From 1907, when he was appointed horticultural manager to the Royal Show, he devoted much of the next three decades to the organisation of the horticultural sections of agricultural shows. For his long and distinguished service to the practice of horticulture, he was an made an Associate of Honour of the Royal Horticultural Society.

He died at his home in Lindum Avenue in Trentham on 23 October 1936. Part of his obituary in the Gardeners' Chronicle stated: "...Quick in thought and action... he always endeavoured to inspire others with his unbounded enthusiasm for horticulture. Nearly half a century ago, "Blair of Trentham" was a phrase on the lips of every young gardener. Now he has passed away at the advanced age of eighty-two years, after a strenuous life. He leaves a widow, three daughters and two sons to mourn his loss".



Map showing Trentham village, Trentham Hall, part of the Italian gardens, the kitchen gardens and Ash Green in 1900

Gardener's Cottage

Trentham glasshouses

Photo from The Sentinel 18 September 1915



Members of the Committee who organised the successful horticultural show at the Victoria Hotel, Stoke-upon-Trent, held last week-end. In the centre is Mr. Peter Blair, judge, and Mr. Geo. Myatt (President) on his right. Photo: "Sentinel."